

**SELF, OTHER AND TRANSCENDENCE IN THE PHILOSOPHY  
OF EMMANUEL LEVINAS**

*Dissertation submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University*

*in partial fulfilment of the requirements*

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**MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY**

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## DECLARATION

I, Sanjay Kumar declare that the dissertation titled *Self, Other and Transcendence in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* submitted by me for the award of the degree of *Master of Philosophy* is my own work. The dissertation has not been submitted so far in part or in full, for any other degree in this or any other university.

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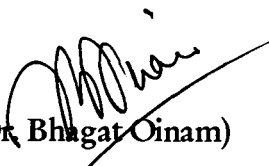


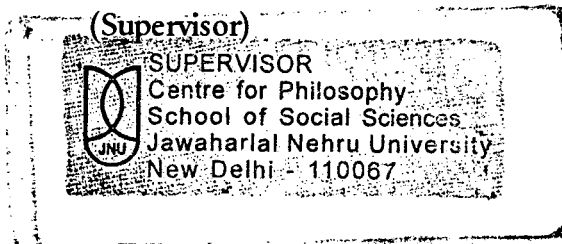
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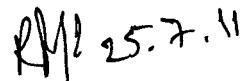
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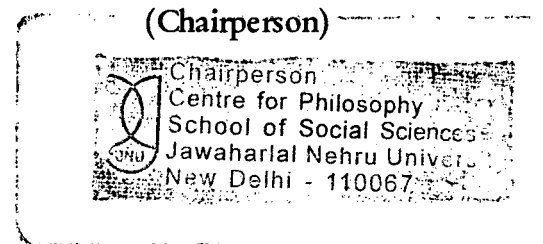
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We recommend this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

  
(Dr. Bhagat Oinam)



  
(Prof. R.P. Singh)



*Dedicated to the "Other"*

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*Sanjay Kumar*

## Introduction

Emmanuel Levinas, a Lithuanian-born philosopher of Jewish heritage who became one of the most celebrated thinkers of postwar France by developing a philosophy of “radical alterity” with important ethical implications. His Lithuanian family was killed by the Nazis and only his daughter and wife survived by hiding in France. Once he said that the presentiment and memory of the Nazi horror dominates his personal and intellectual biography. The trauma of Nazism shaped and radically changed his philosophical outlook; the whole project of Nazis was to treat the Jews as “other” and kill them.<sup>1</sup> Levinas was a big critic of Nazism and its supporters. One of them was Heidegger. Levinas charged him of outrightly denying any space for the “other” and hence making philosophy a “self” centered and legitimate for those who became violent towards the “other.”

Levinas, initially an admirer of Husserl and Heidegger, challenges the notion of “self” as it has been proposed in the history of philosophy in general and in phenomenology in particular. While undertaking the criticism of phenomenological interpretation of “self” he argues against the notion of “self” as propagated through the philosophy of Husserl and Heidegger. More importantly, he was critical of the self-other relationship as it has been portrayed in the philosophy of pioneers of phenomenology. He argues against the incapability of the phenomenological inquiries to accommodate the “Other” and therefore giving proper place to the “other” vis-à-vis “self.”

It is not the case that Levinas was critical of what has been propounded by Husserl and Heidegger. On the contrary, both were his teachers and Levinas was a big admirer of their philosophies, initially. Particularly, when he read Husserl’s monumental work – *Logical investigations* he found it full of wisdom and novelty. In fact, it was a new beginning in the inquiry of philosophy intended to give certainty to the evolution of philosophical thought. Levinas writes about his liking impressions of the philosophy of

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<sup>1</sup> Initially Levinas was an admirer of both, Husserl and Heidegger. But later phase of his inquiry is by and large a criticism of both where he admits both being ego centric. In a way whole of Levinas’ inquiry was a response to Nazi ideology and their philosophical basis.



Husserl through following lines where he admits Husserlian writing as full of novelty. He feels as if got upon the Husserlian lines of philosophization

I read *Logical Investigations* very closely, and got the impression of having come upon- not another new speculative construct but new possibilities of thought, a new possibility of moving from one idea to another, other than deduction, induction and the dialectic: a new way of developing “concept,” beyond Bergson’s call to inspiration in ‘intuition’...lived experience that is ‘intentional’ i.e. that is enlivened by an intention intending something other than that mimicked lived experience, and that, always the idea of something, opens an horizon of meanings- one discovers the concreteness or the truth in which that abstract object is lodged.<sup>2</sup>

Going through the above passage we find that how Levinas was taken over by the philosophy of Edmund Husserl. He says that Husserl not only propounded a new philosophy but also gave a new horizon to the development of concepts apart from deduction, induction or dialectic. He was so influenced by Husserl that he wrote his doctoral thesis in this field – *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl’s Phenomenology* (1930). Through this monumental work French thought came to know about Husserl’s phenomenology.

Apart from Husserl, Levinas published his first reading of Heidegger – “Martin Heidegger and Ontology”; through this he expressed his great enthusiasm for Heidegger’s philosophy. He was particularly influenced by the radical approach of Heidegger which gave an ontological turn to the philosophy. This becomes apparent from the passage below:

For once, Fame has picked one who deserves it and, for that matter, one who is still living. Anyone who has studied philosophy cannot, when confronted by Heidegger’s work, fail to

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<sup>2</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, edit. Jill Robbins, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2001, pp. 31-32.

recognize how the originality and force on his achievement, stemming from genius, are combined with an attentive, painstaking, and close working-out of the argument- with that craftsmanship of the patient artisan in which phenomenologist take such pride.<sup>3</sup>

What we described above is something related to the initial inquiry of Emmanuel Levinas. But in due course of his quest he found that what pioneers of phenomenology talked about is by and large a discourse of “self” and there is no required space for the “other.” In fact, what they talk in the name of the “other” also act as means to the realization of the end of the “self.” It encounters with the “other” only to unfold the possibilities of its own being. And hence no way accommodates “other” in its own right, as an autonomous category.

Besides appreciation Levinas criticized Husserl and Heidegger for overemphasizing “self” and being un-accommodative for the “other.” For instance, he argues that in Husserl encounter with the beings (objects of the world) presupposes an objectifying act which acts as the ground for revealing the meaning of the objects; for Husserl the meaning is determined in the consciousness. Although, as Husserl says that object reveals itself but one is required to study it by suspending all beliefs and presuppositions because if it is not the case then meaning will not be grasped in its purity. Therefore, no certainty will be acquired in the philosophy. Moreover, Husserl says that the being of the “other” is determined by the interpretation given by the subject. “Other is there, present to me, but only in the sense that the other has for me.”<sup>4</sup> Besides, he rejects the truth or reality of the “other” in-itself. Consciousness makes present a there too which “nevertheless is not itself there and can never become an ‘itself-there.’”<sup>5</sup> By this it is apparent that meaning is given by the understanding itself which is an act of sheer

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<sup>3</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “*Martin Heidegger and Ontology*,” *Diacritics*, vol. 26, No. 1, Spring Publishing House, 1996, p. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations-An Introduction to Phenomenology*, trans. Dorion Cairns, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, London, 1991, p. 37.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 109.

subjectivity. We can observe that the beings as such has but only a passive role that is waiting to get meaning in the conscious experience of the subject. One can also see that more certainty is entrusted to the subjective consciousness and objects (the “other”) has but an instrumental role. Levinas makes his intervention at this juncture and remarks that the meaning as it has been derived by Husserl has not properly accommodated the “other.” Also, Levinas charges Husserl of reducing reality of objects into thought:

The most astonishing possibility of reducing to a *noema* (reducing to an “object-as intended”) the very being of the existent and so reducing the represented to its meaning or reducing a reality to its content thought.<sup>6</sup>

Levinas doesn’t treat Heidegger and Husserl differently regarding the understanding of “self” vis-à-vis “other.” However, Husserl’s inquiry was epistemological in nature whereas Heidegger focused on ontological issues. Levinas, in “Martin Heidegger and Ontology” proposes the concept of Ontologism like Husserl coined the term psychologism. As Husserl criticized the idea of psychologism Levinas also presents a critique of Heidegger’s notion of ontology. Heidegger, in his book *Being and Time* proposed the concept of *Dasein* that is being-in-the-world; this is a kind of existence enjoyed by human beings. He argues that there is no essence of being-in-the-world but the fact of the matter is that it is endowed with *existence* only. *Dasein* is always a project and every situation is a new situation for him. Life is always about possibilities and never about the essence. Only death is the culmination or end of the possibilities. Heidegger says that *Dasein* in every encounter with the beings unfolds itself and tries to derive meaning out of these possibilities.

Every interaction serves the understanding of the being. If we imagine the ontological structure of this interaction then one may argue that the being-in-the-world is at the centre of everything. The objects of the world (the “other”) give meaning to the

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<sup>6</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A. Lingis, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, 1969, p. 127.

understanding of the “self.” And “other” in itself has no value, which could be considered as an end-in-itself. Levinas departs from Heidegger from this point and takes the inquiry in favour of the “other” which has not been properly placed in the philosophy of Heidegger also.

The implications of the above discussion could be unacceptable and raise certain questions which could not be answered in the inquiry of Husserl and Heidegger. If “other” is not an autonomous category then how ethics (as first philosophy) are feasible? Also if the category of “other” is not given reasonable space then one is not making a difference between what is “self” and what is “other.” Levinas calls this – violence against the “other.” And, not identifying the “other” as different from “self” is referred to as totalization of the “self”; the denial of the otherness of the “other.”

We observed that the recourse to reason has minimum inquiry of the “other;” Levinas admits that what is “other” cannot be grasped with reason truly. So, Levinas looks to sensibility to find the real “other.” Levinas considers sensibility as passive and prior to thought. Through sensibility “self” becomes constituted with the “other” (substitution).<sup>7</sup> The “self” when not in contact with the “other” and therefore not yet encountered with the “other” is known as *moi*. It is a selfish or egoistic self. But when it comes in contact with the “other” it stands vis-à-vis “other.” Other is substituted in “self” and its being affected by the “other.” This is known as *soi*.

From definitional understanding we can admit that *moi* is the selfish or egoistic self but as Levinas’ analysis suggests that it is revealed only when “self” encounters with the “other.” The face-to-face interaction with the “other” makes the subject to grasp its subjectivity and thereby distinguishing it from the “other.” Such role of the “other” in coming across the subjectivity is referred to as “substitution” by Levinas. So, the constituted self is known as *soi*.<sup>8</sup> In the course of contact with the “other” subject transcends itself and comes across varied aspects of the “other.” This could also be called

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<sup>7</sup>Simon Glendinning, *In The Name of Phenomenology*, Routledge Publication, London, 2007, pp. 168-170.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

the journey of the “self” towards the exterior which extends towards the phenomenon of “radical exteriority.” Present work also intends to explore the same phenomenon of encountering with the “other.”

Besides, I will also seek to analyze the limits of the movement of the “self” towards the “other” which has been referred to as transcendence of “self.” The transcendence is towards the “other” and therefore helps in knowing the “other” as well as the relation which holds between “self” and the “other.” It has been argued that the process of transcendence also transcends any distinction between “self” and the “other.” So, one can meaningfully talk about inseparability of “self” and the “other.” Therefore it implies some third category, other than “self” and “other” which is maintained after every differentiation between “self” and the “other” has been resolved.

This was a coarse analysis of what Levinas aspires for. He presents an alternate model of self-other relationship by criticizing the earlier one. Now we shall see the procedure I have followed to describe the issue of “self” and “other” in the present work.

Firstly, I shall undertake to open up what has been propounded regarding “self” and “other” in the phenomenological tradition. How the issue has been opened up at the outset of phenomenological investigation. Initially, how they grasp the concept of “self” and its relation with the “other.” In this context Husserl opines that “other” is an analysis by “self”; an outcome of what “self” interprets. In other words, the meaning of what “other” comes from the subjectivity itself. Objectivity in itself is not in the meaning deriving discourse. Primarily, Husserl is interested in analyzing the states of consciousness and thereby arriving at meaning. At the level of transcendental deduction even the states of consciousness can also be rejected in order to arrive at the level of transcendental ego which is the pure form of ego arrived at by the serial analysis reduction of the contents of consciousness.

In Husserl’s inquiry of “self” and “other,” “other” just appears and has been bracketed out when Husserlian inquiry actually starts. I will also discuss the Husserlian claim that the “other” couldn’t be discussed in actuality. What is called “other” is the projection of the “self.” It is the alter ego which appears as the “other.” But if one is

indeed interested in the “other” as an autonomous character then one has really to be concerned with the “other.” It is also the concern of present work; to see whether there could be anything called “other” as an independent category.

Subsequently, we will be able to see that Heidegger’s notion of “self” is more accommodative than Husserl. He encompasses “other” entities of the world in his definition of “self.” His notion of “self” is understood in terms of Dasein. And Dasein is always indulged in possibilities in order to grasp its actuality. Therefore, his concept of “self” is inseparably related with the beings of the world. Hence, it seems difficult to admit that he doesn’t consider the issue of “other.” However, one can argue that he perhaps doesn’t consider “other” in itself; it would be sorted out further as the discussion progresses. In other words, issue of “other” still stands in need of justice and find meaningful presence vis-à-vis “self.” One can say that Heidegger is not comfortable when we talk about the status of the “other.”

Now we shall undertake to explicate the issue of self-other relationship. Fundamentally, how Levinas observes the domain of “self” and “other.” In this concern he remarks that “self” is beforehand present when one talks about knowing the “other.” But the question rises that how subjectivity comes into being right at the outset? In response Levinas accepts that formation of subjectivity and encounter with the “other” is a momentous process. When the presence of “self” is felt the subject identifies its identity as some subject and therefore subjectivity is formed. From this level of understanding it (subject) moves towards the “other.”

The movement towards outside exteriority is the movement for the “other.” The journey for the “other” brings it through different aspects. Varied perspectives open up when actually “other” is faced. Distinct vantage points reveal “other” in packets or installments which collectively form the knowledge of “other.” It seems implicit that world comes to me through “other.” Admittedly, “other” is known through separated moments of understanding and perspectives and knowing the “other” cannot be exhausted. This is due to the reason that “other” has infinite aspects and “self” fails to access all of them. But one thing is certain that there is a continuous journey towards the

“other” which if extended throughout life becomes short to know the face of the other in totality. However, the journey of “self” culminates at death.<sup>9</sup>

Above lines suggests that “self” can never be able to grasp “other” completely. Self has to take a leap to otherness or alterity. The wish seems fulfilling itself at the time of death, but not really because “self” no more remains. Death in context of Levinas is marked as a radical step for exteriority. It is in a sort of situation where “self” gives itself away to the “other.” It breaks away into the “other.” It is entrusted to the “other.” Also, at this level transcendence reaches to its zenith. Here, the difference between “self” and “other” is wiped out. A level is reached where “self” exists on par with “other.” Neither is preferable over the “other.”

At this juncture, self-other are completely imbibed within each other through understanding. This stage comes through the phenomenon of transcendence. Here, at this stage of self-other relationship one can draw certain affinities between the respective inquiries of Levinas and Sankaracarya’s Advaita Vedanta. Both explain egoistic self as something lack of knowledge and unaware of its responsibility towards the “other,” in case of Levinas. On the one hand Sankaracarya says that *Jiva* is in *avidya* at stage when “self” is egoistic in nature. The moment it gets out of this ignorance it attains knowledge and hence transcends the sense of individuality. Therefore, after transcendence “self” in case of Sankaracarya becomes realized and full of knowledge and responsible (*soi*) in context of Levinas. Also, transcendence from the level of subjectivity renders to do away with the sense of distinctions in both Levinas as well as Sankaracarya. In case of former it brings about the independent existence of “self” and “other” whereas in latter it brings knowledge of non-dualism. Therefore, both propagate the renunciation of differences at this particular stage of existence.

The sense of differences renders the “self” to understand as something distinct from the “other” i.e., isolated from alterity which makes the whole inquiry of self-other an inquiry of “self” and therefore falls from the actual knowledge responsibility. This sort

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<sup>9</sup> Death has been characterized by Levinas as a stage where “self” breaks into the domain “radical exteriority” therefore enters into the sphere of “other.”

of attitude makes “self” an egoistic one (*moi*) as Levinas suggests and *Jiva* in Sankaracarya; both the stages are lack of true knowledge and have misplaced beliefs. We will also see how the actual knowledge metamorphoses *moi* into *soi* (“self” loaded with the sense of responsibility and hence “other”) and *Jiva* into *Atman*.<sup>10</sup>

Now we shall see how I have proposed the above analysis to discuss through different chapters. In this regard I have proposed three chapter followed by a conclusion. We shall see how I argue the journey of “self” towards the “other.” Levinas own analysis of “self” and “other” will be preceded by his reflections on phenomenological tradition and succeeded by evaluation of his theory of “self” and “other” as well.

In chapter one I intend to discuss Levinas analysis and reflection of phenomenological tradition. In this context I will present how Levinas takes up Husserlian notion of “self” vis-à-vis world (“other”). How Husserlian notion of the same stands with Levinasian criticism of it, will also be discussed. Husserl understood from the world as it appeared in the consciousness. Subsequently, inquiry ends up at transcendental ego, which is also the offspring of Husserl’s inquiry.

Further what Heidegger has to say through his inquiry of “self” and “other” (Being and the world) shall be taken up in the second section of the chapter one? One of the points would be Dasein and its being supportive in the revelation of Being.<sup>11</sup>

Chapter second is devoted to the issue of “self” and “other” and their relationship as it has been analysed by Levinas himself. Here Levinas admits “self” as something which is selfish and not inclusive of the “other,” at its initial stage. Latter, the question that how Levinas brings in the issue of “other” and hence responsibility will be observed. I shall also analyse how Levinas takes up the concept of transcendence whereby being

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<sup>10</sup> In Advaita Vedanta *Jiva* is loaded with the ego sense away from true knowledge. The moment it gets knowledge it comes out of this ego sense and hence away from the sense of distinctions. At this stage there is only one reality therefore this school of thought is known as non-dualism.

<sup>11</sup> Heidegger considers “other” in the form of beings of the world. It seems that he considers “other” in his discourse of “self” and “other.” However, he doesn’t admit “other” as an independent category. Beings in turn help Being to unfold itself and work out its understanding.



goes beyond and reaches to the level of “radical exteriority.” Therefore, exploring from the being to the state of “radical exteriority” through the phenomenon of transcendence, I shall also seek to analyse whether “other” could be known in its totality or not.

First section of chapter third is dedicated to the phenomenon of alterity which is arrived at by the process of transcendence. Levinas would argue that the sphere of alterity is the sphere of “other.” It would not be an exaggeration to say that the journey of “self” into the “other” is the progression towards the outside or beyond being.

Second section of the above said chapter is reserved for the issue of transcendence again. I will try to extend the point of Levinas in this particular section. That at the level where transcendence is at its peak any distinction between “self” and “other” vanishes and a level is reached where “self” exists vis-à-vis each other. In addition to this I shall also see whether there is any affinity of Levinas concept of transcendence and self–other relationship with the other schools of thought.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Critique of the Phenomenological Tradition

#### Levinas' Remarks on Husserlian Method and Concept of Intuition

Emmanuel Levinas, a Lithuanian-born philosopher of Jewish heritage was greatly influenced by Husserl's concept of phenomenology which is manifested in the form of book – *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl Phenomenology* got published in early nineties primarily dealing with the concept of intuition in Husserl. After reading *Logical Investigations*, monumental work of Husserl, Levinas terms it as full of wisdom and novelty and therefore gave a new vantage point to philosophical world which intends to bring certainty in the philosophy. Levinas expressed himself being greatly influenced by his master Edmund Husserl, in an interview:

I read *Logical Investigations* very closely, and got the impression of having come upon-not another new speculative construct but new possibilities of thought, a new possibility of moving from one idea to another, other than deduction, induction and the dialectic: a new way of developing "concept," beyond Bergson's call to inspiration in 'intuition'...lived experience that is intentional, i.e., that is enlivened by an intention intending something other than that mimicked lived experience, and that, always the idea of something, opens an horizon of meanings – one discovers the concreteness or the truth in which that abstract object is lodged.<sup>1</sup>

Going through the above passage we find that Levinas was taken over by the philosophy of Edmund Husserl. He says that Husserl not only propounded a new

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<sup>1</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Is it Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, edit. Jill Robbins, Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2001, pp. 31-32.

philosophy but also gave a new horizon to the development of concepts apart from deduction, induction or dialectic. In other words, he invented new tools for philosophizing. Levinas was so influenced by Husserl that he wrote his doctoral thesis on the Husserlian notion of intuition – *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology* (1930). Through this monumental work French thought came to know about Husserl's Phenomenology.

Above lines show the appreciative aspect of Levinas for Husserl but this is not the whole truth. Besides, his appreciation he was also a big critic of Husserl especially in the later phase of his writing. One of the several criticisms is mentioned below where Levinas talks about the meaning and charges Husserl of reducing meaning into thought by making it a subject oriented discourse:

The most astonishing possibility of reducing to a *noema* (reducing to an object-as-intended) the very being of the existent and so reducing the represented to its meaning or reducing a reality to its content thought.<sup>2</sup>

Here, we find that the being of the object, for Levinas, is what it is in thought, i.e., as the state of consciousness. Hence, reducing existents merely into a thought without looking into what object is in itself. In other words, Husserl considers the aspect which appears in the consciousness. This sort of approach continues in whole of the Husserlian inquiry, says Levinas. In due course of discussion the above made claim will prove itself right.

Admittedly, Levinas was a big critic of Husserl's inquiry but sometimes he presented Husserl's phenomenology from different vintage point altogether. Although, Levinas known for critiquing Husserl but he furthers his inquiry in the same area and gave different dimensions to phenomenology.

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<sup>2</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. A. Lingis, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh 1969, p. 127.

However, presently, I am concerned with the issues of self-other relationship and intuition, i.e., how Levinas respond to these issues which have been dealt over at length by Husserl. But, before we further our debate regarding the concerned issues we need to brief up what Husserl has to say in his phenomenology which in turn would be helpful to grasp Levinas' criticism to it. Subsequently, we shall also undertake how Levinas presents the above mentioned issues differently.

Edmund Husserl, a German thinker, propounded a new trend of philosophizing in early nineteenth century. His sole aim was to give mathematical certainty to the philosophy therefore giving new categories of thought to the world of philosophy. His inquiry was based on the objects as they appear in the consciousness rather than how objects are in themselves.

Phenomenology in the leadership of Husserl was primarily a meaning centric inquiry. It seeks to describe the meaning of truth and being in an intersubjective world.<sup>3</sup> Beginning with individual states of consciousness (*Erlebnisse*), it uses *eidetic* intuition to grasp the essence of pure consciousness. The *Erlebnisse* may either be imaginary or perceptual intuition. As a result of intuiting essences (*Eidos*) such as colour, materiality, perception and memory which are the central problems of reason and reality are studied and solved through phenomenological method. The act of perceiving or imagining an essence speaks more about the truth and knowledge of an object rather than the facticity of an object as such. Husserl calls this an act of ideation. Intuiting the essence of an object that is given to consciousness provides a more accurate level of self-evidence than a naturalistic one of feeling the evidence.<sup>5</sup>

The concern of the present discussion is the objects as they appear in the consciousness not as they actually are; the act of consciousnesses must not be confused with the object of consciousnesses.

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<sup>3</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, trans. Richard A. Cohen and Michael B. Smith, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1998, p. 30.

For Husserl, states of consciousness possess separate existence from things. The essence of consciousness is conceived as intentionality or consciousness of something;<sup>4</sup> consciousness is always intentional (directed towards an object). Husserl's fundamental project demonstrates how intentionality, the relation to the object, is consciousness itself; for Husserl intentionality is a mark of mental.

At the level of phenomenological reduction where consciousness itself becomes the object of investigation the empirical objects have been bracketed out. Yet, the question is how does Husserl characterize such consciousness? He says that the material things in the world that are only perceived from a certain angle are transcendent,<sup>5</sup> whereas the perceived object (*noema*) is transcendental. By distinguishing between these two terms, the object of phenomenology can be understood as pure transcendental consciousness.<sup>6</sup> Husserl argues that the transcendental consciousness is the actual and first principle of inquiry. Therefore, Husserl goes a step further to suggest that phenomenology is the first philosophy.

Husserl uses two terms, *noema* and *noesis*, to designate content of consciousness and act of consciousness respectively. He describes a unity of apperception (representation) between the *noesis* and *noema*. For instance, if we are conscious of a green tree it is *noesis* but the result that the tree is green is *noema*.<sup>7</sup> Intentionality facilitates to think of and give meaning (*Sinngebung*) to things in the world. Every relation to the object produces meaning through the freedom of self-evidence (evidence of the states of consciousnesses of the subject).

Two other important notions in Husserl's phenomenology are reflection and representation. Reflection is the act that studies the *Erlebnisse*, the states of consciousness. Its role is to try to grasp the true state of consciousness in its being,

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<sup>4</sup> Barry Smith and David Woodruff Smith (eds.), *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, The Cambridge Companion to Husserl, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1995, p. 13.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 338.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

whether real or imaginary. To truly return to things is to return to reflection, the act that intuitively unveils reality as a lived experience.<sup>8</sup> The foundation for each act that studies the *Erlebnisse* is representation, the unity of apperception between the *noesis* and *noema*. Importantly, Husserl distinguishes between the *noema* of consciousness and the object presented to consciousness. The *noema* is always the perceived object re-presented through reflection whereas the object of consciousness is transcendent in the sense that it does not depend on one's consciousness for its existence.<sup>9</sup>

The notions of reflection and representation signify how Husserl reduces the meaning of the existence, truth and Being of the world to thought. Reflecting on the act of intuition, the act that grasps and represents *Erlebnisse* through memory and imagination, further reduces subjectivity to a relation with the transcendent object in search of meaning. For the subject to imagine or remember an object depends not on the object's content, but on its meaning and meaning is discourse of the subject.

We saw that in Husserl's transcendental phenomenology the subjectivity depends upon the object's meaning. Again, we return to Husserl's desire to articulate rationally the existence of self-evidence in terms of reflection rather than direct and naive self-evidence. By studying the notions of truth (the meaning of existence) and Being (the conditions of possibility of having access to objects), Husserl develops a new way of approaching the problems associated with humanity's experience of the world.<sup>10</sup>

From the above discussion we may arrive at certain points. For instance, what is there at the level of transcendental consciousness is what constitutes as the subject of Husserl's inquiry. And the transcendental level has been achieved through the phenomenon of intentionality which is the directedness towards an object. It implies that the inquiry of meaning initiates itself from the external objects but reaches at its zenith at the level of transcendental ego through the analysis of states of transcendental

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., pp. 19-20.

<sup>9</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *The Theory of Intuition in Husserl's Phenomenology*, trans. Andre Orianne, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1998, pp. 54-55.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 49-50.

consciousnesses. In other words, the phenomenological movement from its inception is oriented towards meaning. But still the question is where from the meaning comes? How far the “other” is significant in ascribing the meaning? And, how much role does subject play to derive the meaning?

Husserl speaks of the giving of the meaning (*Sinngebung*). If meaning is given then apparently there is some agency which gives the meaning and the agency is the subject. Stating otherwise, Husserl argues that meaning is solely given by the subject. Although, there is a sense of object directedness while encountering external objects but any sort of external reality (the “other”) is ruled out or bracketed out at the level of transcendental reduction. The level of transcendental reduction yields pure ego or transcendental ego. Unconditionally, it is a state of pure subjectivity whereby every interpretation of meaning fountains out from the subjective having least reference to the objective (the “other”).

Therefore, intentionality originates in the subject or subjectivity. Apparently, in Husserl’s opinion intentionality is inseparable from the subjectivity. Intentionality is the methodological tool of Husserl. Hence, methodologically meaning is derived from the subject and this methodological analysis in Husserl which prevents him from including “other” on par with the “self.” Husserl clearly says that intentionality is a mark of mental. In this respect it would be a characteristic feature of the subject. Conclusively, it is inseparable from subject.

If intentionality serves the purpose of the subject then obviously it would not be in favour of giving “other” enough space so that it can also be useful in determination of meaning and reality. Plainly, one can admit Husserl as being biased for the subject and opposed to the inclusion of the “other” as a separate category or tool in deriving the meaning.

Secondly, while explicating on the notions of reflection and representation Husserl argues that the meaning of the existence, truth and Being of the world has nothing to do with the objects and existence as such but it has to do with how they appear in the consciousness. That objectivity in the sense of materiality is not what is required by

Husserl, in order to arrive at the issue of meaning and truth. In other words, an object means the thought of it. Here Husserl seems to reduce meaning, being and truth to thought only thereby enlarging the sphere of subject and minimizing the domain of the object as the “other.” Point like this also affirms what has already been stated above, i.e., only subject is relevant in giving the meaning. In other words, what is subjective is significant in arrive at meaning and what is objective is transcendent (doesn’t exist in consciousness), i.e., object in itself, therefore, not significant in Husserlian discourse.

Therefore, it is the consciousness of an object rather than the essence of objects as such that defines the nature of Being and the world’s existence. Precisely speaking, Husserl wanted to take objective world into the aura of subject and subjective consciousness.

It is plain from the above discussion that consciousness is the transcendental phenomenon of meaning. It is expressed as the relation to the transcendent object through the phenomenon of intentionality. Here, truth and Being are interconnected. Truth has been seen as an unconcealment of an object’s structure through acts of consciousness (*Erlebnisse*). Objective reality of what is experienced is Being, i.e., *Erlebnisse*. Hence, being given means being experienced. Again, this proposition subjects the inquiry into earlier criticism, i.e., subjective orientation of Husserl’s inquiry. Here, what is given is equated to being experienced and entrusted certainty over the same. Therefore, subject once again is the centre of certainty.

The above analysis throws some light on the issue of intentionality or directedness of consciousness towards an object and how it addresses the question of “self” or subject and the objects of the world, i.e., the “other.” However, Levinas in his book *Otherwise than Being* discovers reversal of intentionality in its relation to the “other” which is significant from the methodological point of view. “The intention toward another, when it has reached its peak, turns out to belie intentionality. Toward another culminates in a for-another.”<sup>11</sup> In other words, when intentionality is at its zenith it transcends from the

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<sup>11</sup>Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, trans. Alphonso Lingis, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Amsterdam, p. 18.



subject towards the “other” which in turn belie the Husserlian definition of it, i.e., it is characteristic of the subject.

Here, in the above passage, Levinas wants to make the point that when “other” in itself is analysed through intentionality then intentionality no more remains a tool which merely grasps what subjectivity is? But it also takes into account the “other” thereby bringing both, “self” and “other” on par with each other which are precisely not in accordance with the Husserlian definition of the same. In this sense intentionality belies itself.

Apart from intentionality the notion of intuition, i.e., the act by which consciousness discovers the meaning of being through experiencing transcendently the evidence of a thing’s existence, has also been explored on by Husserl. Intuition in present context might be termed as understanding how the transcendent object exists. Also, intuition may be named as intentionality for it seeks to return to the original phenomenon of truth. The genesis of the concept of being is admitted as consciousness itself because it tries to give meaning to *Erlebnisse* in the acts of intuition.

Before we can have concluding remarks of the above discussion I want to bring down couple of observations which figure in the Husserl’s inquiry and have also been dealt in the preceding discussion.

An object means thought of it or as it appears in the consciousness; giving of meaning; being given means being experienced. One thing which is shared by all of these claims is that the subject is on the forefront, i.e., at the centre of the inquiry. For instance, meaning is given in the consciousness and subject is the locus of this consciousness which gives the meaning, according to Husserl. Also, what is given is equivalent to what is experienced and the experience holder is the subject. Therefore, one can plainly admit that it is the subject which determines the meaning. How the objects which are meant in the consciousness actually are is hardly a matter of discourse. In other words, “self” or subject is significant for an object or entity to be grasped without admitting “other” as an agency of meaning. However, this sort of approach raises some pertinent doubts which may come in the guise of certain questions.

What is “other” in Husserl’s inquiry and how it is related with the “self” and vice-versa? Husserl considers “self” as sole agency of giving meaning. But the issue is how “self” grasps itself? Stating otherwise, how “self” realizes that it is “self” and how far the “other” is supportive in fulfilling the meaning of the “self.” In this context, Levinas argues that it is the “other” which supports the “self” to realize its identity and hence grasp its being.

Levinas places both, “self” and the “other” on par with each other. On the contrary Husserl just admits the “other” and with the blink of an eye brackets it out to grasp the transcendental ego in its purity. Levinas prefers both, “self” and “other” without placing either on the upper hand. However, Husserl prefers the “self” or the subject over the “other” or the objective world. It is like a bird sitting on an island and looking around to know the nearby objects without flying anywhere.

### **Ontologism: Critique of Heideggerian Concept of Ontology**

In his first write-up on Heidegger published under the title – *Martin Heidegger and Ontology* Levinas expressed his curiosity for Heidegger’s philosophy. He was so impressed by German phenomenological tradition that he called Husserl and Heidegger great teachers and Berlin as the city of phenomenology. Few of his appreciations for Heidegger may be summarised through the following passage:

For once, Fame has picked one who deserves it and, for that matter, one who is still living. Anyone who has studied philosophy cannot, when confronted by Heidegger’s work, fail to recognize how the originality and force of his achievement, stemming from genius, are combined with an attentive, painstaking and close working-out of the argument- with that

craftsmanship of the patient artisan in which phenomenologists take such pride.<sup>12</sup>

Apart from his praise for Heidegger Levinas was also became a critic of his philosophy, especially in later phase of his inquiry. Major part of his criticism of Heidegger's philosophy comes from Heidegger's allegiance with the Nazi ideology. Nazism was a big enemy of Jews and killed them at mass level thereby ruling out any space for the "other." In this sense the trauma Nazism shaped and radically changed philosophical outlook of Levinas. That is why he says that the presentiment and memory of the Nazis horror dominates his personal and intellectual biography.

Before we further Levinas's assessment of what Heidegger says we need to grasp what Heidegger aims to say through his philosophy. Subsequently, we shall also see how Levinas draws a critique of Heidegger's philosophy and practice.

Here, we are confronted with three levels of inquiry. Starting from the first and most primordial inquiry feasible for us, the one which could be admitted before every metaphysical speculation and all scientific invention is the question of fundamental ontology. By fundamental ontology he means the inquiry into the Being as such. Heidegger calls it a fundamental inquiry because he argues that this is what philosophy should aspire for and it should be the sole aim of philosophy. It should be the end in itself for philosophy. The inquiry into the question of Being is the sole aim of Heidegger's analysis but it is not the only constituent of Heidegger's inquiry; he also tries to encompass analysis of beings in his inquiry.

Subsequently there is the question of metaphysical findings which makes possible the subject matter of the first level of inquiry; metaphysics as ontology in the widest sense or regional ontology (the inquiry into the Being of beings in various domains). At this level Heidegger includes the beings or existents as the subject matter of his inquiry. But he hardly considers the understanding of beings as his fundamental project. In fact, the beings constitute the objective world and this is what one can refer to as the "other" in

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<sup>12</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, "Martin Heidegger and Ontology," *Diacritics*, vol. 26, No. 1, 1996, p. 11.

Heideggerian inquiry. The conception of beings or existents is not significant in themselves but they play an instrumental role in understanding of Being, therefore important in Heideggerian inquiry. In a way they are the subject matter of the inquiry of Being and help the Being to unfold itself.

Finally, we have the field which has been developed by second level of inquiry, science as the ontical inquiry oriented to everything that *is* (the inquiry into beings of all types). This sort of inquiry, Heidegger argues, focuses on the beings and their relationship with each other. Contrary to the existence enjoyed by the human beings, they exist as the objects lying without any reference to the “other.” Of these three Heidegger primarily focuses on the first level of inquiry, i.e., the inquiry of Being which he calls the fundamental ontology. He terms the question of Being as the forgotten question, i.e., it has not been addressed in its basic sense and argues fundamental ontology as the first philosophy.

Heidegger’s endeavor was to develop philosophy as fundamental ontology (inquiry into Being as such) and not merely regional ontology (inquiry into the Being of beings of such and such a type) is carried out not only by pursuing a specific regional ontology, but precisely through a phenomenology of the being which, in each case we ourselves are. Being is the theme of the fundamental ontology of Heidegger to which he states as more primordial as against the ontical inquiry of the positive sciences. This issue becomes apparent from the following quote:

Ontological inquiry is indeed more primordial, as over against the *ontical* inquiry of the positive sciences. But it remains naïve and opaque if in its researches into the Being of beings it fails to discuss the meaning of Being in general... the question of Being aims therefore at ascertaining the a prior conditions not only for the possibility of the sciences... but also for the possibility of those ontologies themselves which are prior to the ontical sciences and provide their foundations. Basically all ontology... remains blind and perverted from its ownmost aim, if it has not

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first adequately clarified the meaning Being, and conceived this clarification as its fundamental task<sup>13</sup>

In the above lines Heidegger argues that philosophy in its history of inquiry has focused on *ontical* inquiry of the positive sciences and remained ignorant of the question of Being which should be the aim of philosophy, according Heidegger. He further says that besides the ontical orientation of inquiry the fundamental question of Being and hence basic ontology has been neglected. Therefore, call of the inquiry is to start the inquiry into the fundamental ontology of Dasein.

By pursuing the question of Being in its basic sense Heidegger makes a regress from the prevailing metaphysical issues to the issues of fundamental ontology. The question of Being which belongs to the subject called philosophy is essentially different from the *ontic* questions, which is the subject matter of sciences. Heidegger further argues that we grasp our being like one of the objects of the external world, which he admits is fundamental mistake on our part and in this sense the issue of Being is not actually addressed. Therefore he intends to address a forgotten question. Precisely, he remarks that we are out of our Being with which one needs to be fundamentally attuned. That we are largely “out of tune with that with which we are nonetheless most fundamentally attuned”<sup>14</sup> is not simply an intellectual error but a definite characteristic of the kind of entity that Dasein is.

Again, Heidegger states that the kind of existence human beings enjoy is distinguished by the fact that we have only, insofar as we have an understanding of Being; this includes a familiarity with our own Being, a familiarity with existence. And yet our tempting tendency is precisely to interpret ourselves as if we were reporting about entities, that is, as if we were describing an object which we encounter as, in the first instance, present-at-hand in the world. But that means that we are interpreting ourselves

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<sup>13</sup>Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Basil Blackwell Publishers, London, p. 11.

<sup>14</sup>Stephen Mulhall, *Heidegger and Being and Time*, Routledge Publishers, London, 1996, p. 31.

on the basis of an implicit understanding of the kind of Being that belongs to entities which we, precisely, are not.

Precisely, the point is regarding understanding of Being. Heidegger argues that although external world has certain effect on the understanding of our own being but Being should not be understood in the manners we conceive the entities of the external world. Once we start apprehending the nature of Being we feel that the understanding of entities of the external world is supplementary to the understanding of Being. Admittedly, to grasp Being is the primary task of Dasein but the being of external objects is also supportive in unfolding what is there in Being to know. In other words, objects of the external world play an instrumental role in deriving the meaning of Being. We have to have a balance between interactions of Dasein with the world. This is what Heidegger says in his concept of Care.

Care in Heidegger doesn't imply in psychological sense. But it is very much ontological in its nature. It demands to strike a balance of existence between Dasein and objective world. Care is instrumental in rendering authenticity for the Dasein. If a Dasein maintains Care then he is living authentically. If it falls from Care then it would be an instance of inauthentic living.

Heidegger argues that Dasein has ontico-ontological priority over other kind of beings because it is a kind of being which can understand the existence of beings other than itself. Thus, the ontic and ontological structure of Dasein is the foundation for every other kind of being. Dasein, i.e., being-in-the-world directly encounters with the objects of the world. The world includes the totality of "things at hand" and "things objectively present" and also realm where Dasein has its being. Therefore, the world is a constitutive factor of Dasein. In other words, the world is a structural component of Being-in-the-world. Heidegger argues that what we call truth is the disclosedness of Dasein. There can be no truth without Dasein. Indeed meaning and truth are the outcome of Dasein's interaction with the world.

Dasein reveals itself as Care not only in its being with things-at-hand (entities with Dasein encounters in its world of interaction) or with thing objectively present

(entities of the world) but in its being-in-the-world. Thus, being with things-at-hand or being with things objectively present also means being concerned with or taking Care of them. Therefore, Care encompasses taking Care of things at hand, taking Care of things objectively present and taking Care of Dasein itself. Also, for Heidegger Care brings things nearer to Dasein.

Being-with-others, having concern for others and taking Care of the world are modes by which Dasein becomes attuned to being-in-the-world. Thus, the being of Dasein reveals a Care and concern by which Dasein understands and transcends itself. It is the sense of Care which prevents Dasein from falling prey to the world. And falling prey to the world is an instance of inauthenticity because Dasein becomes absorbed by being with others, being with things-at-hand and things being with things objectively present, to the extent Dasein no longer reveals itself.

Form the above lines one can easily deduce that how much subject or ego centric Heidegger is, right at the outset of his theory of Being. He intends to place Being in the centre of everything and whole of his conceptualization and gives no independent status to the objective world (the “other”). It is precisely this attitude which is to be highlighted and is also the focus of present discussion.

As stated above the existence enjoyed by human being is distinct from the objects of the world. Heidegger inscribes this basic state of our being with the compound expression referred to as Being-in-the-world, the German word for this expression is Dasein. Besides, Heidegger emphasizes that the worldly aspects of Dasein i.e, the entities and other Daseins are not an added aspects of our existence. But, it is the essential and irreducible part of the Being-in-the-world. In other words, the worldly aspects of Dasein are inseparable and hence it is a unitary phenomenon. To exist is to have this “unitary phenomenon as one’s basic state of Being.”<sup>15</sup> According to Heidegger Dasein is so related with the world that world itself becomes a constitutive factor of Dasein. In other words, Dasein makes his own world. It implies that not world but Dasein is at centre of the whole existence. Everything else has been made subservient to it, by Heidegger.

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<sup>15</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 78.

The above made claim seems to absorb the meaning of entities of the world into the subject or “self” by describing the “other” (objects of the world) as supplementary to the Being-in-the-world. They are meaningful only if they come in contact with the Being-in-the-world, i.e., Dasein. Precisely, they are inseparable from the Dasein. Both, entities of the world and the Being thereby make the unitary existence of the Being-in-the-world, i.e., Dasein. However, in his notion of Care he appeals to strike a balance of interaction between Dasein and objects of the world. There he admits that “other” (objective world) as being significant in the existence as a whole.

Since, man is all about a desire, i.e., what it wants to be. In other words, he is a possibility. And in order to exercise a possibility there has to be meaningful “other.” Otherwise, Dasein cannot interact with itself. Hence, there seems some hope for the “other.” But how the “other” is present? Is it independent from the subject? These are the questions which are to be answered in following discussion.

Heideggerian analysis depicts that “other” which is present in the structure of existence as such is having secondary role. It is not the “other” as an independent category. In other words, one can say that it is not a real but virtual “other.” An “other” that doesn’t have status as the independent “other,” i.e., as sovereign entity.

This sort of egocentrism shows that the problem of epistemology also vanishes away; epistemology is characterized by the presence of subject and object as two poles of knowing structure. But, there is no meaningful “other” (as an independent category) in the world, Heidegger’s analysis suggests. Moreover, what we call “other” is but a supplement to the “self” or subject because Dasein completes its being by the aid of the entities of the world. Indeed, the world of beings is instrumental in disclosing Dasein thereby helping him to grasp his being. Therefore, it would not be an exaggeration to admit that what we call objects of the external world (the “other”) in typical Heideggerian sense are also the tentacles of the “self” or subject. So, “other” in its true sense (i.e., as an independent category) is nowhere in the picture. Otherwise, the picture would have portrayed “self” and the “other” as two different and mutually independent categories.



Levinas has an issue with the conception of “self” and “other” as it has been propounded by Heidegger. Also, there lies the point of departure of Levinas from Heidegger’s thought in grasping the issue of “self” and “other.”

At this point one may bring the idea that Heidegger’s phenomenology of Dasein opens a roadmap for fundamental ontology. Because the issue of Dasein’s conception of Being has taken a theoretically novel turn. The understanding of Being is not to be interpreted as a specific mental achievement, but rather as a way of characterizing the fundamental structure of existence itself, its shape, its face – a “primordial existential structure that has its most basic expressions in the fact that existence, as such, articulates an understanding of something like a ‘worlds’.”<sup>16</sup>

In his books, *On Escape* and *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas uses the words ontologism as Husserl uses the term psychologism. Both the usages imply the critique of respective terms. The critique is directed against those philosophers who would have the domain of the thinkable and on being coincide without remainder. Levinas conceptualization says that Parmenides was the first person in the context. In other words, Levinas trying to make the point that *being* has been equated with truth throughout the history of philosophy. In this regard, Levinas also puts forth the criticism of what Heidegger argues in his inquiry of Being.

The most significant issue raised by Levinas in Heidegger’s work is the question of ontological difference. In Levinas view which is the difference between the verbal sense of being (*das Sein*) and the being which encounters, i.e., the participatory sense (*das Seiende*). Here, Levinas intends to make the point that Heidegger understands the world from a horizon which places Dasein in the centre- the individual entities are understood within a horizon. Here, he states that one can understand being only through beings. Particularly, the conception of Being through the beings; Dasein unfolds amongst the being of the objects.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

Therefore, Heidegger's argument that prefers being over existents leads us to think of ontology before metaphysics, i.e., freedom of subjects before justice and hence space for the "other." One may admit that it is the movement of the subject without any obligation for the "other." This becomes apparent from the following lines. "Being before the *existent*, ontology before metaphysics, is freedom (be it freedom of theory) before justice. It is a movement within the same before obligation to the other."<sup>17</sup>

The continued reference to the Being as the focal point of Heidegger's inquiry places the "other" nowhere in his philosophy. As stated in the above passage the "other" has been given negligible space and therefore seems out of Heidegger's discourse, as it has been keenly dealt in Levinas' philosophy. This sort of attitude of Heidegger is termed by Levinas as the Violence<sup>18</sup> towards the "other." Levinas argues that this violence manifests itself in the guise of beings who affirm themselves without any regard for one another in general and the "other" in particular.

Although, Levinas presents a criticism of Heidegger's notion of Being by referring it as selfish, ego centric and hence unaccommodative for the "other" but at the same time he did not theorise that "self" is something which is essentially or by nature unaccommodative for the "other." Indeed he proposes the idea that "self" cannot be truly reformed. It is its nature to be selfish because of the reason Levinas admits that "No one is good voluntarily, and responsibility for the 'other' is the good. It isn't agreeable, it's good."<sup>19</sup>

The sense of goodness and responsibility will come from the outside. It imposes itself upon the "self" from the "other." Since Levinas talks about the existence of goodness and responsibility so he might be justifiable arguing about the "other" meaningfully, i.e., "other" as an independent category. It still sounds ontological to talk

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<sup>17</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An essay on exteriority*, p. 46.

<sup>18</sup> When "self" is considered as the focal point of inquiry and "other" is being given least space this would be an instance of violence against the "other." It is violence because "other" is not given what is due to it. In this context "self" portrayed as having overarching presence and hence becomes central point of philosophization. This is what instantiate the claim of violence against the "other."

<sup>19</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, p. 11.

about “self” and “other” in context of the “self” and “other” relationship. How would Levinas make it an ethical discourse? Here, one may observe that the relation of the “self” with the “other” is what will make Levinas’ inquiry an ethical inquiry and relation “self” and “other” as a relation of proximity.

Levinas remarks that Heidegger’s ontology is thing-ontology and so it is too limited to contain the subjectivity.<sup>20</sup> Along with subject Levinas wanted to include the “other” as one of the relata of “self” to give meaningful definition of subjectivity. But ontology as defined above fails to accommodate subjectivity. This is what leads Levinas not merely to distance from ontological difference but to depart from the Heideggerian ontology itself. Going beyond ontology Levinas progresses towards a beyond or otherwise than being, which is metaphysical and not ontological. Levinas moves beyond ontological-difference because he argues that it is also ego centric and unfolds an understanding which is primarily a discourse of subject and subjectivity and subjectivity. Therefore it is exclusively an enterprise of the “self” not the “other.” Because of this reason it is unacceptable to Levinas.

Also, Levinas concretely admits that even the ontological difference is too totalizable, too attached to being to accommodate true transcendence; by transcendence Levinas means the movement of the subject towards the “other,” i.e., a beyond or otherwise than being. However, it is absent in whole of the Heideggerian inquiry. Levinas’ philosophy argues to leave the field of being completely and then initiate the discourse about the “other.” In this regard Levinas proposes metaphysics and not ontology. Levinas also seem to argue that Heidegger does not seem to leave the sphere of the same (subject) because his Dasein is not in dialogue with the “other” for the sake of “other.” That is to say that “other” has not been treated as an independent category. It seems that Heidegger includes the “other” in his philosophy but for the sake of the subject.

The whole discussion converges to the idea that Heidegger seems negligibly accommodative for the “other” whereas Husserl focuses on the subject more and brackets

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<sup>20</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Martin Heidegger and Ontology,” pp. 12-14.

out the “other.” However, he takes a glimpse of the “other” but retracts back into subjectivity thereby stressing more on the transcendental ego and leaving aside the question of the “other.” It seems analogous to a bird sitting on ship in the sea. In this context Husserl’s philosophy doesn’t allow the bird go anywhere but just sit and look around. Whereas Heidegger allows that bird to go and fly around but at the same time he also set a command to come back and be on the ship. The difference between the two is that Husserl doesn’t allow the bird to fly around to see outside reality. Whereas Heidegger allows the bird to fly around but at same time asks it to come back to the initial point. Indeed both of them don’t allow the bird to see reality in itself.

## CHAPTER TWO

### Emmanuel Levinas on “Self” and “Other”

#### Fundamental Understanding of “Self” vis-à-vis “Other”

Across the traditions and thinking minds of philosophy the concept of “self” has found a significant place. The observable fact about all the traditions is that all of them understood “self” as something which is grasped through itself, i.e., from within. For instance, rationalists would say that there are innate ideas which constitute the “self” and shape the understanding of one’s “self.” This sort of attitude in philosophy carried up to 19<sup>th</sup> century. It reached to its zenith through the phenomenological movement where Husserl inquired the issue of “self” to the level of transcendental ego and hence de-contextualized the subject from the “other.” Subsequently, he brackets out the “other” from the discourse of “self” and its interaction with the world. Rather than the world of “other” he was primarily interested in the analysis of pure consciousness resulting in an ego centric inquiry.

Moreover, Heidegger the epoch making phenomenologist of his times, entrusted on other but an instrumental role. He argued that “other” helps the “self” to grasp its being thereby unfolding “self” to give meaning to it. The process of unfolding the being helps to grasp what is being and “other” is what helps to uncover varied aspects of the being. In a way one may admit that he was never conscious of the “other” as meaningful aspects of his inquiry. Similarly, in the subsequent traditions of philosophy the “other” doesn’t find its place as an independent entity or category. Even Sartre didn’t succeed to state “other” in itself and study it in its own right. But, it goes to the credit of Emmanuel Levinas to see “other” sensibly thereby giving it an independent status which helps to discuss it vis-à-vis the “self.” He admits that one cannot be the means for the understanding of the “other.” Both are on par with each other. Preferring “self” would be an instance of violence over the “other” thereby losing the autonomous character of the “other” which it should be entitled to.

Levinas initiates the debate of “self” and “other” with his analysis of same/other where he equates “same” with ego and “other” in terms of having different status as gestures. He argues that “other” is on par with “self.” As the discussion will proceed I will argue that indeed Levinas never favoured any difference between “self” and the “other.” He argues that when the relation of “self” and the “other” is at its zenith any difference between “self” and “other” is transcended; this is the stage of transcendence. The stage of transcendence is the stage of actual harmony between the two. But it is arrived at only when relationship initiated itself with inclusion of the “other” in itself, i.e., as an independent category.

Levinas uses the concept of “same” in the sense of “self” (in itself) and also in the sense of annexing<sup>1</sup> the “other” through the means of knowledge, and in terms of having something. The “self” we are talking about in the present context is an egotistic self, i.e. it is the “self” contained in it. It is a world in its own right without any botheration for what is there in the outside world. Arguing otherwise, the world starts from the “self” and ends unto the “self.” Levinas refers it as *moi*. But it doesn’t mean that “other” is not there. It is very much present but “self” is not concerned with it. Self here is more concerned with interiority rather than exteriority; not interiority but exteriority is the concern of Levinasian inquiry. But first and foremost we need to know how “self” in its interiority has been seen across the tradition of phenomenology.

‘ In *Towards the Outside* Michael Smith argues that this sort of “self” is essentially “separation and interiority”,<sup>2</sup> separation in the sense that it feels separate or distinct from the outer world and word interiority is used in terms of its being focused on the internal constitution of being only. Therefore, Levinas argues that “self” takes its freedom in being a caretaker of itself only. It doesn’t even intend to establish a relation between the consciousness and the outer world. Moreover, “other” remains a delinked

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<sup>1</sup> To annex here means to get on the other and allow other to get on me. It does not mean something like encroaching the space of the other. That way it would no longer remain a discourse for the “other” but only self. In fact, to know “other” variedly is what is the matter of concern presently.

<sup>2</sup> M. Smith, *Towards the Outside*, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, p. 39

category which seems to have nothing to do with “self.” Also, “self” keeps itself confined in its own particularity and therefore assimilated in its own being.

Michael Smith also presents an analogy which supports to comprehend the notion of naturally egoistic and selfish self. He cites the character of Charlie Chaplin in *The Gold Rush* where Chaplin is unaware of the outside conditions except to the degree that they affect his balance inside his cabin.<sup>3</sup> He must translate his inner experiences into hypotheses in relation to “self,” since he has no direct opening into the outer world. “If, stretched out on the floor, already a physicist, he gropes about, studying the elementary laws of those disorderly ups and downs and rejoins the world, it is precisely because he thinks.”<sup>4</sup> This sort of thinking has its origin in self-centered unconsciousness of exteriority and being conscious of the interiority.

At this particular stage “self” is not in any sort of relation with the “other” except for the point it harms the status of the “same,” simply speaking. The feasibility of any relation is ruled out because only “self” is being preferred and any meaningful presence of the “other” could hardly be traced out. For the self-other relation to happen, along with the “self,” “other” has to be present meaningfully. Having said this, any sort of harmony between “self” and the “other” seems implausible. In the same line of argument one can argue that being in the present context is solely egoistic. If it is some egoistic and selfish self then how it is different from the concept of the “same” present in certain religious traditions? In this context Levinas appreciates the point that “self” is egoistic in the sense that it is only aware of itself irrespective of any grasp of the “other.” Characteristically, how Levinas differentiates his notion of selfish self (*moi*) from the concept prevailing in religion is analysed in the argument to follow.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other*, trans. Michael B. Smith, Columbia University Press, New York, 1998, P. 26.

<sup>5</sup> Religions usually disallow the concept of egoism because it is what they are made to undo from the minds of the followers of a particular religion. To be egoistic is to consider one’s own desires only. That is not the business of a religion. It should aim to consider “other” and serve for the “other.”

In the religious traditions “self” (*moi* or selfish self) has been defined as some kind of vice and hence not good to be inculcated. Here, vice is in the sense that being selfish may lead to unwanted deeds and in turn goes against the spirit of religion. However, Levinas argues otherwise than what religion states. He opines that selfish self is not characteristically vice. In other words, it’s not a sin in being egoistic on the part of “self.” Its egotism is in the manner of being everything irrespective of the outer world that is it is confined in its own being. This way it would not include “other” vis-à-vis itself which is precisely, not the way Levinas aspires it to be.

In this regard, one may observe that Levinas’ notion of selfish self is quite different from the religious traditions. As stated above, religion considers egoistic self as something which is vice and unacceptable, therefore, a taboo. Whereas, Levinas argues that the egoism which a “self” has is not an unwanted attribute. But it is a state of “self” where there is dearth of any sort of awareness of the “other.” In other words, behavior and activities of “self” are focused on its own being and any sort of entry of the “other” is suspended. This sort of attitude is not vice but it is able to grasp only the nature of “self” in its own right without any respect and inclusion of the “other.” Therefore, “self” is unaccommodative for the “other” at this particular stage but completely conscious of its own being.

From the above discussion it seems apparent that *moi* is characteristically selfish and egoistic. Stating otherwise, it *is* but I or ego. It grasps only “self” having no regards for the “other.” One may admit that “other” is structurally out of the discourse of “self.” Clearly speaking, where there is no talk of the “other” there could not be any meaningful discussion of the “other” and hence responsibility. That is to say that *moi* is devoid of any sense of responsibility. Responsibility implies an ethical attitude, if there is no responsibility there could not be any question of ethics. Therefore, when one is discussing *moi* one cannot meaningfully talk about ethics. In order to encompass “other,” “self” has to move towards the “other.” The domain of the “other” is the domain of responsibility and ethics. On the contrary, solicitation of responsibility in *moi* makes it a responsible “self.” According to Levinas, when selfish self, i.e., *moi* includes the “other”



in the structure of its inquiry it no more remains selfish self. At this stage it starts considering the “other” hence moving towards the “other.”

When *moi* becomes solicited with the “other” it is termed as *soi*. It is not a “self” concerning solely with me but it so becomes when other gets transformed into it. Stating otherwise, *soi* is an impersonal self it is not merely distinct in degree but in kind from *moi*. The confinement of “self” within itself creates curiosity for transcendence,<sup>6</sup> i.e., movement of “self” towards the “other.” It is the way towards the “other.” It is a sort of tool which helps to move from I-ness to the otherness. Transcendence is a gradual phenomenon, i.e., first and foremost it occurs to the level of perception followed by transcendence towards metaphysical plane. Both the levels of transcendence include the otherness in its complete sense; physical as well as metaphysical. Transcendence<sup>7</sup> as a phenomenon in its own right will be dealt in next chapter. At this stage we can only say that it is the mode of the movement of “self” towards the “other.”

Levinas argues that *moi* must eventually free itself from itself in order to become *soi*. This process of emptying out of “self” from itself has been termed as “de-nucleation” by Levinas. But the question is how “self” does this? Levinas answers that the process is accomplished through the phenomenon of transcendence i.e. movement of “self” towards the “other.” Pleasure is the process of emptying out selfish self to transform it into *soi*. He further argues that the being of pleasure is essentially in its unfolding. In the meantime of happening of this process being moves towards the “other.” The being seems lost in the process of pleasure. It is completely into the “other” but at the culmination being fails to grasp the “other” in its totality because “other” has innumerable aspects according to Levinas and “self” doesn’t succeed in uncovering all of its aspects therefore “self” feels

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<sup>6</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A. Lingis., Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, 1969, pp. 43-46.

<sup>7</sup> In context of Levinas concept transcendence is not used in traditional sense which is a sense of going the objects of the external world. For instance, Plato used this word to signify the world which inhabited by the pure form of every entity of the world; that particular world transcends the objective world which is the shadow of the real and transcendental world.

being deceived. This deception ends up in underscoring of *shame*.<sup>8</sup> The *shame* results because we fail to grasp the “other” as an independent category on the one hand and in totality on the “other.”

Levinas argues that same/self is imperishable in its voyage of knowledge and practice. The imperishable tendency breaks away with the admission of otherness in metaphysical sense and through the phenomenon of transcendence.<sup>9</sup> By the phenomenon of transcendence *moi* or the selfish self becomes solicited with the “other” which in-turn makes the selfish self impersonal and responsible for the “other”? The question of responsibility in-turn brings in the ethical discourse. Plainly, responsibility is the nodal issue in dealing with the “other.” Therefore “self,” “other” and responsibility is the triad for ethics to materialize. Amongst these responsibility is the working instrument which unites both “self” and “other.”

This brings us to Levinas' question of responsibility. The notion of responsibility explicates the idea that in being responsible for the “other,” subject (i.e., I) is already in the grip of the “other.” It also entails that all thought enters on the scene after the emergence of the “other” in the face-to-face encounter with subject. That is to say that the other person precedes my ethical subjectivity and that ethics precedes any conceptual science. In as much as responsibility is the ground for all interpersonal relationships, it is in responsibility that we are going to find a means to pass from an encounter with the real other person into ethics. Apparently, face-to-face encounter with “other,” demands being responsible for the “other.”

Levinas in his book *Otherwise than Being*<sup>10</sup> speaks of responsibility as primary and most fundamental mode of subjectivity. He describes subjectivity in ethical terms

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<sup>8</sup> As Max Scheler says that shame is based not on a lack in our finite being but on our attachment to ourselves through time. Here one may admit two more terms related to shame. These are Nausea and Anguish. Nausea is a malaise arising internally from which there is no escape and therefore it arises from pure ego. On the other hand Anguish arises from the nothingness itself.

<sup>9</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, pp. 44-48.

<sup>10</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, trans. A. Lingis. Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, 1998, pp. 139-40.

which by default includes responsibility. Ethics, here, does not inseparably enclose a preceding existential base as Heidegger would say. The very node of the subjective is knotted in ethics understood as responsibility. Furthermore, the tie with the “other” is knotted only as responsibility. Thus, responsibility is the link between the subject and the other person or in more general terms, the source of the moral “ought” and the appearance of the other person as person and not as thing are one and the same. There is no authentic sociality apart from ethics, and there is no ethics apart from sociality. In other words, the first moment of subject entering into the domain of sociality is the beginning of ethics. That the reason why Levinas refers ethics as first philosophy.

To say that responsibility is fundamental for ethics and interpersonal relation is to say that the meaning of the otherness of the other person is given in responsibility, and not in my interpretation of the other person. This point is contrary to the Husserlian understanding of how meaning is given to the objects of the world; “other” presented to the subject. Husserl admits that meaning of a particular object is determined by the consciousness itself. In this respect meaning depends on how an object appears in “self” and subjectivity and subsequently how it is being interpreted by the consciousnesses. Here, the primary concern is “self” whereas “other” comes but secondary. However, Levinas is quite critical of this approach. He argues that it is not “self” but the “other” which is fundamental.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, “other” is foundational and also it gives meaning to the “self” and its relation vis-à-vis “other.” For Levinas not “self” but “other” makes the enterprise of self-other relationship meaningful. In Levinas’ approach understanding opens itself up through the “other.”

The very meaning of being another person is the one to whom I am responsible. Thus, the contact with the real other person is something presupposed by the very meaning of ethics. This contact with the “other” constituted with the sense of responsibility is the driving force or the source of moral ought in Levinas. By arguing for the admission of responsibility as the characteristic of self-other relationship Levinas

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<sup>11</sup> Other is fundamental in the sense that it should be the first instant of analysis and inquiry. Knowledge of different aspects of the “other” brings in knowledge of the world itself. That is why Levinas says that we know the world through the “other.”

doesn't aim at the establishment of being of ethics but ethical transformation of the persons. He never wanted to rehabilitate ethics as a discourse but he was indeed interested in liberating persons from their chronic disease of being biased for "self." Due to this reason he repeatedly said that the question of ethics is the primary question. This could be accomplished by giving space to "other" and placing it on par with the "self."

From the above discussion one may have certain observations. First and foremost for an ethical discourse to be feasible there have to be two entities, minimally i.e., the "self" and its "other." Presently, the point of discussion is how "self" interacts with the "other?" What is it that is known as "other?" How "self" comes to know "other." How "other" responds when accessed by "self?" In other words, is it some sort of idea which could be known rationally? If it holds true then how the "other" would get proper space, i.e., exist as an independent category. These are certain doubts which come in the guise of questions. In order to argue for "other" reasonably Levinas has to answer these questions. Otherwise his inquiry won't make sense.

If "other" is some idea understandably accomplished through reason then it has to be an interpretation of some mind or subject. But in that case it would become merely a discourse of "self" and subjectivity. Which Levinas would definitely not allow because that is what he is inquiring against. Also Levinas argues that an idea would emerge from some subject and its subjectivity. In other words, it is a byproduct of some mind or subject. And in context of Levinas before any sort of subjectivity there is the "other." It implies that one cannot help but to see the "other" before it is able to discover itself or subjectivity. Moreover, Levinas argues that not the "self" but the "other" helps to realize what subjectivity is. If "other" doesn't come through reason then what is it which aids the realization of the "other?" How one comes to know the "other." Here Levinas brings in the issue of sensibility and argues not reason but sensibility is instrumental in revealing what "other" is all about. Other gets exposed in Sensibility and thereby supports the emergence of subjectivity. In other words, Levinas argues that the real "other" is found in sensibility and not in reason.

Nourishment, as a means of invigoration, is the transmutation of the other into the same which is 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.<sup>12</sup>

Sensibility, for Levinas, goes back to a point before thought originates i.e., before the ordering of a world into a system or totality.<sup>13</sup> Sensibility is passive, not active as thought is, and it is characterized primarily by enjoyment. In other words, it is the moment as it is lived rather than understood. It implies the satisfaction of being filled with sensations; a state of being overwhelmed with the “other.” A state of touch with the “other,” which is present outside and felt from within.

The above said concept is a departure from Heidegger who maintains that we live from things through their function as tools i.e., they have an instrumental role. Levinas maintains that we live from these things as nourishments. He gives the example of eating bread. In the activity of eating bread, it becomes a part of my body. The becoming me is a matter of consumption, a matter of taking what is “other” and making it become a part of me.<sup>14</sup>

Above said lines indicate the intensity with which “self” may feel the “other,” the way it wants to feel and possess the “other.” In other words, to know the “other” is to imbibe it through “self,” inviting “other” to get on me. It is like a piece of music which makes somebody to feel the beauty of the beats and the way these beats are composed. It feels like “self” nourished by these beats of music. This is what nourishment means for Levinas.

Levinas states nourishment as a way to give energy through the transmutation of the “other” into the “same,” which is the essence of enjoyment. It is the energy which is indeed the “other.” The “other” gradually becomes me when it comes in contact with

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<sup>12</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, pp.110-11.

<sup>13</sup> Ordering of the world referred here is in the consciousness itself and hardly has any reference to the extra-mental existence of the world.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111.

“self.”<sup>15</sup> This taking on of what nourishes me conveys a separation between me and what has yet to nourish me i.e., the other. “Enjoyment is made, writes Levinas, of the memory of its thirst; it is a quenching.”<sup>16</sup> Enjoyment then includes the memory of not having been satisfied with what now satisfies me. It is precisely the realization of the thirst of not having what is now rejoicing me. This will make “self” to realize what it means to be enjoyment.

Enjoyment also involves stepping back from my environment. “Living from...delineates independence itself; the independence of enjoyment and happiness.”<sup>17</sup> Before enjoyment there is me and the “other” thing that has yet to come on me. The otherness of what will nourish me becomes apparent only in enjoyment. I can represent the bread, but this will not feed me therefore I must eat it. But then in eating my bread, the memory of hunger, evinces a separation between the bread and me.<sup>18</sup> Thus, in enjoyment, the “self” emerges already as the subject of its need.

If Levinas is correct then the human being starts first as happy, satisfied with the conference of sensations.<sup>19</sup> He/she enjoys them. This enjoyment as independence is the initial formation of me. But, this “self,” the self of enjoyment, constitutes a sort of egoism. It is happy, but selfish. The self of enjoyment travels into the world to make everything “other” part of itself, and it succeeds very well at this task. Sensation is referred to as happiness because at this level of sensibility the subject is entirely self-satisfied and contented. Instead of taking refuge in reason there are vibrations or sensations. These vibrations are like a phenomenon which happens and seems self-satisfying. Vibrations come like a stream and get embedded into the subjectivity. This event does not happen to subjectivity, this eventfulness and this flux itself is

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

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

<sup>19</sup> Here, the word sensation is used in the sense of experiencing the “other.” It implies the multifactoredness of what is encountered in the world, in other words, what is given there as “other.”

subjectivity.<sup>20</sup> Characterizing eventfulness as subjectivity shows the intentness with which “self” wants to experience the “other.” The way it takes on the “other” and moves towards it increasingly. It seems as if there is progressive thirst in “self” to know and hence experience the “other.” This shows the prioritizing attitude of Levinas, towards the “other.” At the very early stage he sets the “other” free from the shackles of egocentrism.

Thus, Levinas finds on the level of sensibility a subjectivity that is more primordial than rational subjectivity<sup>21</sup>. It is not limited by the sphere of one's own ideas, but by the egoistic self that goes out to enjoy the world. What is important here is that, unlike the sphere of ideas, sensibility reaches further out into the domain of the extra-mental.

Having established subjectivity on the level of sensibility provides Levinas with a place where the “other” can be met, not in the cabinet of consciousness but on the street, in the classroom, or in the workplace, where the egoism of enjoyment has the possibility of becoming filled with sensations. Here Levinas considers the objects and entities as the “other.” Furthermore, establishing subjectivity on the level of sensibility leads Levinas to a point where he can establish that the human subject is, first and foremost, passive. Sensations come to me from the outside. But, unlike the contents of ideas, sensations are discovered and therefore not invented.

From the above discussion one can observe that egoistic self when goes out and becomes solicited with the “other” becomes impersonal self. At this state of consciousness “self” remains no more self centered i.e., it do care for the meaningful presence of the “other.” In this respect considers the presence of the “other” in its own right i.e., parallel to the “self.” Levinas further argues that “other” is not some idea which could be known through reason. On the contrary, it reveals itself through sensibility.

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<sup>20</sup> Richard Cohen, “Emmanuel Levinas: Happiness is a Sensational Time,” *Philosophy Today*, vol. 25 1981, p. 201.

<sup>21</sup>There are three different types of subjectivity in Levinas: 1) rational subjectivity: the self of representation that occurs in the “I think.” 2) Subjectivity of being: the self of enjoyment and need. 3) ethical subjectivity the social self that arises from transcendent interpersonal contact.

Therefore, Sensibility is supportive in the emergence of subjectivity and reason or rationality is subsequent issue of discussion in the relation of “self” and “other” relationship. Subject goes beyond being or otherwise than being with the aid of understanding of “self” and “other” relationship transcending the distinction between the “same” and the “other.”

### **The Question of “Radical Exteriority”**

In the further discussion we shall analyze how “self” journeys towards the “other” and how “other” responds to it thereby moving into the domain of “radical exteriority.” Generally speaking, exteriority means something outside or transcendent that which is beyond the reach of “self” or consciousness. It presupposes some interiority for which it is exteriority. For instance, paper on which I am writing is outside my mind. It may be considered in the domain of exteriority. Andre Barata in his paper, “Levinas, Husserl and Damasio – From Otherness as Experience and Experience as Otherness,”<sup>22</sup> presents different nuances of the meaning and definitions of exteriority and also examines how Levinas’ conception of the same is distinct from the generally stated meaning. Subsequently, he undertakes to define how Levinas understands the concept of exteriority. We shall also see how he examines the notion of exteriority as it has been propounded by Levinas in the light of commonsensical notions of the issue.

It has been suggested in the earlier discussion that the concept of exteriority is intertwined with the concept of subjectivity and otherness. In this regard Levinas admits experience as otherness and otherness as experience which also happens to be the title of the article by Andre Barata. He intends to say that what is otherness is revealed in the experience and experience comes through the other. We need to remember that the experience being talked about here is not perceptive but it is something beyond that i.e., even prior to that. But what is this prior to that? Is it some sort of sensation or a kind of

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<sup>22</sup> Andre Barata, “Levinas, Husserl and Damasio – From Otherness as Experience to Experience as Otherness,” *Filosofia*, (2008), pp. 1-11.



idea? Levinas in his book *Totality and Infinity* argues that this discussed about experience is “precisely the relation with the other.”<sup>23</sup> It is a sort of interaction or encounter with the other.

Before we jump into what Levinas has to say regarding exteriority we may like to enumerate general notion and understanding of Exteriority. First and foremost I would like to define exteriority in most general terms. This sort of understanding concerns with the physical domain which is publically accessible. Here, the observer or the subject with his body acts as a subject for some entity lying outside in the objective or extra-mental world like a table before me. In this example ‘I’ belongs to the interiority whereas the table belongs to the Exteriority. Admittedly, it is a common and objectively present entity that everyone whosoever encounters will find one and same. But different individuals may have varied memories regarding a particular entity for instance table in the present context. One may argue that this is an objective and scientific understanding of exteriority.

Another meaning of exteriority is in context of the entities which are transcendent to me and which are immanent to me. In other words, in terms of that, which I am and which I am not. This sense of awareness places even memories in the domain of the exteriority i.e., within the domain of objectivity and therefore outside the domain of subjectivity. The example of table will be fitted in different framework in this case. The memories of the image of the table in the mind will come within the preview of exteriority. The subjective in this sense of exteriority will the stage of pure ego or pure consciousness. The ideas are also presented in the domain of exteriority at this level. This sort of understanding of interiority/exteriority is reminiscent of Husserlian and Sartrean approaches of grasping what is subjective and what is objective.

Husserl argues that objects are transcendent. We don’t have any direct access to them. What we can know are simply the states of consciousness i.e., whatever appears in the consciousness. If we place his understanding in the light of above meaning of

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<sup>23</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, p. xii.

exteriority then the conscious states of mind come in the domain of exteriority and the transcendental ego comes in the interiority. Here what is interior is subjective and what is exterior is objective. Since the external objects are transcendent for Husserl therefore they hardly play any role in deriving the meaning. For him meaning is all about how subject conceives and interprets the states of consciousness.

Similarly, Sartre in his book *Being and Nothingness* argues that ego is not less transcendent than the external objects; we are a conscious body that is a subject in totality. Therefore, the states of mind or ego are not less transcendent than the object presented outside. He presents the act of counting cigarettes as an example to substantiate the above made claim. He argues that suppose I am counting the cigarettes and somebody asks me who is counting the cigarettes. This question makes me to realize that there is somebody who is counting the cigarettes and consequently I tend to reflect on myself. Therefore the memory of counting becomes transcendent to me, to my being conscious. If the question is not there I may not have any reflective consciousness about who is counting the cigarettes although that act still happens.

Apart from Husserl and Sartre, K.C. Bhattacharya,<sup>24</sup> a contemporary Indian thinker, also deals with the issue of interiority/exteriority in his analyses of subjectivity. He presents three levels of subjectivity viz. bodily subjectivity, psychic subjectivity and beyond subjectivity. Right from bodily subjectivity which considers external world in the domain of exteriority there is a sort of progression till the level of beyond subjectivity arrives. Clearly, in the progression of subjectivity he presents psychic subjectivity as one of the levels of subjectivity. This particular stage of subjectivity is characterized by the presence of ideas and objects as images. Because of this reason this particular level of subjectivity has also been referred to as pictorial subjectivity.

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<sup>24</sup> K.C. Bhattacharya in his book *Subject as Freedom* seeks to analyze subjectivity and its various levels. His sole inquiry was to arrive at pure subjectivity which should be free from every sort of objective colour. He begins from body as subject and external object as object. Subsequently, he progresses towards the subjectivity in itself by negating the preceding stage as objective and placing the succeeding stage under analysis so as to sort out where subjectivity lies in it.

These ideas as images remain in the domain of interiority or subjectivity at the level of bodily subjectivity where the external objects come in the domain of what is objective. They remain the subjective concern till this level treating the external objects in the objective domain. But when one moves beyond this level images and ideas of the external objects will move to the objective sphere and therefore becomes the exteriority. On the other hand, pure consciousness (which is being talked about at the level of beyond subjectivity) will be the pure subjectivity or interiority. In this respect the images and ideas become transcendent to the being of pure consciousness. What can never become transcendent is pure ego or consciousness itself; it can never become subject to any object.

Observing the two definitions of exteriority one may admit that the stages of the journey of the subject are progressive in nature; what is subjective at preceding level becomes the objective at the next level and this approach goes ahead. What is subjective at the initial level becomes the objective at the succeeding level. In other words, what has been referred to as interiority at first level becomes the exteriority at the second level. For instance, ideas present in mind are at subjective pole with respect to the external world whereas they are at objective pole with respect to the pure ego or transcendental consciousness.

This receding pattern at different stages continues up to the point of pure consciousness. But this sort of attitude will not continue in Levinas' conception of subjectivity. Stating otherwise, as Levinas grasps subjectivity and exteriority it could not be a state which has been arrived at by receding from the commonsensical notion of the same; receding in this context is towards the interiority. What Levinas propounded, is infact, radical exteriority. It has been observed as the core of subjectivity subsequent to which there is no boundary of the interior. Interiority exhausts itself at this level. Levinas further argues that exteriority is what is further inside or beyond i.e., a place of dispossessed interiority. It is behind any intentional ego i.e., it is the stage of pre-consciousness. However, this sense of exteriority is intertwined with experience and in-turn experience with subjectivity.

Levinas observes subjectivity as exteriority and exteriority as experience. He further argues that it is impossible to have some other term mediating exteriority thereby giving it meaning. Precisely, Levinas is disinterested in bringing any medium to grasp the notion of exteriority. Doing so would not present other in itself which in-turn will purport ego to posit as an alter ego and grasp it as the other. Which would not be actually what Levinas aims at? To give meaning to exteriority is to have “other” because both are intertwined concepts. And experience is inseparably related with the otherness. Therefore, all the three concepts are interrelated. Levinas argues to the extent that “other” is not a concept which could be grasped through reason. But at the same time it is also not a non-concept. He states that it is fundamentally experience. The irreducibility of “other” to any concept is what leads to propose the idea of otherness as experience. Levinas even goes one step further and proposed the idea of experience as otherness because other reveals itself through experience and experience comes through the “other.”

The problem of otherness, i.e., an experience of the other was also put forth into the words in 5th Cartesian meditation by Edmund Husserl.<sup>25</sup> He argues that “the question necessarily presents itself: how can my ego, at the core of its own being, possibly constitute the other precisely as being alien to it?”<sup>26</sup> Husserl further unfolds his problem and argues that how the world or other which is transcendent could be known through “self?” For him we have access only to the states of mind and what is there in the world in itself is beyond our reach. Husserl also asks how come one can get the experience of the “other” (which is something transcendent to the “self”) in the exposition of his own ego.

Quite un-accommodative for the “other” in itself, Husserl argues that what has

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<sup>25</sup> In his writing on fifth Cartesian meditation Husserl proposes the problem of knowing “other” in itself and argues that “other” cannot be known in itself. Further, he says that what is referred to as “other” is to posit ego in disguise. He calls this alter ego; in knowing “other” we posit ourselves outside subjectivity which is implausibility.

<sup>26</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Meditations Cartésiennes*, trans. Gabrielle Peiffer and E. Levinas, Vrin Publishers, Paris, 1992, pp. 44.

been referred to as “other” is not other in itself but “self” in guise. He maintains that we claim to know other through resemblance and analogy because we consider “other” as being similar to the “self.” Indeed for Levinas, this could not be the way to know other in its own right. It is the pseudo other because the “other” is not known in flesh and blood. Husserl opines that knowing the other this way would be equivalent to posit alter ego which is also a derivative of ego not “other.”

The fundamental issue is the consciousness itself. And beyond objectivity and subjectivity we find an experience which is prior to intentionality. In other words, we find experience is an exposure to the sensibility. This arrives at the question of Levinasian conception of exteriority. In *Totality and Infinity* he states that it is not an ego that finds the “other” as an alter ego for ego primarily is private in its nature. In Levinas it is the sensibility which finds the “other” and finds the “other” precisely as subjectivity. The subjectivity here is sensible subjectivity. The “other” is not found through intentional consciousness. The other is encountered in proximity through the face-to-face interaction. Undoubtedly, it is an experience; a feeling of absorbed through its distinguished phases of coming face-to-face.

For Levinas “other” is in the face of the person I see, in the pen I am writing with. It is in the table before me, in the chair I am sitting on, in the paper I am writing on. Precisely, it is the experience of itself. In other terms, it is a sensible encounter with the outside entities. An encounter when one finds the “other” in itself without being blurred, without any opaqueness of “self.” Face to face with the entities of the world seems as if whole world have become a face of the other. Therefore, we can strictly admit that “other” can only be found as sensibility and never as directed consciousness or intentionality.

The understanding of experience and otherness through sensibility demands the answer of the question that could there be an experience alone which supports to groom subjectivity. This is prior to the intentional consciousness. But is there any such thing consciousness which is prior to the intentional consciousness. Antonio Damasio in some neurological pathologies; in cases where the inexistence of conscious life is evident, yet

mental experience unmistakably continues; mental in the sense of sensibility which is not in terms of some directed conscious experience. I don't know whether this experiment actually fits into the Levinasian understanding of the issue or not. However, it certainly has some affinity.

Knowing the "other" through sensibility and its being independent of "self" could again be established through the concept of face, a central point of arguing for the "other," in Levinas. The naked face uncovers me and engages me as sensibility and exposure. The experience of the face is a passive one. Again, the experience of the "other" in its otherness is engaging in its activity. For instance, the acts like killing somebody get meaning vis-à-vis "other." This is due to the reason because the "other" resists me in sensibility which is pre-intentional. Therefore, the above lines prove that there is something called the "other" in itself which could be known without referring to the intentionality or directedness of consciousness.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Investigating the Question of Transcendence and Alterity

#### Self and its Alterity

Simply stating, the term alterity is the state of being “other” or different. It may be a sort of diversity or otherness. The meaning of alterity as the otherness or different than that, what “self” is, has been nuanced differently across time and changes in the trend of philosophization. Correspondingly the meaning of subjectivity (sometimes pronounced as “same” by Levinas) also takes different dimensions for it is an established fact that “other” has a significant affect on the self/subjectivity. The claim becomes apparent if we see the history of philosophy in general and phenomenology in particular. That is from Plato to Descartes<sup>1</sup> and then Husserl to Heidegger.

The notion of “same” (“self”) prevailed in early Greek philosophy as well as religion is by and large at variance with the “same” understood in the times further. Greek thought portrays it as something which belongs to the other world; a world which is beyond being as well as the empirical existence. They termed it as the only truth in terms of reality. For them it is the entity which survives the bodily death. On the other hand, the objects of the day-to-day perception are mere shadows of the pure and transcendental entities. For instance, Plato argues that pure form lies somewhere outside this world; it is transcending in its character. From there it partakes in every object. Similarly, pure subjectivity (“self”) also resides in the idealistic world. It exists in that particular world in its pristine glory.

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<sup>1</sup> In the history of modern western philosophy Descartes for the first time propounded the problem of dualism. He argues that there are two substances viz. mind and body. Former has the attribute of thought and latter that of extension. Also, it goes to the credit of Descartes that for the first time in the history of philosophy discussed the issue of subjectivity. However, the question of subjectivity was there in the history of philosophy but Descartes was the one who made it to manifest so prominently.

However, by the advent of Cartesian philosophy as modern western philosophy subjectivity and hence otherness took different dimensions. He argued that a man is constituted of two entities, i.e., mind and body. Mind is something which could be referred to as “subject” or “self” and body could be seen as the objectivity or the “other.” Therefore for Descartes it could be considered that the “self” is something which is referred to as “same” and objective body as the “other,” in Levinas’ frame of thought. In this regard, “self” is conceptualized in terms of being contained in itself. In other words, it is located in its own mind. Cartesian philosophy doesn’t come up with meaningful interaction of “self” (“same”) and “other.” Also, Descartes doesn’t have much to say about otherness (alterity) except for his fifth meditation.<sup>2</sup> Husserl articulated Descartes’ fifth meditation to arrive at the problem of “other.” However, it doesn’t statute the status of “other” as an autonomous category.

However, with the descending trend of philosophization the concept of subjectivity and otherness diverged differently. For instance, the dualism of mind-body became the embodied consciousness or conscious body in phenomenology. Likewise, different schools of thought understood the issue of “self” and otherness distinctly. The most significant thing about all these schools is that by and large they explicate subject and therefore subjectivity as something which has socio-empirical importance, i.e., apart from its being an individual entity it is also located in a particular context which is also characterized by the presence of other entities.

In the context of nineteenth century the significance of being situated reveals itself in Heidegger when he argues that the being is thrown<sup>3</sup> into the world. This thrownness

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<sup>2</sup> Husserl has written on Descartes fifth meditation where he proposes the problem of the other as alter ego and not a category in itself. He argues that what has been referred to as other is not really other but “self” in disguise. He further states that to know other as an independent category is an impossibility because “self” remain “self” and cannot become the other to know it in itself.

<sup>3</sup> By thrownness Heidegger meant what is given in the concrete existence is that we exist in the world. It is the only givenness a being can have. One cannot trace out the cause of this thrownness. It would be a meaningless question for him. Man could start from his thrownness and can go ahead by exercising possibilities.



explicitates about the priority he gives to the situation and everydayness of being. Locatedness of Being determines what sort of “self” it is and what are its future perspectives.

Apparently, we observed that the use of alterity as an alternative to otherness has emerged from changes in twentieth-century philosophy that have shifted the conceptualization of identity from the Cartesian proposition of a self-contained consciousness located in the individual mind which was based on his basic proposition of *cogito ergo sum* to the socially located conceptions of “self” and subjectivity. In this latter perspective, the formation of the “other” is inseparably involved in the formation of the “self” for it is only through the construction of this “other” that the “self” can be defined as an identity or the “same.”

The “other” then is not something outside or beyond the “self” as the Platonic and Cartesian perspective would suggest it to be. Rather, it is deeply implicated within the “self.” In due course of development and theorization the trend of inquiry of changed from knowledge based to ethical basis. Its philosophical status must, accordingly, shift from being an epistemic question to an ethical one. In short, the philosophical problem of the “other” is no longer of the sort that involves a coherent self-asking how can I know the “other?” Rather, the questions become what is my relationship with the “other?” And how should I act towards the “other?” These questions precisely make the understanding of “self” as a discourse of sociality.

Therefore, shifting from the traditional inquiries the quest comes to the world where other subjects are also involved, which makes it an intersubjective inquiry. An intersubjective world makes the sense of the “other” therefore is meaningful. It is this respect for the “other” which makes the “self” responsible towards the “other.” This in-turn acts as the entry point into the domain of ethics.

The term alterity here becomes useful because it suggests that the “other” involved in the concern question is neither merely an abstract proposition, nor is it unrelated and therefore irrelevant to considerations of the “self.” The other’s difference is

therefore not absolute but relative. It is determined by series of cultural, economic, political and moral differences. So, the “other” seems a relational concept in the contemporary understanding of otherness and subjectivity. However, the concern of present discussion is the issue of “self” vis-à-vis alterity, according to Levinas. In other words, how he describes the concept of the alterity (otherness) and also the way he contextualizes the issue of otherness.

One thing that Levinas would also acknowledge is that the concept of alterity is relational and not absolute. Stating otherwise, it is only in relation to some “self” or “same” that the meaningful discussion of alterity is feasible. Also, the “other” has been termed as being different than what “self” is? Neither “self” nor the “other” exists in isolation. If it is so then one cannot meaningfully talk about the relationship between “self” and “other.” Therefore, “self” and “other” have a relational co-existence with each other.

Another point which is worth mentioning here is that Levinas conception of “self” is non-essentialist, i.e., unlike the traditional philosophical traditions. It had been argued that the view of “self” in modern western philosophy is essentialist one; the essence of a person lies in the “self.” In other words, there is something called “self” which is essential to man. It endures and also survives death; due this reason there are the discussions of immortality of “self.” For instance, Plato and Kant have reasonable discourses on immortality of “self.” A person becomes what he thinks. The thinking thing is mind in Descartes which is the persisting essence of a being. It’s being although interacts with the world but its essence is no ways affected in terms of its essence.

However, the contemporary view of “self” and its alterity (otherness) is more into empirical reality i.e., its interaction with the objects and entities of the world. It constitutes itself through the way it interacts or encounter with alterity or otherness. In other words, the “self” is how it interacts with the “other” and how alterity takes the “self.” More important is what sort of alterity is presented to a particular “self” which in-turn tries to make it like itself. Extentials of the “other” when come in contact with the existence of the “self” they form a discourse which is essentially relational and exist in

co-existence with each other. In this context the essence of “self” and “other” doesn’t come in themselves or in isolation but through the means of interacting with each other in the empirical world. That is in face-to-face encounter with each other.

The interaction with the “other” sometimes feels like some sort of mystery; in the sense that what really “other” is all about becomes really difficult to understand and communicate. Levinas in his book *Existence and Existents* explains “other” as what is there (*Il y a*) before being and being as something which puts “other” at stake. As Heidegger unfolds being infinitely and reduces “other” into an instrument of Being. Levinas admits that the horror of Being pervades in Heidegger which is sometimes threatening for “other.” Following lines quoted from *Existence and Existents* makes the point clear.

There is horror of being and not anxiety over nothingness, fear of being and not fear for being; there is being prey to, delivered over to something that is not a ‘something’. When night is dissipated with the first rays of the sun, the horror of the night is no longer definable. The something appears to be nothing.<sup>4</sup>

In the above lines Levinas elaborates his criticism for Heidegger and also argues that Being pervades in the philosophy of Heidegger as some sort of horror which threatens “other” in terms of its existence in itself and its relation vis-à-vis “other.” This is what Levinas himself opposes in his inquiry of “self” vis-à-vis “other.”

Levinas admits that self/alterity sometimes couldn’t be apparently defined but also cannot be denied. It remains a sort of unsettled issue. In spite of this, “other” comes and invigorates “self.” To this Levinas calls nourishment; the “other” in various forms come and nourishes the “self” or “same.” Other may be a piece of eatables or a smooth surface to touch. It could be a piece of beauty to see, a vibration to feel. These are precisely the means through which “other” comes on “self” and reveals itself.

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<sup>4</sup> Sean Hand (ed.), *The Levinas Reader*, Blackwell Publishing House, Oxford. p. 34

The presence of “other” makes “self” fulfilled. This phenomenon indeed frees “self” from the fear of being itself only. Nourishment makes “self” to free from the encircled ego of its being focused on the “same.” When “other” in various shapes and forms comes to the being or “self” it feels moved beyond itself and enjoyed being transcended. It feels “other,” wants to get into the “other” which is manifestation of the urge for the “other.” The idea explicates itself in the passage below.

Nourishment, 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.<sup>5</sup>

Here, Levinas admits the point that through “other,” “I” lives by being enslaved to the “other.” It is not that the “other” is subsumed by the “self” but it is very much present over there. If it is true then I will again fall into violence of totalization<sup>6</sup> where only “self” has its say. It has the overarching presence which hardly gives any space to the “other.” This is what Levinas refers to as violence towards the “other.”

Here, it seems a situation of dialectical relationship between the “other” and “self.” Alterity is being thrown into the “self” and questions it. Alterity comes on “self” and nourishes it. But how really “self” is tuned with alterity is explained through the example of love cited by Levinas in the passage below. Love mentioned here is in the

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<sup>5</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. by A. Lingis, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh, 1969, P. 111.

<sup>6</sup> If our inquiry focuses “self” as the foundation of the self-other relationship and doesn’t treat “other” as autonomous entity then the entire discourse would become an enterprise of “self” which is totalizable approach; an approach which sidelines the “other” and hence doesn’t consider “other” in itself, as Levinas would suggest.

sense of feeling the “other” in its encompassing presence. That is equivalent to feel the other by being part of it, i.e., beholding it. To feel alterity by going down into it’s being. In this way “self” gets itself dipped in the “other” and “other” absorbed in the same thereby abolishing all the differences.

The pathos of love, however, consists in an insurmountable duality of beings. It is a relationship with what always slips away. The relationship does not *ipso facto* neutralize alterity but preserves it. The pathos of voluptuousness lies in the fact of being two. The other as other is not here an object that becomes our or becomes us; to the contrary, it withdraws into its mystery.<sup>7</sup>

Although, love seems appropriating the problem of self-other relationship but Levinas argues that the beauty of love is in its being unsettling. Since desire is all about to seek and aspire for. It never feels like an ending process. So, there remains a sort of tug-of-war between what “is” (self) and what “is not,” i.e., the “other” which has infinite aspects of it ready to be known. The journey towards the “other” is unending because “self” can never be contended of having the “other.” It is because of the reason that “other” has varied aspects. However, this journey ends at death where “self” breaks into “exteriority” therefore into the “other.”

Here, apparently the question rises that how come self comes to know the “other?” How ego manages to transcend being which it inherently is? This question has been raised by Levinas himself in his book *Totality and Infinity: an essay on exteriority*. “Total alterity, in which a being does not refer to enjoyment and presents itself out of itself, does not shine forth in the form by which things are given to us, for beneath form things conceal themselves.”<sup>8</sup> Here Levinas admits the issue of “radical exteriority” where being feels completely in the sphere of exteriority and hence seems as if it presents out of itself.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 110-111.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., P. 192.

The above discussion seems converging into what is given as alterity and what our intentions are, i.e., what we intend at? In other words, whole inquiry of interiority and exteriority comes to “same” and its alterity; both are present vis-à-vis each other. In this regard Husserl would argue that “same” is the only area of concern in the inquiry of subject for deriving meaning. He would like to determine meaning from the intentions of the “self,” i.e., from the states of mind or consciousness. Alterity is of least concern in Husserl. And if there is in the form of states of consciousness then the subject gives it meaning whatever it can grasp from the “same.” That is to say that we hardly have anything to learn in the context of alterity.

In the same lineage we come across another thinker named Heidegger who is a bit soft on the issue of “self” and alterity. Heidegger’s soft corner for the “other” or alterity manifests in his inclusion of the “other” beings in his inquiry of Being which is otherwise a thrust for Being. In one sentence one may admit that whatever encourages the inquiry of Being is significant for Heidegger.<sup>9</sup>

Having said this, how come then beings are significant for Heidegger; how he includes the other beings in his inquiry, which is purely ego centric (being biased for Being). In a way this temporary shift of inquiry of ego towards beings present outside in turn re-establishes the rigidity of Being. Because encounter with the beings or entities of the external world helps the Being to unfold itself. So they are merely used as means to realize the ends of Being. However, Levinas goes many steps away and includes the “other” in its own right in the discourse of “self.” Moreover, he admits that his inquiry starts from the “other” in itself and not the “same” or “self.”

In this regard Levinas admits that the “other” has its own discourse through which it comes to grasp the world. Also, Levinas admit that alterity is multifaceted i.e., it has different aspects. In other words, “other” unfolds the world through different aspects. Levinas also mentions that “other” comes to “self” through different means. It takes on “self” and reveals itself. Revelation is not in some mysterious sense but it is a sensible

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<sup>9</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, “Martin Heidegger and Ontology,” *Diacritics* vol. 26, No.1 (1996), pp .1-9.

understanding of the “other” which comes to form the subjectivity. But how “other” comes and interacts with the “other” is still to be unfolded. Now we shall see how the “other” makes itself to be known by the subject. Stating otherwise, how alterity helps itself to get into the subject.

Levinas argues that “other” is not something which could be known through mere perception. It gets into “self” so that “self” can feel its presence over there as something which is trying to assert itself thereby making its presence meaningful. Self can take the warmth of the “other” when it throws itself into the alterity. The issue is to conceive how alterity comes on “self”? What are the instances which are symptomatic of alterity? How we can face it in our actual life? These are the questions if answered would be an analysis of alterity.

Instantiating the above made claim I would say that alterity could be the surface on which I am sitting, it may be a wall I am gazing at or light which is illuminating me. Or it could be the screen I am writing on, key pad I am feeling. It could be fan running on the roof or some music coming to me from distant source, a horn of the passing through vehicle. All these are means to move into alterity also try to prove them supportive to know the “same” thereby to understand the “other.” Here, the question rises that could we know the “other” in its totality so as to complete its understanding. We will be discouraged if we try to get the answer of this question because for Levinas “other” is something which cannot be known in its totality. Only at the time of death “self” breaks into the otherness.

On the contrary, he admits that to move into the sphere of the “other” is a gradual and progressive process. It is not something which could be arrived at, all of a sudden. Subject puts its step beyond being and starts interacting with the distinct aspects of the “other.” To answer the question that how the interaction of “self” and “other” is feasible Levinas brings in the question of sensibility.

Sensibility is nodal instrument to get closer to the “other.” Knowing the “other” or getting into the “other” is not some spontaneous process; it does not happen all of a

sudden. On the contrary, it is progressive in nature i.e., a process whereby “other” slowly climbs on the “self” increasingly. In the process it gets to know seemingly multifaceted character of alterity. The journey towards the “other” is the journey towards exteriority. Progressively, the phenomenon of knowing the “other” radicalizes itself and gives rise to stage known as “radical exteriority” where alterity remains the only discourse and concern of the “self” or subject. This could be referred to as the state of actual transcendence where being throws itself completely towards the “other.”

Having discussed this Levinas admits that the “other” cannot be known in its totality because according to him “other” has infinite aspects. At the stage where there is question of “radical exteriority” Levinas argues that death is the only possibility to get into the “other” with feasible completion. At this particular stage, subject beaks into the “other,” the alterity. That is quite contrary to the Heideggerian notion of death. For Heidegger death is the pure individuation of being. It is most authentic possibility of the being for living authentically. Before we see how Levinas conceives death we need to brief up Heidegger’s notion of death. This will help us to see Levinasian notion of the same as the better one to include “other” in its discourse.<sup>10</sup>

Heidegger argues that death is the most extreme possibility of Dasein. For him death culminates in the utmost individuality of being. It confirms to the utter solitude of the being because Dasein can take death upon itself and no one else can do it for Dasein. Obviously, Heidegger would say that before death Dasein is amongst the other being i.e., in its sociality. This is the hurdle in the path of Dasein as being an individual and authentically existing being. Death is the stage which doesn’t even require the world (i.e., beings) to make it happen.<sup>11</sup> Therefore it is the highest individuating step.

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<sup>10</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinoson, Blackwell Publishers, Cambridge and Oxford, pp. 240-60.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.



Here, Levinas seems to agree with Heidegger that being should be the focal point of inquiry but at the same time disagrees with the idea that socially connected “other” is a hurdle for the individuality of a being. At the time of death Being realizes itself completely because “other” can no more create any hurdle. That is why he says that death is the height of individuality. Therefore, one may admit that meaning for Levinas is something which is arrived at when “self” comes in contact with the “other” in sociality. On the contrary, Heidegger says that meaning is that on which being arrives at after unfolding itself through the aid of the “other.” In this respect both, Heidegger and Levinas treat alterity differently. Former doesn’t give it an independent space whereas latter do. One treats death as an instance of individuality and the other considers it as a break towards the alterity. Therefore both are diametrically opposed to each other.

On the question of death, as stated earlier Heidegger says that it is the most authentic possibility of the subject. It is a principle of individuation for him.<sup>12</sup> However, Levinas disagrees with this point and argues that death can neither be assimilated by the subject as its most extreme possibility nor can it serve as the ultimate test of one’s virility. Death always remains outside the subject as the impossibility if possibility. A mystery denotes an absence, a recession. Death as mystery is something that always recedes from our grasp. It is unknowable and cannot therefore be an object of mastery. Levinas explicate his notion of death through the following lines.

This approach of death indicates that we are in a relation with something that is absolutely other, something bearing alterity not as a provisional determination we can assimilate through enjoyment, but as something whose very existence is made of alterity. My solitude is thus not confirmed by death, but broken by it.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *The Levinas Reader*, trans. R. Cohen, edit. S. Hand, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford, p. 43.

In the relationship with death the subject encounters not only that which is wholly exterior to it but also that which cannot be assimilated as an object of knowledge. By being always already in a relation with death the subject is in relation to something other than itself and the present. Hence, the solitude of the subject is disturbed. The solitude breaks into exteriority which is the stage of “radical alterity.” One may admit that death is the stage where subject entrusts itself to alterity. It is the realization of self-other relationship which seems towards completion.

### **Transcending the Self-Other Distinction**

The way “other” comes on “self” seems like it overwhelms the subject. In the process we understand that there are infinite aspects of alterity. Indeed, “other” can’t be known completely. At this particular level of understanding there is something called “self” which is distinct from the “other,” the face. However, when subject gradually transcends towards the “other” any distinction between “self” and “other” fades away. At the level which comes beyond transcendence, both “self” and “other” have independent status. Before we go into how really there is no distinction between “self” and the “other” we need to know what transcendence stands for.

Transcendence towards thoughtful ego in relation to the pure being could be considered as the initial stage of transcendence. At the other stage, being transcends towards the objects of the external objects, i.e., face of the other. Transcendence which has been talked about here is not like going away from the empirical world. It is not an ecstasy but sociality. It is a mode of being in the empirical world amongst the other beings. But this notion of transcendence is not what we find in the history of philosophy. It remained foreign to the whole Greek tradition. Plato argued that transcendence means to be beyond the happening of this world. For him there is a hypothetical world having pure idea of everything. That world is transcendental from the world we have for our day to day observation. Moreover, the world at our disposal is the reflection of the original

one which is transcendental in its character. However Levinas differ from Plato on this particular issue.

Levinas argues that whole inquiry of western philosophy is after the being, the one. The inquiry is so biased for the so called transcendental (the world beyond the objective one) that it forgot the status of the “other” vis-à-vis “same.” This reached at its zenith in twentieth century when another school of philosophy came into force and that was phenomenology. Husserl, a phenomenologist of this era, undertook the inquiry of subjectivity to its peak and came up with the concept like transcendental ego, which was purely an enterprise of subject/self. In the mid twentieth century another school known as existentialism also gave a push to this sort of subject biased inquiry. However, transcendence in Platonic sense was given away as the focus of inquiry but another phenomenon came into being known as immanence. Husserl echoed this concept into the world of philosophy.

In the above lines I have taken up the issue of immanence<sup>14</sup> which has been significantly dealt by Husserl. Levinas argues that in Husserl there is the subjectivity or ego present immanently. This is what has been referred to as “I think” in disguise. However, Husserl names it intentionality. Therefore, according to Levinas alterity and transcendence are reduced to or return to immanent subjectivity which exteriorises itself. It is apparent from the lines below.

Husserl’s phenomenological reduction, in which the identity of pure consciousness carries within itself, in the guise of the ‘I think’, understood as intentionality-*ego cogito cogitatum*- all ‘transcendence’, all alterity, ‘all externality’ reduces to or returns

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<sup>14</sup> Husserl proposed the concept of immanence as something which is present there in the consciousness. It is so present that it sees an inseparable part of consciousness. Levinas remarks that if something is immanently present it is still in the sphere of “self” only. And if we argue that “other” is immanently present then we are not treating it as an independent entity.

to the immanence of a subjectivity that itself and in itself exteriorizes itself.<sup>15</sup>

From the above it is apparent that for Husserl to know the “other” is to exteriorize the subject which doesn’t give it an independent status. Rather, he places the “other” immanently in the ego itself. On the contrary, Levinas takes the self/other to different dimensions. For him the inquiry regarding the other doesn’t mean merely thinking about the “other” but a concern for the “other,” a sort of solidarity with the “other.” He intends “other” to be in the world of engagements, in sociality. In other words, there should be an accommodative space for the “other” which excludes any condition or reservations on the part of the subject or “self.”

In this regard Levinas proposes that the gaze for the “other” should be a sense of vigilance for the “other” even before the I-sense (*cogito* in Cartesian sense) emerges. So, talking about the formation of I-sense presupposes happening of transcendence. The sense of ego formed earlier proves the point that transcendence occurs at the very outset. This is what is instrumental in the formation of the “same.”

All encounter begins with a benediction, contained in the word hello; that ‘hello’ that all cogito, all reflection on oneself already presupposes and that would be a first transcendence. This greeting addressed to the other man is an invocation. I therefore insist on the on the primacy of the well-intentioned relation toward the other.<sup>16</sup>

It has been discussed earlier that the intention to take on “other” is the first phase of transcendence. This would be an instance of egotism but Levinas argues that this intention subsequently changes into an attitude of openness or exteriority. The gaze of the

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<sup>15</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*. trans. M.B. Smith, Columbia University Press, New York, 2000, p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 98.

“other” is what he defines as alterity; the “other” is alterity. Precisely, this sort of attitude is instrumental in analyzing “other” as meaningful relatum of the “same.”

In the sphere of alterity what is immediately encountered is the face of the other? Levinas argues that face of the other is defenseless and disarmed when exposed to me (i.e., I). Behind the face is the weakness and mortality of the “other.” Here, Levinas presents “other” as docile and innocent which is to be treated patiently and honestly. There is a sort of appeal from the “other” for not to harm it or kill it through the overarching presence of the “self.” Few lines below present the above stated picture of the “other.”

The face is a seignior and defenselessness itself. What does the face say when I approach it? That face expose to my look, is disarmed. Whatever countenance it may put on, whether this face belongs to an important person, titled, or in appearance simpler. This face is the same, exposed in its nakedness. Beneath the countenance it gives itself, all weakness comes through, and at the same time its mortality emerges; to the point where I can want to liquidate it entirely.<sup>17</sup>

Besides, this harmlessness or weakness of the “other” there is a hope of optimism for the “other.” Levinas observes that there is an imperative in the face of the other; a sort of authority in the face of the other which commands the conscience of the subject/same to include the “other.” Here, one must admit that this sense of command has theological overtone in it. Therefore, face is considered as the locus of that command or imperative and source of the imperative is God. Levinas admits that there is a word of God in the face of the other.

There is in the face the supreme authority that commands and I always say it is the word of God. The face is the locus of the

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

word of God. There is the word of God in the other, a non-thematized word.<sup>18</sup>

From the above discussion one may arrive at the observation that “other” is both, locus of weakness and source of authority. By this observation Levinas sounds to be theological in approach. Also, whole analysis of self/other relationship in Levinas can be seen to have some affinities with the non-dualistic philosophy of Sankracarya. I would like bring out certain points where these two thinkers seem to have affinity with each other.

First and foremost, Levinas talks about the stage of pre-intentional consciousness where the subjectivity is not yet formed.<sup>19</sup> Here, Levinas says, the subject tends to know the “other” through sensibility. There is not any I-sense at this particular stage. But one is aware of the outside world. This particular stage is similar to the concept of *Saksi* in the philosophy of Sankaracarya. *Saksi* is the stage of pure consciousness which is devoid of any sense of ego or *ahankara*. According to Sankaracarya *saksi* is the bare consciousness and witness to everything.<sup>20</sup> It is ever present.

At the next stage being comes in contact with the “other.” It interacts with the face of the other. In other words being starts its journey of transcendence towards the “other.” This process is precisely helpful for the formation of subjectivity or the sense of being self (I-sense) or subject. At this stage subject realizes of being itself. This seems having affinity with what Sankaracarya calls *Jiva*. *Jiva* is subject-objects complex; consciousness entangled in the ego and sense organs. He calls *Jiva* of this stage ignorant

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> At the stage of pre-intentional consciousness subject is just aware of the outside world. There is lack of ego sense but indeed awareness is there. For Levinas it is the stage when transcendence is just to start.

<sup>20</sup> *Saksi* is present in all the three stages viz. waking, dreaming and sleeping stage. At the waking stage it is into the empirical world through the *antahkarna*. At the stage of dreaming it is entangled with the mind and therefore having the internal perception and in the deep sleep stage it is lost into avidya. Therefore, it prevails in all the three stages of existence of a being.

because it is not aware of its real nature i.e., pure consciousness. Similarly, Levinas would say that at the stage when transcendence is in its budding stage and subjectivity in its seedlings. Self considers it in totality without giving meaningful space to the “other.” Therefore, the responsibility part is not present at this stage. One may argue that “self” is not meaningfully present. Advaita Vedanta also says that *Jiva* at this very stage is in *avidya*. It is not aware of the meaning of its actual being i.e., it’s potential of becoming the supreme.

However, when *Jiva* realizes it’s true nature and comes to know that it is not a mind-body complex in actuality. Not only body but also the states of mind or ego are not the real nature of *Jiva*. Its real nature is *Atman* or pure consciousness which is *Brahman*. Parallel to this stage in Levinas is the stage when “self” moves beyond what is being. In moving beyond it started realizing itself as being responsible for the “other” and hence includes the “other” as a category in itself. This attitude is what accommodates “other” as a category of existence in itself.

At this stage, the self which includes the “other” in its own right is similar to the *Atman* of Sankaracarya. Former gives space to the “other” and hence responsible for the “other.” Similarly, *Atman* is also the self which is illuminated with the knowledge of reality therefore both are aspired stages of the egoistic selves in context of Levinas as well as Sankaracarya.

At the stage when transcendence achieves its complete meaning, “other” is meaningfully accommodated in the relation of “self” and “other.” At this point of understanding “self” exists vis-à-vis “other.” Both, “self” and “other” exist on par with each “other.” On the other side Sankaracarya also admits that when *Jiva* is transformed to *Atman* the differences just fade away i.e., he denies any distinctions therefore upholds non-dualism.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Levinas also says that at the stage of transcendence there is no distinction between “self” and “other.” It has been transcended at this level. Neither could be considered on the upper hand. Both are on par with each other.

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<sup>21</sup> Both, Sankaracarya and Levinas admits that not the “self” but “other” is important. Both argue that it is the “other” which transforms the “self” into a realized or responsible “self.”

Lastly, I would like to cite another stage where there seems a theological tinge in the face of the other. For instance, Levinas would say that there is imperative in the face of the other. In other words, there is a word of God in the face of the other; he takes it in the sense of command which asks self to leave space for the “other.” “The face is the locus of the word of God. There is the word of God in the other.”<sup>22</sup> That is to say that there is unity in the face of the other.

Advaita Vedanta says that there is *Brahman* in everything, in every being. Infact, they argue to the extent that whatever exists is *Brahman*. Only *Brahman* is there because it is only entity which is able to qualify the criteria of reality; that which exists across the three times i.e., past, present and future. Only *Brahman* is able to pass through this frame of reality. Everything else is but appearance. In Levinas also only that self/subject is meaningful in its existence which accommodates the “other” in its true sense and hence takes the part of responsibility towards the “other.”

Another point is regarding the issue of death Levinas argues that death is the end of solitude, i.e., subject’s being occupied in itself.

This approach of death indicates that we are in a relation with something that is absolutely other, something bearing alterity not as a provisional determination we can assimilate through enjoyment, but as something whose very existence is made of alterity. My solitude is thus not confirmed by death, but broken by it.<sup>23</sup>

He admits that at death subject and hence subjectivity breaks away into alterity. That is to argue that “self” is a sort of confinement which creates a hurdle to realize the “other” in itself. It is a sort of check to the unfolding of “other” through “self.” Subjectivity here is admitted as a sort of piston in a machine which prevents the fluid

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.



from entering into another compartment. Therefore, when death occurs this subjectivity ceases to play the role like a piston in a machine hence “other” reveals itself maximally.

However, Sankaracarya differs in his remarks regarding the death. He admits that true knowledge could be attained before death also. It may be a matter of a moment only. Because the moment one realizes that true nature of *Jiva* is *Atman*, it has true knowledge. In order illustrate this Sankracarya gives an analogy of a pot having air inside as well as outside the pot. It is the same air inside as well as outside. Similarly, the nature of *Atman* and *Brahman* is same but it depends on understanding. Self is at the same time aware of itself and *Brahman*. At this particular stage there is no sense of ego or subjectivity. This stage comes at the time of death in context of Levinas although there is a continuous thirst for it in life time. At the time of death “self” breaks into the exteriority.

Besides any analysis for Levinas transcendence from being is the ultimately realized state of “other.” At this level “self” is transcended to the utmost possibility. It includes the “other” and hence is also responsible for it, says Levinas. In this regards one may admit that one may admit that the sense of “other” liberates “self” from being selfish. This way “self” moves beyond being and transcends towards the “other.” Self in its journey towards the “other” reaches at stage of “radical exteriority” which characterized by the presence of “other” in its true sense and hence loaded with responsibility. Hence derived from the above lines it is apparent that there is no sense of distinction of “self” and “other” at the level of transcendence. Both exists vis-à-vis each other.

## Conclusion

The discussion between the lines and through the pages purports that the analysis of “self” and “other” was a response by Levinas to prevalent understanding of the same in phenomenological tradition. He charges whole western philosophy from Plato to Descartes and then Husserl of being ego centric. Their respective inquiries had been the inquiries of “self” irrespective of the meaningful presence of the “other.” Cartesian *cogito* and Husserl’s transcendental ego were some of the instances of pure subjectivity or being. Admittedly, Heidegger looks just enough to include the “other” in his inquiry of Being but gives a limited status to the “other.” Precisely, these are the issues on which Levinas elaborates.

As stated in chapter one what Husserl was primarily interested in is the question of meaning. As his inquiry uncovers there seems least role of “other” in deriving the meaning. Meaning is what is entrusted by the subject. It is the way “self” interprets the world and its objects. Here “other” is completely out of discourse of meaning. Subsequently, in the same chapter I have dealt with the way through which Husserl arrives at meaning. The point which Levinas proposes, regarding “self-other” relationship in Husserl, has also been elaborated significantly. In this context, Husserl admits that whatever exists is revealed through the consciousness, i.e., conscious states. He calls this *Erlebnisse*. This is what appears in the consciousness irrespective of what is there in the objective world, in itself. This is what Levinas had an issue with. The “other” has been completely pushed out of the inquiry of subject.

Chapter one also indicates that “other” has been completely sidelined in the quest of meaning initiated by the Husserl. He focused on what appears in the consciousness, treating it as the raw data to arrive at meaning. Therefore, he focused on the picture of objects, which are actually present in the external world, to arrive at the meaning which he claims to be certain. Even, Husserl manages to

shift from the level of conscious states to the level of transcendental ego. These stages are arrived at by progressive bracketing out of the external world first (*epoche*) followed by transcendental reduction which brackets out the transcendental states of consciousness. Following this methodology Husserl arrives at the level pure consciousness.

In the second half of chapter first I undertook the issue of self-other as it has been observed by Heidegger. Although, he gives some space to the “other” but he doesn’t explicate the existence of the “other” as it is required for being an independent category. For Heidegger, the objects of the external world are the beings which are there given in the world of Dasein. Beings are significant in Heideggerian inquiry of grasping what Being is all about. In other words, objects of the world (“other”) are presented at hand for everyday interaction. At one moment it feels like Heidegger includes the “other” in his quest of Being. But if one looks from Levinasian perspective, “other” is still sidelined therefore not being given independent status. But still question is why Heidegger brings in “other” in the guise of beings if he was not intending to give it an independent status? Here one may answer that the being of beings is what supports the Being to unfold itself. And unfolding of Being is what helps to unfold what Being is. From the preceding argument we might propose that “other” has but merely a complementary role in the quest of Being.

Observations made above suggest that both, Husserl and Heidegger observe and analyse the world through “self” and subjectivity, i.e., placing subject at the center of their respective inquiries. This is what makes them ego centric. Approaching towards the question of meaning and understanding this way treats the “other” as a means to suffice the goal of the “self.” Also it fails to give “other” an independent status. On the other hand, Levinas argues that what we encounter first in the world is not “self” but the “other.” It is the “other” which plays determining role in the emergence of subjectivity. Levinas argues to the extent that we see the world through the “other;” different aspects and phases of the “other” are unfolded to realize the multifaceted “other” and world.

At this particular situation I have made a couple of observations regarding the legitimacy of Levinas charge on Husserl and Heidegger of being “self” centric. First and foremost, I have brought in two issues viz. intersubjectivity and life world which Husserl and Heidegger elaborated at length. Having admitted these two issues, one is forced to see that how far Levinasian criticism to Husserl as well as Heidegger is justifiable? Levinas charges them for overlooking the “other” in favour of “self.” When we ponder about intersubjectivity and lived world meaningfully we unavoidably think of the “other.” Inter-subjectivity is in the intersubjective world where “other” is present in different forms. If one doesn’t admit the meaningful presence of these objects and entities (“other”) then how come the phenomenon of inter-subjectivity is feasible. Therefore, if intersubjectivity is there then there is “other” also and if “other” is not present meaningfully then one can no more talk about intersubjectivity and make sense.

Secondly, they also hold the concept of life world. It is not something which is beyond the reach of conscious beings. As Heidegger says that world for Dasein makes sense only when it comes in contact with it in terms of space and time. It implies that there is the “other” present in space and time. Even Dasein encompasses the everydayness of our existence which could not be without the presence of the “other.” Moreover, if “other” is not meaningfully present then how come Dasein gets meaning as Dasein; it is a being embedded in the world. If there is no existence of “other” how come Dasein interacts? Without the “other” how come the notion of everydayness is feasible? Also if it doesn’t interact it is no more a possibility. However, as Heidegger says, it comes across different possible situations and derives meaning out of it. Precisely, it implies that it (Dasein) lives through the “other.” Hence there seems the presence of the “other.”

Another point is regarding the Heideggerian concept of Care. In this context Heidegger admits to have a sense of Care on the part of Dasein. He proposes that in order to live with authenticity Dasein is required to maintain a balance in his quest of Being and his everydayness, i.e., his facticity. Not doing so would be an instance of fallenness from the point of authenticity and hence from

true meaning of existence. Again, in the concept of Care he talks about everydayness of Dasein where admission of “other” as a category becomes a structural necessity. Otherwise, the concept seems an ill founded one. Keeping in view these points one may liberate Heidegger from the criticisms of being ego-centric and Levinas’ criticism itself seems criticism begging.

In second chapter I undertook to discuss how Levinas himself sees the concept of “self” and the “other.” Precisely, how he narrates “self” vis-à-vis “other.” Levinas argues that subjectivity is formed when the “other” comes in contact with the “self.” Other makes the “self” to realize its being an entity existing in the spatio-temporal world. Other is not perceived through perception but through sensibility. It precisely implies that one may sense the presence of “other” through the feeling which comes in enjoying the presence of the “other.” In the process of enjoying, “other” comes and overwhelms the subject and shows its inclusive presence. Here Levinas talks about self-other relationship which shares some differences with what others has to say.

Martin Buber primarily a theologian has to say something regarding self-other relationship which is at variance with what Levinas says. For him what “self” does for “other” has to be reciprocated by the “other.” Likely, if “self” has a definite responsibility for the “other” then “other” is also supposed to have certain obligation for the “self.” Stating differently, I would say that there is an element of reciprocity in the self-other relationship, according to Martin Buber. But on the same point Levinas would say that there is not any obligation expected from the “other.” Only “self” has to suffice its part of responsibility. Martin Buber says that reciprocity is an essential part of this particular relation whereas for Levinas it is not.

In this context I would like to stretch on the issue of reciprocity a bit. Firstly, we know that Levinas doesn’t admit reciprocity as an ingredient of self-other relationship unlike Buber. But, what reciprocity is all about actually. If it means having effect of or being affected by then Levinas seems saying

something about it. Even though Levinas didn't mention about it explicitly but we may find traces of his inquiry when the question of reciprocity comes. For instance, when he admits that "other" is supportive in the emergence of subjectivity, "other" seems to have effect on the "self" which is in a way one half of the self-other relationship. Other which is one relatum of the whole discourse of self-other cannot be known in its totality, say Levinas. Knowing "other" is the gradual and progressive journey of the "self" towards the face of the other. The journey towards the "other" is the journey towards exteriority.

Admittedly, there are infinite aspects of the "other" and to know the infinite is of course not a feasible assignment. It implies that "other" cannot be known completely. But in its journey of exteriority "other" makes the "self" to feel itself and feel contended. The unfolding of the "other" is the way of knowing the world. Therefore Levinas says that we know the world through the "other."

Movement of ego towards the "other" is the journey for exteriority. The journey continues infinitely to unfold different aspects of alterity. However, Levinas states that thrust of "self" towards the "other" culminates at death. At death "self" feels engulfed into the "other." Therefore, death is an instance of "radical exteriority." Here, subjectivity itself breaks into the "other." That is to say that only otherness or alterity persists at the level of "radical alterity." These lines suggest that Levinas admits otherness as more persistent than the subjectivity. Here, unlike Heidegger Levinas seems biased for the "other."

For Heidegger, death ends up in realization of complete individuation. It is the realization of complete subjectivity. It is the most authentic stage of being which Dasein can aspire for and achieve. It is apparent that even the notion of death in Heidegger is ego centric which is diametrically opposed to that of Levinas. However, for Levinas death is the break of "self" into the "other." It is a state of being completely thrown into the "other."

Another observation about Levinas suggests about the theological overtone of his inquiry. He says that there should be an independent space for the

“other.” He says that “other” is defenselessly presented to the “self.” It is weak and innocent and deserves a gradual and handled treatment. Besides, Levinas argues that there is a certain sort of imperative in the face of the other, a command which asks subject to see the “other” distinctly and unfold the understanding through it. Levinas remarks that in the guise of face it is the word of God. In other words, there is the word of God in the face of the other. Looking otherwise, there is some command of God in the face of the other. As the “other” or alterity prevails in the existence so is God. This is reminiscent of Sankaracarya’s notion of *Brahman* which could be seen existing correspondingly to the Levinas’s concept of word of God in complete otherness.

In this regard one may see that subject in its early stage, in Levinasian inquiry, is similar to *Jiva* of Sankaracarya. There seems a certain sort of difference amongst the “self” and “other.” However, when it moves towards the “other” and starts looking it as a category in itself it starts realizing that difference is not something which is real and persisting. Levinas also talks of abolishing the differences between the “self” and the “other.” Similarly, in Advaita Vedanta *Jiva* when attains knowledge attains liberation from the differences and metamorphoses into *Atman* which is nothing what *Brahman*. Therefore every “other” becomes the part of *Brahman*. And not only this, every “other” is *Brahman*. This point has an affinity with what Levinas refers to the word of God in the face of the other.

Another point is regarding the notion of death. Admittedly, both talk about the rejection of differences at the level of transcendence. Also both of these remark that “other” is infinite. Remarkably, both see death as a movement towards the “radical exteriority.” It is the entry into the eternity of the “other,” the reality. In a sense death facilitates the “self” to entrust itself to the “other.”

Therefore we observed that “self” gets proper space in Levinas’ inquiry which is a step further from the inquiry of phenomenological heritage. Levinas presents self-other relationship in a way where both exist on par with each other.

This progressive journey starts from being (“self”) itself whereby “self” starts moving towards the “other.” This movement is characterized by the phenomenon of transcendence. As the transcendence progresses, “other” starts revealing it to “self.” This process brings “self” to the domain of exteriority and therefore to the level of “radical exteriority” which is characterized by the presence of otherness. When transcendence is at its zenith the sense of distinction goes away. Both, “self” and “other” exists vis-à-vis each other at this particular level. However, the journey of “self” to know the “other” continues through infinite aspects of the “other.” This thirst to know the “other” reasonably quenches at death when “self” breaks into alterity, i.e., complete otherness of the “other.”



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