

# THE OTHER, THE THIRD, THE JUSTICE

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## **ABSTRACT**

The text exposes the Levinasian narrative on the theme of subjectivity, which gains meaning exclusively from the relationship with the face and its otherness. The exposure proposed by Levinas invites us to think on the closeness of the neighbor, that is, on the arrival in us of the idea of the infinite that overflows the simple thinking or thinking alone. The neighbor is not only someone who stands before me, face to face, but each and every other is a neighbor. The third one ties the seam offered by Levinas to his ethical plot, which evokes a "responsibility for everything and for everyone". At the same time, it ties a knot to the moral relationship, because it is necessary to compare the incomparable, to say who comes first or who has priority. This text intends to outline some traces of the plot of subjectivity that involves the other, the third and, consequently, justice, indicating that ethics is always an "intrigue of three".

## **KEYWORDS**

Levinas, Otherness, Face, Third, Justice.

If all philosophy is an egology, as says Levinas in "The philosophy and the idea of the infinite",<sup>1</sup> and war is its result - immanence of thinking - it is necessary to outline an exteriority that presents new meaning to the self and interrupts such an ancient source of disagreement. Levinas focuses on the task that consists of recovering a forgotten sense - the problem of otherness or the immemorial past - which is concluded through subjectivity. In the preface to *Totality and Infinity* the author announces the centrality that the theme of subjectivity has in this text when he says: "This book then does presente [...] as a defense of subjectivity [...] as founded in the idea of infinity".<sup>2</sup> It is about a centrality that is never articulated in an isolated way. To Levinas, it is not possible to think about subjectivity without *thinking* about infinity or exteriority. They are terms that walk side by side. In other words, there

<sup>1</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel. *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*. Paris: Vrin, 1974 [1949]. p. 167-168. Hereafter DEHH.

<sup>2</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel. *Totalité et infini. Essai sur l'extériorité*. La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974 [1961]. p. XIV. Hereafter TI.

is no subjectivity without otherness. The development of the narrative about subjectivity is linked to the very notion of transcendence, which, in the work of 1961, is defined by the word infinity. The term infinity has other names in *Totality and Infinity*: Other, face, transcendence, exteriority are notions that are equivalent and indicate the absolutely Other or Other person, “signification without context”. Taken from the Third Meditation of *Meditations* (1641), in which Descartes ponders about the ideas that are in the subject and exist outside of it, the theme of infinity resounds in Levinas through the perception of an *ego thinks more than it can fathom*, an expression of the *most in the least* that disturbs the good conscience - the conscience of solipsistic restlessness. The idea of infinity is an excess that the finite contains, an ex-cendence that overflows the consciousness, the thought of a cogitation that is not reduced to the understanding of the intentional consciousness, in which the objects are disposed under the light of vision, by the clarity and distinction, that is, adequacy. According to what Descartes had affirmed, Levinas asserts that the infinite refers to a “deeper and more archaic thought than the *cogito*.”<sup>3</sup> But this is not, under any circumstances, about the affirmation of the substance of a cartesian God, a logical and metaphysical principle that guarantees every possibility of the construction of an edifice of safe truths derived from the “I think”. What interests Levinas is the vigor or strength of this deduction developed by Descartes, that is, a proposition pointing to something that thought cannot encompass and is not even the result of his production, which is an image unfolded from the immanence of thinking and knowledge. As Levinas affirmed, The idea of infinity is not a notion that is forged.<sup>4</sup> The matter in question is the reference to a reality that “comes from outside” of consciousness and of all phenomenality, a judgment that escapes from the mazes of ontology, of the totality of reason in its coherence of univocal postulations and meaning. This is the indication of another “content”, separated, asymmetrically disproportionate to thought, and which reaches it in its core, giving it a new meaning. Contrary to the postulate of an essence of the universe that can be assumed by the concept, the infinity in its exteriority resists to every attempt of capture or subsumption - it is resistance to the universal or to all possible violence. “Infinity does not enter [*rentre*] into the *idea* of infinity, and cannot be grasped; this idea is not a concept.”<sup>5</sup> The infinite, this *quasi-concept*, is not cushioned into the thought that thinks it and it remains radically separate in its exteriority. Considering this, it does not consume the one who approaches it, as in a mystical relationship. There is a separation that is preserved in the relationship with infinity - the same idea of separation that Levinas had developed in the texts of 1946 and 1947 and that will be taken up again in *Totality and Infinity*.

<sup>3</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel. *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*. Paris: Vrin, 1998 [1982]. p. 12 (note 3). Hereafter DVI.

<sup>4</sup> TI, p. XIV.

<sup>5</sup> DEHH, p. 172.

Accompanying the demands of thinking with Descartes about this exceptional “beyond”, Levinas will consequently assume the formulation of an *idea-of-the-infinite-in-us*. Although it is under the abyss of separation, an instance of a phenomenology of the non-phenomenal, the infinite establishes a relationship with the subject by coming to him as an idea - a theme that will be widely developed in “God and Philosophy” (1975), a text that will later compose *Of God who comes to mind* (1982). According to the description of Levinas, this “beyond” of the totality is reflected *within* such totality, in the interiority of the subject's dwelling as *infinite of the infinite*, an event that takes place without being reduced to an experience or a “vision”. The “beyond” can only be said through the implications around the category of “relationship”. By describing the so-called “idea of the infinite”, Levinas wants to indicate the metaphenomenological intrigue of the relationship between the Other and the Same, to point out its sustenance through the path of the intersubjectivity and the view of its signification. The idea of the infinite, which is presented in Levinas' work as a fundamentally ethical category, is the in-condition of sociality, that which makes its beginning possible and accomplishes what he will call “eschatology of peace”. The fundamental level of consciousness is the idea of infinite.<sup>6</sup> Bearer of a language that traumatically interrupts the subject's enjoyment of the world, the idea of the infinite is shown or expressed through the face (visage), according to Levinas, language that is only produced on the face to face.<sup>7</sup> The other reaches subjectivity as face. The metaphysical discourse in Levinas cannot be organized from the Greek *thauma*; astonishment, admiration, contemplative attitude. Rather, it emerges through a trauma, a material relationship, that crosses through drilling (*creuseur*) the subject and his introverted thought, creating space inside and removing him from his ontic-ontological stillness. The truth, the object of philosophy *par excellence*, Levinas stated would thus “indicate the result of a movement that starts from an intimate and familiar world [...] towards the foreigner, towards the beyond, as Plato had said.”<sup>8</sup> This “beyond” - the theme that runs through the Levinasian work - would be the very heteronomy of thinking, translated into *Totality and Infinity* by the notion of face. The truth of the exteriority is offered in front of the face, Levinas affirms. It can be seen from this demarcation that the recourse to abstraction does not enter into the Levinasian analysis of the idea of infinite. It is not about an author who proposes a philosophy in the abstract, a fact that was already observed when defining hypostasis through corporeality - without resorting, of course, to materialism. It is a thought that is extremely inimical to the abstract, of hollow generalities, filled with empty words. “What is investigated here (says Levinas) is the *phenomenological concreteness* in which this signification could

<sup>6</sup> TI, p. XIV-XVI.

<sup>7</sup> TI, p. 271.

<sup>8</sup> DEHH, p. 165.

mean or means indeed, even if it separates itself from all phenomenality”.<sup>9</sup> The notion of face represents a phenomenological ambiguity, which unfolds in a meta-physics that “takes place in ethical relationships,” a relationship with the transcendent taken from a social relationship.<sup>10</sup> Levinas inserts a discourse on the “beyond” considering the elements that constitute the description of the signification of the “less”, and vice-versa. The face evokes the consciousness, inaugurates it, granting meaning to subjectivity. This is the focus of the analyses on the face, presented through a highlighted manner, in sections III and IV of *Totality and Infinity*. The signification of the face and the imbrication of its transcendence, attached to the notion of subjectivity, are the conducting element of the analyses of the text from 1961, a description that breaks with the idea of a chaining of an exteriority fit to the interiority of the vision and of the “whole”, a donation of meaning (*Sinngebung*).

And what is the face? The face (*visage*) is not a term that makes reference to the silhouette of a face, to the plasticity of the forms that are kept by the equanimous light of reason in which the colors and shapes of the real shine. The face is not reduced to a context, to a physiognomy, to a relationship of reciprocity-symmetry; it is the next-distant, someone, a character out of context and of the contents labeled as significations, aside, who does not establish a relationship with what is “seen” or with what is correlative to knowledge. It is not about an object of the consciousness that could be measured in conformity to the knowledge that is absorbed in the being. The face is Other and is someone who speaks, and speaks from another place. And it has precedence: it always comes first. “The face speaks. It speaks, it is in this that it renders possible and begins all discourse. [...] [And] it is discourse and, more exactly, response or responsibility, which is this authentic relationship”.<sup>11</sup> The other is not elsewhere, but *here and now*; he stands up and says “no” to what is imposed on him, begs and commands. The other is not in one place, just like Plato's *ideas*. In other terms, the other is all that makes mention of the foreigner, of what is strange to the language of the structures that make themselves understood by the games of grammar, of connectives, of adequacy. He preserves the face, his estatute of infinite because he does not integrate to the Same and remains strange, bizarre, sinister. Using a nomenclature taken from biblical literature, Levinas will say that the face refers to the widow, the orphan, the poor, the foreigner, that is, it refers to abject figures that make begrudgingly evident to the discourse a proximity that invariably preserves its distance. This shows the very idea of the infinite that the Levinasian argumentation intends. This being said, it is understood that the neighbor, a foreigner *par excellence*, does not present himself as an equal to the intentional consciousness, just like the idea of the infinite; he does not resemble; he does not enter into identification process with it; he preserves his exteriority, his inadequacy. More

<sup>9</sup> DVI, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> TI, p. 50-51.

<sup>11</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel. *Éthique et infini*. Paris: Fayard, 1993 [1982]. p. 92. Hereafter EI.

than a category defined by its plasticity, the face is not reduced to the vision one has of someone, of its features defined by any inbred heritage. A phenomenological situation that refers to the “beyond” of the supposed. In spite of the constitutive invisibility of the face, it is not indicating an absence of relations, but rather “relations with what is not given, of which there is no idea”.<sup>12</sup> It points to a relationship that is not of the field of knowledge, but substantially ethical. The defense of invisibility is necessary to preserve the exteriority of the face. After all, the author states that “The visible forms a totality or tends towards it”.<sup>13</sup> Associated with the biblical figures elected by Levinas, the face possesses a foreignism that does not manifest itself to the vision, and remains, in a resistant way, unmeasured of the object, invariable and infinitely non-totally; things that are not understood, but do not remain silent. The definition of a radical otherness aims at avoiding the totality, which is described as the impossibility of the otherness, a movement of reduction of the Other to the Same, in which the immanence of thinking brings together the multiplicity of the real into an inescapable unity of meaning, which results in the following formula: the Other is the Same. Regency of ontology, the truth of the real, under this tonality, results in a Heraclithite statement: “War (*pólemos*) is the father of all and the king of all” (*Fragment 53*). The work of identity, of totality, war (fratricide) is the manifestation of the dominion over otherness, in which all particulars become only the image of a single vitality. According to Levinas, the mark of thought in the West is defined by the parameters of totality and its word is turned against such an ancient horizon of understanding. The totality has its beginning in the instant when otherness becomes accessible by “I can”, “I possess”, although the resistance of the otherness. For this reason, mapping by the concept of exteriority becomes a crucial problem in the work of Levinas, since a rational connection with the other is never established. There is no concept, much less a genuine concept to be pursued, a concept of the concept (*der Begriff des Begriffes*). The relationship to the face differs from possession and all that possession implies.

It is through desire (*Désir*) that Levinas will find the way to attribute significance to the relationship to the other. But it is not a conventional analysis that takes into account desire interpreted as necessity (*besoin*), lack, need. Levinas retains the idea of a satisfied subjectivity. “The Other metaphysically desired is not 'other' like the bread I eat, the land in which I dwell, the landscape I contemplate, like, sometimes, myself to myself, this 'I', this 'other'”.<sup>14</sup> The matter in question is the development of the meaning of metaphysical desire, which “tends towards something else entirely [*tout autre chose*], toward the absolutely other”.<sup>15</sup> What is at stake is an aspiration for the invisible, for a strange, utopian place, which maintains distance or separation,

<sup>12</sup> TI, p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> TI, p. 220.

<sup>14</sup> TI, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> TI, p. 3.

without satisfaction or eroticism, accumulation, that is, according to Levinas, Desire beyond satisfaction and which does not identify, as necessity, a term or an end.<sup>16</sup> As Levinas announced in *Existence and Existents*, is assumed that the relationship with *others as a movement towards Good*, but without denying or doubting human misery. In other words, it is an indication of the beyond the being, infinite desire. The insufficiency prescribed in the ontology does not allow this leap towards that which is inscribed “outside” its correlations, an instance of transcendence. Under the description of a “desire without fail”, an expression borrowed from Valéry, of a desire that dismisses the pathetic nostalgia of lovers, which differs from the emptiness of the Platonic soul, Levinas elaborates his notion of a desire that expresses *na ágape-love*, capable of being further from every need and every measure or condition that may come to impose itself on desire. The desire is awakened in the bosom of the *lack of lack*; desire that only occurs where there is no lack, for all the rest is need. Therefore, the relation to the face establishes a contradiction, a catastrophic disorder, demanding something that overflows the sufficiency in the being, imposing a hunger of metaphysical origin, aspiration to height, to Good, intention of redemption or restoration; demand of something new, coming from outside the being. Levinas dedicates the second section of *Totality and Infinity* to describe the economic constitution of subjectivity in its satisfied interiority and the modulation that produces the fracture of the position that the hypostatic subject occupies in the being. The subjectivity suffers from a torsion by affectation, caused by the idea of infinite, which shines in the face of the other, as we will see in detail in the following topic. What is intended to affirm is the invocative aspect that the face possesses; a dimension of a relationship to the invisible that refers to the visible. Quoting and paraphrasing Rimbaud,<sup>17</sup> Levinas inaugurates the first line of Section I of *Totality and Infinity* saying that true life is absent, but we are of this world. According to Levinas, the transcendence of the face is, at the same time, its absence from this world, where the expatriation of a being rises, his condition as a foreigner, a dispossessed or a proletarian.<sup>18</sup> The humanity of the human is absent. The tone of discourse warns of the situation of the intersubjective encounter, through which the intended phenomenological message flows, wrapped in an ambiguous and paradoxical plot between the visible and the invisible, totality *and* infinity. The face is word; language makes reference to the infinite and to the relationship *in face*; language capable of stopping the advance of totality, of postponing the moment of betrayal, which violence demands for itself - a return to ontology. The essence of language is the relationship with someone, exposed and threatened by their vulnerability, who says “don't kill me!” or “I'm hungry!” At the center of the discourse are the traces of an

<sup>16</sup> DVI, p. 111.

<sup>17</sup> RIMBAUD, Arthur. *Une saison en enfer*. Bruxelles: Alliance Typographique, 1873. p. 17: “La vraie vie est absente. Nous ne sommes pas au monde.” — “The true life is absent. We are not of this world.”

<sup>18</sup> TI, p. 47.

ancient, immemorial past that makes one cry out “thou shalt not kill”. Levinas stated that “To be with someone else face to face - is not to be able to kill him.”<sup>19</sup> Consequently, language, before being “conscience of”, is obligation; is society. Levinas certainly understands that the relationship with the face can “be dominated by perception, but what is specifically the face is what cannot be reduced to that.”<sup>20</sup> It is about a discourse that signals on all sides the defense of the perennial impossibility of appropriation of the other. What is not reduced to the face, its excess; the idea of the infinite is the component that establishes sociality and constitutes man's humanity. The presence of the face commands like a master, offering the way to the realization of the human, under the condition of “who are we?” According to the author, “The meaning is the face of another and every recourse to the word is already placed within the original face to face of language. The meaning is the infinite, [...] it faces me, puts me into question and forces me by the fact of its essence of infinite.”<sup>21</sup> The delineation of a discourse in which ethics takes precedence over ontological density, which weighs on things and beings that exist, and which is glimpsed from the so famous Levinasian expression “ethics as first philosophy”, is disseminated through that which reverberates in the face, its language of the infinite or that of the meaning. In any case, it is a strange language, radically repulsive to the act of thinking, but it attributes desire and movement *to* and *for* the other. Far from being a voice of the consciousness (*Gewissen*), that speaks from within - a reference to the heideggerian nothingness (*Nichts*) and its opening of senses immersed in a specific anguish of the moral consciousness (*Gewissensangst*) - exteriority speaks through the face, the word of an existent that breathes and means. The guiding role of the face is thus established. The face guides, like a *spokesman for the infinite*, the subjectivity away from its possessions, teaching it by exposing to thought that which cannot be awakened by itself. The teaching is moral. “This voice coming from another shore teaches transcendence itself. Teaching signifies the whole infinity of exteriority. And the whole infinity of exteriority is not first produced then to teach - teaching is its own production”.<sup>22</sup> The face presents a new world, never contemplated or dreamed of by the self; the opening of Saying further from the being, as we will see in *Otherwise than being, or beyond essence* (1974). The exteriority of the face, the language of the infinite founds the moral, its conscience. And this is not about an optic, a perspective among so many possible. “Transcendence is not an optic, but the first ethical gesture.”<sup>23</sup> The path of the subjectivity in Levinas connects itself to intersubjectivity specifically at this point, where the self meets the other face to face. The realization of transcendence fulfills itself in intersubjectivity, that is, in the welcoming of the word, the signification of the infinite evoked in the

<sup>19</sup> TI, p. 173.

<sup>20</sup> EI, p. 90.

<sup>21</sup> TI, p. 181-182.

<sup>22</sup> TI, p. 146.

<sup>23</sup> TI, p. 149.

face of the neighbor-foreigner, as a “yes” to the one *who* is on the way, and what is not a simple thing or stone on which, at first sight, the poet meditates.

In The Middle Of The Road

In the middle of the road a stone  
a stone in the middle of the road  
there was a stone  
in the middle of the road.

I shall never forget this incident  
in my life of weary eyes.  
I shall never forget that in the middle of the road  
there was a stone  
there in the middle of the road a stone  
a stone in the middle of the road.<sup>24</sup>

The approach that is made to the other through face to face, which is an ethical gesture, invites the interlocutor to action and urges him to say in response something more than the mere “whatever” from Meursault, character by Camus.<sup>25</sup> Provoked, the thought is invited to responsibility. The idea of infinity confirms an overflowing of thought that crosses the barriers of immanence and moves consciousness. The non-indifference of the self to the other makes a sign upwards, indicates the transcendence and reveals the humanity of the human or the signification of subjectivity, an *event*.

Closeness “is someone else's contact,” Levinas says in *Otherwise than being, or beyond essence*.<sup>26</sup> Contact is welcoming. And welcoming means top ut in question the freedom of the self.<sup>27</sup> The matter that urges to chase Levinas' words is the idea that freedom, according to the author, “begins in non-freedom, which - far from being slavery or childhood - is one beyond freedom.”<sup>28</sup> The theme of subjectivity exposes freedom to the inverse of its condition - will, deliberation and choice. The *who* of the splendor of the appearance of this subjectivity, master or persecutor - as one reads, respectively, in *Totality and Infinity* and in *Otherwise than being, or beyond essence*, affirms the humanity of man, consolidating what Levinas will call a *humanism of the other man*, as the very name of one of his works indicates. What is human? In reverse, the self and its attributes are under the condition of *respon-*

<sup>24</sup> Drummond de Andrade, Carlos. Uma pedra no meio do caminho: biografia de um poema. Rio de Janeiro: Editora do Autor, 1967; translation into english by George Monteiro.

<sup>25</sup> Camus, Albert. *L'étranger*. Paris: Gallimard, 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel. *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence*. La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974. p. 108-109. Hereafter AE.

<sup>27</sup> TI, p. 58: “To welcome the Other is to put in question my freedom.”

<sup>28</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel. *Quatre lectures talmudiques*. Paris: Minuit, 1976 [1968]. p. 88. Hereafter QLT.

*sibility for everything and everyone*, even the condition of hostage, without the possibility of hiding and avoiding *who*, before the way, questions and says “I am hungry,” “I am thirsty,” “do not kill me”. Urged *by the other and in the face* of the other, the self is called not to pass by the side of the living as if they were dead, not to accompany the *funeral of the living* in an indifferent way, quietly awaiting the hour of burial. The *dead* or the *near-dead* concerns the *who* of subjectivity, concerns who we are, *human or not*. Death means the impossibility of abandonment, its prohibition, because of it I become an accomplice. The death or near-death of someone always concerns me - his agony, his collapse, his hopelessness, his enclosure, his annihilation. Subjectivity in its uniqueness is called upon to bodily respond to an appeal without whereabouts and, therefore, gives itself before the height of the other with a simple “here I am”. Therefore, non-indifference is the first and indispensable condition to think about the *what* of the subjectivity, its own hospitality - a sense that imposes itself on the relationship to the neighbor and to those away, which, more on the fringe of any context, come “like a thief”,<sup>29</sup> preventing philosophy from becoming a naive or optimistic pronouncement on the identical, under the terms of a calm or awakening conscience.

The face of the neighbor means a disturbing responsibility, which is not reduced to any moral normalization. There would be [for Levinas] a covenant with the good before the alternative of good and evil.<sup>30</sup> The whisper of this elevated plot touching the ear and making the heart incline, without dispersing the opacity, punctuates Levinas' narrative, his “ethics of otherness,” his *Otherwise than being*. Acting is not preceded by understanding; non-indifferent is the subjectivity before “that” which she does not understand, does not see and, at the same time, receives and offers. For sure, *folly for the Greeks* or the philosophy of scandal. It can be said, in these terms, that Levinas agrees with Nietzsche when he states that *all philosophers are tyrannized by logic*.<sup>31</sup> After all, as Levinas affirmed: “Clarity is the disappearance of what could shock”.<sup>32</sup> Levinas' narrative indicates that the thought only remains alive because it is under the intrigue of a vision without image. The gap that a question like “who are you?” promotes keeps death away, protects the transcendence of the abuses of the arbitrary hostility of reason, of its coming and going between worlds -

<sup>29</sup> AE, p. 189.

<sup>30</sup> QLT, p. 95.

<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches: ein Buch für freie Geister*. Stuttgart: Alfred Kröner Verlag, 1964. p. 20; *Humano, demasiado humano: um livro para espíritos livres*. São Paulo: Cia das Letras, 2000. p. 19: “Es hat bis jetzt noch keinen Philosophen gegeben, unter dessen Händen die Philosophie nicht zu einer Apologie der Erkenntnis geworden wäre; in diesem Punkte wenigstens ist ein jeder Optimist, daß dieser die höchste Nützlichkeit zugesprochen werden müsse. Sie alle werden von der Logik tyrannisiert; und diese ist ihrem Wesen nach Optimismus.” : “Until now, there has been no philosopher in whose hands philosophy has not become an apology for knowledge. In this way, at least, every one is an optimist, by thinking that knowledge must be accorded the highest usefulness. All philosophers are tyrannized by logic; and logic, by its nature, is optimism.”

<sup>32</sup> TI, p. 96.

protects the necessary ambiguity when thinking; defends subjectivity. In these terms, the *metaphor* of the invisibility attributed to the metaphenomenon of the face - and the other notions that correlate with it - does not represent a fortuitous question pursued in Levinas' texts. The meaning of this non-phenomenality is indispensable for indicating the significance of the *one-to-other*. The separation is there. Subjectivity is called to respond to *whom* do not see himself, or the neighbor and those away - the unknown, the marginalized, the non-relatives, the foreigners, those from anywhere. Are not the foreigners invisible when looking at their identity? Outside the correct context of the gaze or the horizon of being, what is left for the other but *leftovers of gaze* or indifference? The *responsibility for everything and for everyone* is much more than a simple moral "formula" - linked to guilt, duty, tolerance, civility, legality, urbanity and, consequently, resentment - but the phenomenological realization that those existents, somehow (in another way) concern me and demand an answer beyond their features and their origins. The neighbor is a concern of the subjectivity. But who is the neighbor? What are the terms of the relationship to the neighbor?

*Tout autre est tout autre*. Absolutely another is absolutely (all and any) another, says Derrida. In Levinas' work it is evident that subjectivity is fulfilled as service and hospitality in the direction of the *other human being*, discourse oriented toward all men, discourse for peace "between us," on the fringes of meetings marked by the impersonality and reciprocity of the identical. Its starting point is the relationship of "flesh and blood" beings, closeness, as Levinas stated, disturbing [*bouleversant*] the calmness of the non-ubiquity of the being, what becomes rest in a place, therefore, insufficient closeness, as well as an embrace.<sup>33</sup> It is about enunciate subjectivity as sensibility, as incarnation and, according to Levinas, "maternity, body that suffers for the other, body as passivity and renunciation, pure suffering."<sup>34</sup> In turn, the work of justice is the relationship to the other, in which this transcendence is continuously preserved, the opening of time to novelty, trauma. Closeness is a new birth, it is awakening - humanity beyond the shapes of a contractual fraternity. To approach is to become responsible, not by the name of fraternity, but under the order of what hurts my freedom. The intelligibility indicated in closeness refers to a figure of the human who is beyond the powers and knowledge of the consciousness: it is sensitivity. One does not choose for whom to be responsible - the signification of the other is *to offer the bread of your mouth* without looking at *whom*; one does not approach only his neighbor, but his neighbor's neighbor. The plot of subjectivity, which reveals the height of that event, develops as an "intrigue of three".

The expression *You first!* brings with it, in a simple and direct way, the intention, and the height, that drives the thought of Levinas. Levinas affirmed that the concrete

<sup>33</sup> AE, p. 103.

<sup>34</sup> AE, p. 100.

of Good is the value of the other man.<sup>35</sup> He who comes first, *my brother, who counts above all*, makes possible the beginning of a new dimension of meaning, which refuses the giving of meaning, symmetry and reciprocity. *Meaning is the face of another*, which “shows itself” in the proximity to the neighbor, the saying in the said, beyond correlation. Enigma of the infinite, the word of the one who speaks first - and who possesses the privilege of the question and the word - is defined as a trace of a term that does not enter in a relationship with the present (illeity), but that decisively marks subjectivity; intrigue that comes to the idea, a fall upon the senses of that which thought cannot bear - excess that is the Good or idea of the infinite. Under impossible demands to make it bear the more or less, the intelligibility of transcendence, a relationship of extrinsicity from the only one to the other, it is insertion of meaning in the “theater of the Spirit”, through the contact of the skin. Nevertheless, the approach does not promote an equalization of the interlocutors. There is an insuperable and necessary dissimetry between the interlocutors, where the other is always higher. Levinas emphasizes the asymmetrical and non-reciprocal character of the *intersubjective* space; transcendence demands separation and infers an “absolute unevenness”. For Levinas, “correlation does not suffice as a category for transcendence”.<sup>36</sup> This conception remains present as a common thread in the course of his work. The condition imposed by reciprocity, which is a free movement of coming and going, ends up emptying the relationship of its transcendence.<sup>37</sup> Although the interlocutors belong to a *common horizon*, their signification is not enclosed in the horizontality of language. According to Levinas, other as other, as the neighbor, is never equal in his presence to his proximity”. “This difference in closeness between one and the other - between me and my neighbor - becomes *non-indifference*, precisely under my *responsibility*.”<sup>38</sup> Levinas agrees that *in the beginning is the relationship*, but, on the contrary to the theses presented by Buber in his work *I and Thou*, for him the word principle is not governed by reciprocity. The “we” do not live the torrential flow of universal reciprocity - the forms of acting of the self on the other and of the other on the self are absolutely distinct. In general terms, what indicates the outcome of the notion of subjectivity is related to a responsibility that increases as one responds, to the point where the subject takes responsibility for the responsibility of the other, including his or her faults - turned from the desirability of the desirable, which departs and charges, subjecting the self to the other. “To suffer for...” to carry the misery of the other is the condition of anteriority constitutive of the self. It is noted, not only in *Otherness than being, or beyond essence*, but also in *Totality and Infinity*, an inversion of the relationship de-

<sup>35</sup> DVI, p. 225.

<sup>36</sup> TI, p. 24.

<sup>37</sup> DVI, p. 229.

<sup>38</sup> AE, p. 211.

fined in terms of reciprocity. As this text has already pointed out, Levinasian discourse is built from the idea of a radical asymmetry between the other and the self, through separation. And, more than an I-Thou relationship, the relationship for Levinas involves another of the other. The initial *duo* implies the reference to a *trio*, and even to an *orchestra* in the background. More than emphasizing relationships that may come to be established between neighbors - with equals, from the land itself - Levinas indicates that responsibility is not enclosed in the mirrored symmetry of an I-Thou, under the alignment of those who walk or march side by side and, much less, is measured by the movements of a "step of two". Avoiding the shapes of an intimate society, based on the love of lovers, the I-Thou relationship involves a "he", a third one. The other is always someone else, election. I-thou-they-He. More than a *You first!* has to be said *You all First!* "The third is other than the neighbor but also another."<sup>39</sup> For Levinas, the entrance of the third in the relationship is the beginning of consciousness and sociality - policy that appears as a demand, a "must" (*il faut*), initiating an unavoidable question within ethics as primary philosophy. Responsibility does not stop only with the neighbor, but with the neighbor's neighbor, so that the other becomes "immediately the brother of all the other men."<sup>40</sup> And it is necessary to compare them under the conditions of being, to go obligatorily through ontology, to fix the *To say in what is said* at the cost of a betrayal. After all, responsibility for the neighbor does not solve the responsibility for all the others. In a universe of many, *to whom* should one answer in the first place? Who is the closest neighbor? "The interlocutor is not a Thou, he is a You."<sup>41</sup> The third is also the neighbor and, therefore, he cannot be adrift in the relationship of responsibility and non-indifference, which is tied in intersubjectivity. Considering this, it is necessary to compare the incomparable, through a judgment that is found within one's own proximity - the task of subjectivity as righteousness. The only one, I, responds to everything and to everyone, to the call that makes visible the invisibility of the phenomenological meaning of the face. The measure is imposed and the face is faced, *dé-visagé*.

The third is the evocation of politics (and justice), a theme on which Levinas has devoted little attention in his work and for which the postulation of undecidable is preserved. From everywhere in the architecture of her texts, it is possible to notice a "tension" and an "ambivalence" that is inscribed between the wisdom and the cunning that represents the plot between the *neighbor and those away*. Ethics resists to politics and, at the same time, demands it. Levinas repeatedly expresses serious restrictions about politics, which is pointed out in his well-known "Foreword" to *Totality and Infinity* (1961). As one who stands before a pulpit in a gesture of exhortation to lucidity aimed at overcoming a mere play of light, Levinas says in the

<sup>39</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel. *À l'heure des nations*. Paris: Minuit, 2009. p. 156.

<sup>40</sup> AE, p. 201.

<sup>41</sup> TI, p.75.

first lines of his essay on exteriority: “Politics is opposed to morality, as philosophy to naïveté.<sup>42</sup> Politics, he continues, “the art of foreseeing war and winning by any means”<sup>43</sup> stands out as the very exercise of reason, which, by its condition, highlights the obliteration of the Other's otherness and strips him of his height. Against the evidence of the violence that is reproduced through war - all against all - under the vestments of universality and law, Levinas makes use of an ethical discourse of face to face that is enunciated under the traces of a prophetic eschatology. Despite Levinas' resistance to politics, it must be stressed that, according to the author, politics is no less necessary than ethics.<sup>44</sup> He will say that politics “is necessary” because there is always the third, the neighbor of the neighbor. How is this articulated? The references left by Levinas on the topic of politics point to the description of a messianic dimension of politics, as can be read in “Beyond the State in the State” (1988) - politics that carries within itself the metaphysical inspiration (ethics) that precedes it. In these terms, politics, according to him, translates into an extreme attention to “the judgment of all the instants in time, when the living are judged”<sup>45</sup> just like Abraham on Mount Moriah listening to the voice of the angel in a gesture of welcome, resistance and separation. Levinas' philosophical journey, which is dedicated to the unmeasured of the welcome of others in discourse, and which unfolds from an anarchic and unconditional “yes” (matter of subjectivity); it also demands opposition to totality in the form of politics - politics not given to itself, that is, in vigil against the risk of tyranny; politics guided, in turn, by hospitality and by the disenchanting word,<sup>46</sup> tension that is sustained between “yes” and “no” (limits of ethics and politics). The path of subjectivity is exposed under the statement that the third is not indifferent to us either. In *Otherwise than being, or beyond essence*, Levinas says that the third is also closeness; the relationship between the neighbor and the third cannot be indifferent to me, since i get close. ...] justice that compares, gathers and thinks, the synchrony of being and peace.<sup>47</sup> The closeness of the neighbor is embraced by justice - the emergence of conscience. Levinas says: Justice and judgment are needed from the moment the third one appears.<sup>48</sup> The figure of the third demarcates a new openness in subjectivity; openness in relation to others, humanity's responsibility for humanity. The absolutely other is each and every other - and to each and every other is due response; is due hospitality. After all, “justice only remains justice in a society where there is no distinction between those close and those

<sup>42</sup> TI, p. IX.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel. *Liberté et commandement*. Paris: Fata Morgana, 2016. p. 19.

<sup>45</sup> TI, p. XI.

<sup>46</sup> TI p. 71.

<sup>47</sup> AE, p. 20.

<sup>48</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel. *Entre nous. Essai sur le penser-à-l'autre*. Paris: Grasset & Fasquelle, 1998 [1991] (Le Livre de Poche). p. 221.

far off, but in which there also remains the impossibility of passing by the closest”.<sup>49</sup> The third brings the relationship between two to the sphere of “community”, where unity prevails *in plurality*, a relationship between unequal, now separated and hostages of many, under the same order. The interposition of the third in the frame of the ethical relationship corresponds, in Levinas' signature, says Derrida, to almost the totality of his discourse,<sup>50</sup> an instant that marks the “birth of the question.” Who comes first? Does it concern me the other of the other as well? To face (*dé-visager*) the third, establishes the limit of the immediacy of the responsibility, imposing a condition to the ethical in-condition. “It is necessary” the context, the vision, the measure, the State, the judgment, etc. In these terms, the closeness of the neighbor is engaged in justice, in such a way that, according to Levinas, consciousness is born as the presence of the third.<sup>51</sup> So the first question is: what's just and right? Who's first? Who has priority? It is necessary to make a decision, to compare what cannot be compared, the irreplaceable. Therefore, Levinas says that it is necessary to judge, the State, and political instances.<sup>52</sup> Justice undoes the asymmetry: it is necessary to compare the incomparable, those who are not just another one among themselves - the only and irreplaceable. Levinas stated that the drama of forgiveness itself does not consist of only two characters, but of three.<sup>53</sup> More than reconciliation between offender and offended, it is necessary justice and judge, *Elohim*. *Conciliation is to do justice* to the third, horizontality of relationships that does not dismiss its vertex. The judgment of the subjectivity is to dig out the Saying that the said from the letter of the law imposes on the conscience, revealing its ultimate signification and offering it, as service, to all. The presence of the third demands consciousness. “Justice requires contemporaneousness of representation. It is thus that the neighbor becomes visible - and looked at [*dé-visagé*] - presents himself, and there is also justice for me.”<sup>54</sup> A broadening of the notion of Levinasian ethics is promoted, described as welcoming and replacement through brotherhood, maintaining the idea that the engine of justice is also the forgetfulness of oneself - surplus of the duties attributed to the self over his rights - even if he is restored to the calculation. In any event, Levinas says: Justice is never a degeneration of obsession, a degeneracy of the other [...] a 'neutralization' of the glory of the infinite.<sup>55</sup> On the contrary, the path of justice is the guarantee of peace “between us,” that is, the very rationality of reason or its universality. The institution of the third does not obliterate the substitution of the other. The birth of justice establishes an organization in which the relations between

<sup>49</sup> AE, p. 203.

<sup>50</sup> Derrida, Jacques. *Adieu à Emmanuel Lévinas*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2004. p. 48.

<sup>51</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel. Paix et proximité. In: ROLLAND, Jacques (Dir.). *Les Cahiers de La Nuit Surveillée*. Emmanuel Lévinas. n. 3, Verdier, 1984. p. 346.

<sup>52</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel. *À l'heure des nations*. Paris: Minuit, 2009. p. 156.

<sup>53</sup> QLT, p. 41.

<sup>54</sup> AE, p. 202.

<sup>55</sup> AE, p. 203.

myself, the other and the third become symmetrical - the possibility of equality, but without excluding the ambiguity of the enigma of transcendence. The synchrony of peace is maintained “thanks” to the diachrony of “the otherwise than being”. The court of reason is animated by the transcendence of the other, “thanks” to it. In this way, it is indicated that the space of politics is made up of a meeting of subjectivities as a meeting of faces, and not as a corporation, of those who sit *next* to each other without facing each other face-to-face - subjectivity is brought closer to those close to each other, maintaining a relationship of a different order from the simple coexistence of the *being-with*. In these terms, justice prevents invisibility, which passes by the side of the living as if they were dead, indifferently. The other does not dissolve into the anonymity of the whole, but continues to be face, with its wrinkles that indicates the visitation of the infinite. The stranger is named, he exists, as a body that suffers and feeds itself, before others, and does not resemble. The journey on subjectivity in Levinas mentions the not forgetting the invisible/visible *to whom* may concern the uniqueness of the self, judgment made impossible without it, responsibility for all - as Levinas already announced in the “Preface” of *Totality and Infinity*. The spirituality of the human, the work of welcoming, substitution and brotherhood is justice in the closeness. *Peace to those far and near*, says the prophet (Isaiah, 57) - terms of today and tomorrow of a humanity to come.

Levinas' intention is to indicate that there is always a third - third ones- to compose the plot of the ethical relation, which turns the ordering of the order to the neighbor given by face to face, demanding calculation and that which goes with it, that is, politics. It is necessary to deal with the call that comes from the *neighbor* and, also, from the *other's neighbor, the one away*, and therefore to create, as we read in “Politics after!”, “the concrete conditions of political invention.”<sup>56</sup> Politics emerges as a demand in Levinas, a “must”, establishing an unavoidable question within its *ethics as primary philosophy*. Politics is directed towards a responsibility that reaches everyone, where everyone is responsible for everyone. This “intrigue of three” of politics makes reference to Márkel's speech in the book *The Brothers Karamazov*: “Each of us is guilty before everyone for everyone, and I more than the others”.<sup>57</sup> Appropriating this sentence to his thought, Levinas will say that guilt should be read as responsibility, that is, as imputability or substitution. The third, *everything and everyone*, interrupts ethics, *vis-à-vis*, opening the doors of politics and, therefore, of justice - as Primo Levi makes us think from one of his stories as a survivor, in which a political question is made to be heard that shamed him: “why you two and not me?”<sup>58</sup> In the manner of a response task imposed on a survivor

<sup>56</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel. *L'au-delà du verset: Lectures et discours talmudiques*. Paris: Minuit, 1982. p. 227. Hereafter ADV.

<sup>57</sup> Dostoiévski, Fiódor. *Os irmãos Karamázov*. São Paulo: Editora 34, 2008. p. 396.

<sup>58</sup> Levi, Primo. *Os afogados e os sobreviventes*. Rio de Janeiro / São Paulo: Paz e Terra, 2016. p. 64. [English title: *The drowned and the saved*.] Primo Levi brings to mind an event that took place in Auschwitz during an arduous working day of a very hot day, when everyone suffered from thirst.

(unicity), Levinas articulates his discourse on the human and the order of the politician, or his disorder. As Derrida affirms in “The word of welcome,” the interposition of the third in the plot of the ethical relationship corresponds in Levinas' signature to almost the totality of his discourse,<sup>59</sup> an instant that marks the “birth of the question. Who comes first? This is the fundamental question that guides the measure of politics, of the third. Does it concern me the other of the other as well? To face, *dé-visager*, the third establishes the limit of the immediacy of responsibility, imposing a condition on the ethical in-condition. It is necessary to demand the context, the vision, the measure, the State, the judgment, etc. In these terms, the closeness of the neighbor is taken to justice, that is, the appearance of conscience. Levinas' philosophy dispenses the intentional consciousness, presupposed in the subject's relationship with the world, in which the otherness is gathered, circumscribing it; intentionality is without image, experience without vision - it mentions the *face*. However, politics alters the terms of this singular relationship. Levinas said that *judgement and justice are needed from the moment the third appears*. Thus, the author states that conscience is born as the presence of the third, and its foundation, it is worth emphasizing, is justice and not the opposite - as, for example, Thoreau might suppose. The first question is a question of justice. “Who” before all? A decision is needed. But who decides?

In opposition to the certainty of the primacy of freedom, who says “yes” first is the other (invested freedom). “It is not I - it is the other that can say yes.”<sup>60</sup> We speak of a responsibility that comes before freedom, in the manner of an “original gift” under the inspiration or ordering of an immemorial past (idea of the infinite, God...). The tone of Levinas' discourse points to the existence of a “yes older than naive spontaneity,” “before the I-that-decides”.<sup>61</sup> It is not required to listen and understand each other in order to answer right away, as Levinas points out in “Heidegger, Gagarin and us”.<sup>62</sup> There is only listening and answering. This is also called hospitality or welcoming, notions that indicate an “relentless 'intrigue' of obedience”.<sup>63</sup> In Levinas, to welcome is to obey, what could also be called ethics, metaphysics, hospitality, responsibility, fecundity, substitution, subjectivity, Torah, prophetism, etc. It is not a question of affirming any obedience, which can also be read

In his story he says that after he and his friend Alberto discovered a water source they both decided to enjoy it without sharing it with the other prisoners. But the secret was not kept safe, for there were those who silently noticed it. Years later, after the release, Primo Levi was questioned by Daniele, their companion who secretly witnessed the episode, about why the water was not shared with him. This passage alludes to the task that falls on the shoulders of the survivor, who in his unicity owes everything to everyone.

<sup>59</sup> Derrida, Jacques. *Adeus a Emmanuel Lévinas*. São Paulo: Perspectiva, 2004. p. 48.

<sup>60</sup> TI, p. 66.

<sup>61</sup> QLT, p. 106; 107.

<sup>62</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel. *Difficile liberté. Essais sur le judaïsme*. Paris: Albin Michel, 1963. p. 325.

<sup>63</sup> ADV, p. 176.

as a discourse on disobedience.<sup>64</sup> In other words, “yes, yes”. Obedience in his thinking is translated as “fear of heaven,”<sup>65</sup> that is, fear for the other or trembling before the mystery of the other. Definitely, it is not a matter of fear as fear of violence as expressed by Hobbes, which is imposed from an instinct of self-preservation. But surely there is a terror at work in the midst of the horizon of being, which endangers politics itself by emptying the word (impersonality), as occurs in the consolidation of totalitarian regimes. The fear, to which Levinas refers, is the fear of the consequences of the “there is”, of a night that invades and becomes endemic, suspending justice, as we read in *From the sacred to the holy*, in its fifth lesson.<sup>66</sup> The fear concerns a call to ordering that addresses me (the only one), accused, as a possibility of interrupting someone's death and any justification for the suffering that may be imposed on those near and far. It is not a question of fear about one's own death, about anguishing oneself in the face of it and, in this movement, about appropriating oneself, but of fear about the death of someone else, about fear of taking someone else's place, usurping their dwelling, reducing someone else to hunger and misery, committing murder. One fears death that may be under the weight of my deaf, blind, pure hands that decide at will, alone or by naive carelessness. Certainly, hands that are always dirty, but that can still “save”, practice justice - hands willing to sacrifice/ligature (*ligature*), hands willing to perjure, disposition for the politician, disposition for the *now*.

<sup>64</sup> Scoralick, Klinger. “Desloulcar a obediência. Sobre a insurgência do político em Levinas.” *Revista Ética e Filosofia Política* 22, v. 1 (2019): 196-211. <https://doi.org/10.34019/2448-2137.2019.27448>

<sup>65</sup> ADV, p. 116.

<sup>66</sup> Levinas, Emmanuel. *Du sacré au saint. Cinq nouvelles lectures talmudiques*. Paris: Minuit: 1988. p. 149-180.