

READING LEVINAS' DECONSTRUCTION OF TIME THROUGH THE ETHICAL SUBJECT

HAEYEUN HAN

“In every man, there is a spark of God.”¹
Janáček, *From the House of the Dead*

Abstract

This paper will take a closer look at Levinas' ethical subject and diachronic time in relation to Heidegger's project of *Being and Time*. Throughout the analysis, I will show how Levinas reformulates Heidegger's task and overcomes its limitation by successfully construing “the whole of time”, in the mode of discontinuity. Levinasian Diachronic time reveals a new signification of finiteness, to be a Messiah, who dedicates oneself to the suffering others without seeking other-worldly hopes, for the “responsibility of a mortal being for a mortal being” itself is “the relationship with the infinite”. Furthermore, I will argue that through this diachronic time, Levinas attempts to construct a new structure of eternity under the influence of Rosenzweig. Levinas declares that only after falsifying hopes for the afterlife are dissolved in despair, infinity breaks into time, and enables “mortal human beings” to participate in “immortality” through the time of the Other. Whereas Heideggerian ontology attempted to articulate the meaning of Being-in-general based on the being of Dasein and temporality, Levinas captures that the primordial horizon of ethics is the manifestation of the face of the Other and diachronic time, which lead us to think beyond Being, namely, “the otherwise than being”.

Introduction

Levinas criticizes Heidegger's ontology for being a totalizing ontology which absorbs individuals into the faceless universal Being and prioritizes the death of the

¹ This is the heading written by Janáček in the score of his last opera *From the House of the Dead* (1928) which is based on the same title of Dostoevsky's novel.

self over the death of the other. However, Levinas' major works, including *Time and the Other*, *Totality and Infinity*, and *Otherwise than Being and Beyond Essence*, are deliberately titled in reference to Heidegger. This shows that Levinas continuously fought against his master's shadow, but it also demonstrates the constant discussion Levinas had in his work with Heidegger. Paradoxically Levinas' declaration that he felt "a profound need to leave the climate of [Heidegger's] philosophy" expresses the influence of Heidegger had on the development of Levinas' thought.² Consequently, viewing Levinas' ethics from the horizon of Heidegger's ontology is required. Therefore, the paper examines Levinas' concepts of the ethical self and diachronic time in relation to the project of *Being and Time*, to gain a deeper understanding of these concepts which are the core of Levinasian ethics. However, this does not imply that the paper tries to deduce Levinas' ethics from Heideggerian ontology. On the contrary, the purpose of the paper is to deconstruct Heidegger's ontological project from the standpoint of ethics that precedes ontology and to "hear a God not contaminated by Being".³

According to Heidegger, the ontological priority of Dasein stems from the fact that Dasein understands its own being. In claiming that the meaning of Dasein is temporality, Heidegger attempts to grasp the meaning of Being-in-General from the horizon of time. I argue that Levinas' project of defining the ethical self as that which enables diachronic time by starting from the death of the other structurally resembles Heidegger's attempt to interpret time as the possible horizon for the understanding of Being by embarking from the death of the self. Moreover, I will focus on how Levinas overcomes the limitation of Heideggerian ontology with his concept of diachronic time, thus reformulating the project of *Being and Time*. Eventually, Heidegger confesses that he could not write part two of *Being and Time*, as he was unable to finish his own project to grasp the meaning of Being-in-General from the horizon of time.⁴ Nonetheless, Levinas suggests diachronic time, which

² "If at the beginning our reflections are in large measure inspired by no philosophy of Martin Heidegger, where we find the concept of ontology and the relationship which man sustains with Being, they are also governed by a profound need to leave the climate of that philosophy, and by the conviction that we cannot leave it for a philosophy that would be pre-Heideggerian." (Levinas, Emmanuel: *Existence and Existents*, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh 2001, p. 4.)

³ Levinas: *Otherwise than Being, or, Beyond Essence*, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh 1998, p. xiii.

⁴ Heidegger planned to write division three of part one, which was titled "Time and Being", in his book, *Being and Time*. However, it never appeared, and the task of *Being and Time* remained unfinished. In the 1930s, he gave up on the analysis of Dasein as the fundamental ontology which inquired into the question of Being starting from human existence. From this period, his work overcomes the limitations of fundamental ontology by abandoning the mediation of the being of Dasein and takes a departure from the meaning of Being itself. This is called the "Turn" [*Die Kehre*]

is the horizon to understand the meaning of the trace of infinity that precedes the realm of Being.

Furthermore, this paper delves into the heart of Levinas' ethics, into "the de-formalization of time"⁵ that conceptualizes a new structure of eternity on the basis of Levinas' declaration of messianic consciousness at the end of *Totality and Infinity*. Admittedly, Levinas' thought changed over time as he emphasizes the immemorial past more than the utopian future in his later works, especially in *Otherwise than Being and Beyond Essence*. In this respect, the paper has a limitation in that it heavily relies on Levinas' writings on the future, especially in *Totality and Infinity*, and *God, Death, and Time*. Nevertheless, I hope this paper can contribute to bridging Levinas' middle and later thoughts by focusing on his interpretation of time. In conclusion, I will argue that Levinas suggests a new structure of eternity and messianism that surpasses traditional religious doctrines and reaches beyond Heidegger's critique of eternity in *Being and Time*.

I will begin with an examination of Levinas' phenomenology of death and finitude, which, according to Levinas, does not account for the salvation of the disembodied soul in the afterlife, for "the temporality as aging and death" is at the center of his ethics.⁶ Following this, I will take a brief look at Heidegger's critique of eternity and the temporal mode of the "now", which according to Heidegger, designates an inauthentic understanding of temporality. However, throughout this analysis, I will show how Levinas suggests a new structure of eternity with his concept of diachronic time that goes beyond Heidegger's understanding of eternity and reformulates Heidegger's task of understanding Being-in-General from the horizon of time.

Thus, we will be able to see how Levinas overcomes the limitation of Heidegger's ontological project by reaching out to the other-than-being through the face of the other, the pure saying that signifies justice. For Levinas, the origin of the truth is not Being itself, but the trace of infinity. Moreover, the task of philosophy is

in Heidegger's philosophy. In the "Letter on Humanism (1946)", Heidegger admits that the project of *Being and Time* failed. Accordingly, in his later thoughts, "Heidegger rejects his early ontological idealism and opts a quasi-mystical stance toward the obtaining of Being". (D. Blattner, William: *Heidegger's Temporal Idealism*, Cambridge University Press, New York 1999, pp. 290–291.) Therefore, in the sense that Heidegger speaks in a different voice in his later thoughts after abandoning the fundamental ontology, this paper is restricted to his analysis of Dasein and its temporality in his early writings, especially focusing on *Being and Time*.

⁵ When Levinas was asked for his main philosophical theme in his later years, he answered, "my work is further the de-formalization of time". (Levinas; Robbins, Jill: *Is It Righteous to Be?: Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, Stanford University Press, California 2001, p. 209.)

⁶ Levinas: *Otherwise than Being, op. cit.*, p. 52.

to “extract the other than being”⁷, that precedes ontology and interrupts the order of Being by revealing the true meaning of self as substitution and responsibility for the Other. Only if we start philosophizing from proximity of the Other, the face of the Other, time will acquire its proper meaning as “the passing through of God [la passée de Dieu]”⁸. From this horizon of diachronic time, the meaning of the trace of infinity beyond being will be understood as justice and fraternity.

1. The Death of the Self and the Death of the Other

In this first section, I will explain the meaning of “love is stronger than death”⁹, the verse that Levinas brings from the *Song of Songs*, for it is the key to understand Levinas’ critique of Heidegger concerning the interpretation of death. According to Levinas, we need to think about “death on the basis of time”, not “time on the basis of death” as Heidegger did in *Being and Time*.¹⁰ Nevertheless, Levinas stresses that redefining death with “a meaning that overflows death” does not signify “surpassing or reducing” death.¹¹ Thinking about time beyond death, as the time of the other, bestows meaning on the finiteness of the ethical self. Therefore, this section aims to take a closer look at Heidegger’s phenomenology of death and Levinas’ prioritization of the death of the other.

For Heidegger, the ontological priority of Dasein stems from the fact that Dasein understands its own being. This is the reason why Heidegger says that the being of Dasein is care for its own being which structurally encompasses its thrownness in the world and its potentiality for Being, namely, its existentiality. Death exposes the nature of the human being as finite and uncovers the authenticity of being human as bound up in its finitude; in other words, Dasein’s meaning arises in having its own end. However, this enables Dasein to grasp his own temporality, his own finite time. Accordingly, the fundamental structure of care for one’s own being is temporality. Thus, one has to deal with one’s own time by “temporalizing of temporality”.¹²

Death plays a crucial role in disclosing the temporality of Dasein. From the fact that everyone has to undergo one’s death on their own, Dasein acknowledges

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁸ Levinas: *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, Vrin, Paris 1967, p 301.

⁹ Levinas: *God, Death, and Time*, Stanford University Press, trans. Bettina Bergo, California 2000, p. 104.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

¹² Heidegger, Martin: *Being and Time*, Harper Perennial Modern Thought, New York 2008, p. 278.

the finiteness of life. This enables Dasein to realize its original mode of being as existence, which is characterized by “mineness”.¹³ Namely, Dasein’s “essence is simultaneously his existence”.¹⁴ Accordingly, with “anticipatory resolution”, accepting death as one’s own end makes it possible for Dasein to live life authentically. Therefore, Dasein is “his way of being, his way of being-there”, and “at the very same time”, his way of “self-temporalizing”.¹⁵ Facing death enables Dasein to encounter the authentic moment¹⁶, “the moment of vision”¹⁷ which is the center of temporality, that makes one grasp one’s own time by freeing the self from the world of they [Das Man] who “aggravate the temptation to cover up” one’s ownmost “Being-towards-death”.¹⁸

The they conceal the fact that everyone has to face one’s own death in the end. Heidegger gives an example when we console a dying person by telling him that “he will escape death and soon return to the tranquilized everydayness of the worlds of his own concern”.¹⁹ For Heidegger, this is the attitude that Das man deals with death; they refuse to accept the fact that death is inevitably embedded in human existence. Nonetheless, Dasein can acquire his authenticity and grasp one’s own temporality by breaking out from the world of the they and facing one’s own end.

Contrarily, for Levinas, the traumatic impact of the death of the other—and not the self—lies at the center of his ethics.²⁰ Levinas’ emphasis on the death of the other starts from Heidegger’s phenomenology of death. Indeed, the death of the other is fundamentally unapproachable. Nonetheless, for Levinas, the alterity of the other’s death, like the alterity of the face of the Other, appears as a mysterious enigma that reveals the responsibility we have for the other. In order to unravel

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 307.

¹⁵ Levinas: “Martin Heidegger and Ontology”, in *Diacritics*, Vol.26, no.1, the Johns Hopkins University Press 1996, p. 16.

¹⁶ Heidegger: *Being and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 387.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 376.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 297.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ When Levinas was asked to state his own opinion regarding Heidegger’s Nazi affiliation, he answers by pointing out that Heidegger’s ontology prioritizes one’s own death over others and criticizes his ontology because it was unable to see the face of the suffering other. Nevertheless, in *Time and the Other*, the mysterious relationship with one’s own death appears as an enigma that is “absolutely unknowable”. This is suggested as analogous to an ethical relationship with the Other, as the face of the Other that overflows my cognitive ability is also an ungraspable epiphany. But in his later works, in *Totality and Infinity* and *God, Death, and Time*, Levinas emphasizes the significance of the death of the Other by referring to its traumatic effect.

this complicated relationship between Levinas' and Heidegger's interpretations of death, we need to follow their stances separately.

Heidegger says that we worry about the death of the other and mourn his death. At the funeral, "those who have remained behind are with him, in a mode of respectful solicitude".²¹ Nonetheless, "in the suffering of this loss", they do not experience the death of the other "in a genuine sense".²² Heidegger's analysis of fear for the other also returns to one's own experience. When one is "fearing for" someone in danger, the fear actually belongs to one who is fearing because, in a strict sense, it is fear of losing the other being with me.²³ Worrying about the other, though it is from a true and genuine place of care, does not mean that one could deal with the other's matters or live the other's life on behalf of the other. No matter how much one cares for the other, one must admit that there is a gaping distance between one's concern for the other and the problem the other is going through at the moment.²⁴ Therefore, for Heidegger, we cannot die for the other, as we cannot live for the other. Even though one sacrifices oneself for the other, it is nothing but extending the other's life, as in the end, the other will have to face one's own death.

In *La mort – Essai sur la finitude*, Françoise Dastur mentions the mourning of the death of the other. For Dastur, mourning is experiencing the absence of the beloved, with the feeling of this loss, and at the same time, keeping the beloved still alive in memory.²⁵ However, Dastur points out that, ironically, this is the process of accepting the fact that despite the beloved's absence, one is still living, curing the feeling of the loss of the beloved by reconciling with the reality that one has to live without the dead. According to Dastur, this is the reason why Freud names the process of mourning as work; there is work to be done for one to live on despite the absence of the other.²⁶ Moreover, by following Heidegger, Dastur pinpoints that the irreplaceability of the other itself designates that "love is not stronger than death", as the sacrifice for the other will only give some more time to live and not immortality.²⁷

On the contrary, Levinas emphasizes the traumatic effect of the death of the other. When speaking of the death of the other, Levinas refers to the "affectivity

²¹ Heidegger: *Being and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 282.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

²⁴ According to Heidegger, facing the anxiety alone, which is the authentic *Befindlichkeit*, enables Dasein to face his own death and live his own authentic possibilities. (*Ibid.*, p. 188.)

²⁵ Dastur, Françoise : *La mort. Essai sur la finitude*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 2007, p. 116.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

without intentionality”.²⁸ There is an “excess of emotion” in encountering the death of the other.²⁹ Even in Plato’s dialogues that prioritize intellect and rationality, Apollodorus weeps over the death of Socrates “beyond the measure”.³⁰ Levinas questions; isn’t there a need to think philosophically about the meaning of “this affectivity and these tears”?³¹

Levinas says that neither Husserlian *noesis-noema*, nor the Heideggerian phenomenology of emotion [*Befindlichkeit*] can truly capture the meaning of “the fear for the other’s face”.³² For Levinas, the fundamental state of mind is not anxiety towards my being, fearing one’s own death, but the fear for the sake of the other which reaches beyond my own being. At the core of Levinas’ ethics is the insight that the Other brings affectivity beyond intentionality. According to Levinas, the face-to-face encounter with the Other carries with it an affective immediacy that “exceeds object domination as comprehended through intentional meaning”.³³ As the face overflows the cognitive ability of the subject, it resists any finite “comprehension and constitution”.³⁴ [Hence, the face is the place where the infinite idea is given; “the idea of God is, from top to bottom, affectivity”.³⁵ For Levinas, this theological affection, leads us to think beyond the realm of finite condition.] Thus, the absolute alterity of the face reveals that the starting point should be what comes from beyond my comprehension as well as my being. Therefore, it is not the care for my own being, but the responsibility for the other that is revealed in the face of the dying Other; the responsibility for the other stems from the fact that the other is a mortal.

Levinas insists that the other’s death is more significant in the sense that it makes us realize that the disposition bestowed on human beings is to become an ethical subject. The dying other calls for the living and awakens the fact that I am responsible for the other: “I am responsible to the other in that he is mortal. The death of the other: therein lies the first death.”³⁶

The responsibility for the other is the responsibility that reaches to the extent of sacrificing oneself.³⁷ According to Heidegger, one should embrace one’s own

²⁸ Levinas: *God, Death and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Levinas: “Diachrony and Representation”, in: Caputo, John D (ed.), *The Religious*, Blackwell Publishers, Malden 2002, p. 86.

³³ Bergo, Bettina: “Levinas and Husserl”, in: Atterton, Peter (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Levinas*, Oxford University Press, New York 2018, p. 85.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Levinas: *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-other*, Columbia University Press, New York 1998, p. 221.

³⁶ Levinas: *God, Death, and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 43.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

temporality authentically due to the fact that everyone should face their own death individually; death awakens the responsibility for one's own life. What is central to Heidegger's analysis of Dasein is the notion that one must pursue one's ownmost possibilities, which can only be done by oneself. Indeed one cannot die for the other: "I can give the other everything except immortality"; in other words, "freeing her from her own death" is impossible.³⁸ However, this does not hamper one from sacrificing oneself for the other. For Levinas, the ability to become a radically other-directed-self, the self who devotes oneself to others, is the true potential of human beings that opens up a new horizon of ethical time. From Levinas' perspective, what we call love is that the death of the other affects me more than my own death. In this sense, "love is stronger than death."³⁹

Moreover, the self becomes otherwise than being, who brings the time of the other, namely, the true future by becoming an ethical subject. Contrary to Heidegger's analysis of Dasein that emphasizes the death of the self and the authentic temporality of Dasein, Levinas' ethics puts emphasis on the death of the other, and the meaning of the future that goes beyond my time.⁴⁰

As Rosenzweig says in *The Star of Redemption*, by referring to *Song of Songs*, Levinas also insists that love soothes the sting of death and finitude.⁴¹ Even though love does not enable one to surpass one's own death, it opens up a new path to the true future, not because it makes one immortal, but because it opens the gateway for the other. Therefore, what Levinas calls the true future is the future of the

³⁸ Derrida, Jacques: *The Gift of Death*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1995, p. 44.

³⁹ Levinas: *God, Death, and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

⁴⁰ In Levinas' early works, including *Time and the Other* and *Totality and Infinity* the true future is fecundity, the birth of the child. "For the self, to be is also, through fecundity, to be other... Infinite time does not bring an eternal life to an aging subject; it is better across the discontinuity of generations, punctuated by the inexhaustible youths of a child... Here the self is not ground down into its sameness but rather transcends itself in a discontinuous existence." (Moati, Raoul: *Levinas and the Night of Being*, Fordham University Press, New York 2017, p. 172.) Thus, through fecundity, the self goes beyond its own being without outstripping death. This is the true future and the hope that the self grasps onto when facing its own death. In his later works, Levinas centers more on the messianic utopian future that the ethical self brings into the world. Nevertheless, the utopian future aligns with fecundity as both of them refer to the time of the other, the time beyond the death of the self. This is because, according to Levinas, "to consider the Other as a son precisely to establish with him those relations I call 'beyond the possible'" that exceeds "the possibilities inscribed in nature of a being". (Levinas; Nemo, Philippe: *Ethics and Infinity*, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh 1985, pp.70-71.)

⁴¹ "Being as strong as death, love neutralizes death's sting. Death remains, but when one is in the embrace of love the existential anxieties attendant on our singularity, crowned as it is by our inexorable death, are cauterized and suspended." (Mendes-Flohr, Paul: "Between Sensual and Heavenly Love: Franz Rosenzweig's Reading of Song of Songs", in: Green, Debora A.; Lieber, Laura S. (ed.), *Scriptural Exegesis*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009, p. 313.)

other, which is beyond my own being. It is noteworthy that Levinas says that the “futuration of the future” is “the fall of God into meaning”.⁴² Levinas goes on to say that the “concreteness of responsibility, in its extraordinary future of the uncontainable” should be understood as God’s words ordered in the face of the Other.⁴³

The death of the other and the trauma due to the absence of the beloved other cannot be healed but it transforms the self into an ethical self who has an infinite desire, an on-going longing for the other; the ethical self is in a constant state of mourning.⁴⁴ This is not restricted to the loss of the beloved, but also for the victims of history, who were persecuted and suffered from injustice. Indeed, Shoah is at the heart of his ethics. Nevertheless, Levinas’ prophetic voice speaks not only for the persecuted Jews, but also to the non-Jews who suffered from violence and hatred throughout the history of mankind, ever since Cain killed his brother Abel.⁴⁵ Thus, his ethics is written for the “victims of the same hatred of the other man, the same anti-Semitism”.⁴⁶

For Levinas, the ethical self should be “uprooted from history” to truly approach the Other.⁴⁷ There is a need to traverse the history of the victors, “the history of historiographers”, “the conquerors” who “recount enslavement”.⁴⁸ Accordingly, Levinas’ ethics is a “prophetic speech, in which the cry for justice resonates repeatedly, and invoking the community, exhorts and elects each of them”.⁴⁹ The vocation of an ethical subject is to wash “his hands of faults and misfortunes that do not begin in his own freedom or in his present”.⁵⁰ In other words, which is not his own faults, but the faults of mankind that he is responsible for. I believe this is the reason why Levinas insists that his work is a “deconstruction of time”. In the following section, I will show how the ethical subject enables the time of diachrony as a new structure of eternity.

⁴² Levinas: “Diachrony and Representation”, *art. cit.*, p. 86.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

⁴⁴ “Thus, we come back to the love ‘as strong as death! It is not a matter of a force that could repel the death inscribed in my being. However, it is not my nonbeing that causes anxiety, but that of the loved one or the other, more beloved than my being.” (Levinas: *God, Death, and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 105.)

⁴⁵ “One always dies alone, and everywhere the hapless know despair. And among the hapless and forlorn, the victims of injustice are everywhere and always the most hapless and forlorn.” (Levinas: *Proper Names*, Stanford University Press, trans. Smith, Michael B, California, 1996, p. 119.)

⁴⁶ Levinas: *Otherwise than Being*, *op. cit.*, i.

⁴⁷ Levinas: *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, Duquesne University Press, trans. Lingis, Alphonso, Pittsburgh 1969, p. 52.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

⁴⁹ Bergo, Bettina: *Levinas Between Ethics and Politics: For the Beauty that Adorns the Earth*, Kluwer Academic, Boston 1999, p. 144.

⁵⁰ Levinas: *Otherwise than Being*, *op. cit.*, p 116.

2. Heidegger's Critique of Eternity and Diachronic Time as a New Structure of Eternity

In this section, I will argue that the ethical subject enables diachronic time, the immemorial past and utopian future. I will insist that the diachronic time in Levinas' ethics designates a "deconstruction of time" as well as a configuration of a new structure of time as eternity that Levinas declares at the end of the *Totality and Infinity*.⁵¹ Moreover, I will suggest that Levinas' ethical subject, which is characterized as responsibility for others, gives the vision of a messianic future of answering the silent call of the persecuted and the suffering. To be an ethical subject is to be a Messiah oneself who carries the whole responsibility of the world. I will also discuss how Levinas envisions the messianic future by rethinking the present moment by conceptualizing the fissile present that awakens the immemorial past and invites the messianic future. Furthermore, I will argue that this enables Levinas to overcome Heidegger's limitation in his analysis of Dasein as fundamental ontology, wherein his analysis could not account for beyond the temporality of Dasein, thus failing to account for the Being-in-General from the horizon of time. Finally, I will take a closer look at Levinas' declaration of "extreme vigilance of the messianic consciousness" of the ethical subject that reaches out to diachronic time, the time beyond the death of the self that relates to infinity.⁵²

The aim of *Being and Time* was to free time, which was viewed under the guise of eternity ever since Plato called time "the image of eternity".⁵³ For Heidegger, as the inauthentic understanding of time is captivated in the mode of "present-at-hand", time was considered as "a sequence of nows" that "constantly has presence as something selfsame".⁵⁴ It is noteworthy that Heidegger relates this to Dasein's inauthentic understanding of one's own being, covering up his finiteness, causing him unable to face his own death. The they, what Heidegger calls *Das man*, live in the mode of inauthentic existence and think of time as a sequence of endless constant nows. Accordingly, this inauthentic understanding of temporality makes an end never be found.⁵⁵ Therefore, *Das man* is incapable of reckoning with their

⁵¹ "The completion of time is not death, but messianic time, where the perpetual is converted into eternal. Messianic triumph is the pure triumph; it is secured against the revenge of evil whose return the infinite time does not prohibit. Is this eternity a new structure of time, or an extreme vigilance of the messianic consciousness? The problem exceeds the bounds of this book." (Levinas: *Totality and Infinity*, *op. cit.*, p. 285.)

⁵² Levinas: *Totality and Infinity*, *op. cit.*, p. 285.

⁵³ Heidegger: *Being and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 475.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Heidegger: *Being and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 476.

own death that reveals the authentic possibilities as well as the original temporality of Dasein.

For Heidegger, “finite time becomes the inmost meaning of being and eternity an illusion”.⁵⁶ Against Heidegger, who discloses the finitude of Dasein by defining eternity as an inauthentic understanding of time, Levinas seeks new possibilities in “eternity”, that interrupts Dasein’s temporality by rupturing the self who concerns for one’s own being.⁵⁷ This is related to his intention to establish an ethical moment wherein the exteriority of the Other disturbs the movement of the same, shattering the “temporalizing of temporality”⁵⁸, which is Dasein’s grasp of his own time. I will show how Levinas reconstructs the new structure of eternity as diachronic time without slipping in any illusions to cover up the finiteness of human beings. In other words, this is the eternity that lives at the heart of us, and bestows new meaning on the finiteness of human beings.

As Levinas says, we cannot outstrip Heidegger’s ontology by being pre-Heideggerian; Levinas repeatedly underscores that he does not fall back to the pre-modern concept of eternity⁵⁹ by referring to an ideal that is “illusionary”.⁶⁰ In opposition to the rest of eternal peace in the afterworld, Levinas insists “the disturbance by the other” which is the “disquiet” that disturbs the heart at rest: “this is awakening, this is temporality”⁶¹ as for Levinas, “responsibility for the other signifies an original and concrete temporality”.⁶² Thus, by following Zarathustra who denies all dualistic world views of *Hinterwelt*, namely, “the world behind our world”, Levinas does not envision another world and refuses to justify sufferings in this world with theodicies.⁶³

Consequently, Levinas’ ethical subject does not seek spiritual compensation in the afterlife as a reward for one’s ethical deeds. This is because, for Levinas, “the notion of morality having an outcome is as absurd as the immobilization of time which it assumes”.⁶⁴ Without denying the finiteness of human beings by providing

⁵⁶ Löwith, Karl: “M. Heidegger and F. Rosenzweig or Temporality and Eternity”, in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 3, No. 1, John Wiley & Sons, New Jersey 1942, p. 75.

⁵⁷ Bergo, Bettina: “Levinas’s Weak Messianism in Time and Flesh, or The Insistence of Messiah Ben David”, in: Bradley, Arthur; Fletcher, Paul (ed.), *The Messianic Now: Philosophy, Religion, Culture*, Routledge, New York 2011, pp. 45–68.

⁵⁸ Heidegger: *Being and Time*, op. cit., p. 278.

⁵⁹ Levinas: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh 1986, p. 66.

⁶⁰ Levinas: *Totality and Infinity*, op. cit., p. 57, 125, 268.

⁶¹ Levinas: *God, Death, and Time*, op. cit., p. 111.

⁶² Levinas: “Diachrony and Representation”, art. cit., p. 80.

⁶³ Schulte, Christoph: *Radikal Böse: Die Karriere des Bösen von Kant bis Nietzsche*, Fink, München 1991, p. 318.

⁶⁴ Levinas: *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1990, p. 82.

illusionary consolation of other-worldly hopes, Levinas attempts to redefine time from the horizon of ethics.⁶⁵ In this respect, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at Levinas' remarks on "the Biblical notion of the kingdom of God"⁶⁶:

The Biblical notion of the Kingdom of God—kingdom of a non-thematizable God, a non- contemporaneous, that is non-present God—must not be conceived as an ontic image of a certain "époque" of the "history of Being", as a modality of essence. One has to go back from the Eon to the kingdom of God, which signifies in the form of subjectivity, of the unique one assigned in the passive synthesis of life. It signifies in the form of the proximity of a neighbor and the duty of an unpayable debt, the form of a finite condition. Temporality as aging and death of the unique one signifies an obedience where there is no desertion.⁶⁷

It would be a mistake to think that Levinas is suggesting a concrete vision of a utopian future, either from a secular or religious perspective; it is not "a state nor an era nor a community to come".⁶⁸ Therefore, considering Levinas' utopian future as an afterlife or a utopian society is a misunderstanding of his texts. The sting of death cannot make human beings surrender not because the Messiah will bring the world of resurrection and conquer death at the end of history, but because an ethical self is already free from concern for its own death, from preserving its own being beyond this world. This disinterestedness in its own being characterizes the ethical self as the one who sacrifices oneself without any promise of reward or compensation.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ Paradoxically, there is a resonance between the utopian future of Levinas' messianism and Zarathustra's urge to "plant the seed of the highest hope on earth". Levinas's ethical self, who is obliged to be responsible for the other to the extent of dying for the other, is in stark contrast to Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, who is characterized as a sovereign individual of will to power. However, without Nietzsche's declaration of the death of God and banishment of otherworldly hopes, Levinas' ethics of "embodied messianism" would not have been possible. (Bergo, Bettina: "Minimalist Faith, Worlds, and the Body" in: Mjaaland, Marius Timmann and Sigurdson, Ola (ed.), *The Body Unbound*, Cambridge Scholars Press, Cambridge 2010, pp. 125–149.)

⁶⁶ Levinas: *Otherwise than Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ Bensussan, Gérard: *Le temps messianique: temps historique et temps vécu*, Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, Paris 2001, p. 131.

⁶⁹ "This question of 'when' no doubt lacks relevance for Levinas, since for him the idea that hope might be a compensation or a reparation that is meant to bring some balm tomorrow to the suffering of today, constitutes a complete misunderstanding of hope. Such a conception of the economy of hope, in fact, annuls its keenness since it constitutes a complete misunderstanding of hope. Such a conception of economy of hope, in fact, annuls its keenness since it consists, even under duress, in playing the role, in relation to suffering, of anticipating better days, even eternal salvation. But this is a suffering without compensation." (Chalier, Catherine: "The Keenness of Hope." in *Levinas Studies*, Vol. 5, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh 2010, p. 124.)

For Levinas, seeking reward in the afterlife and longing for the Messiah to judge others out of resentment would be to remain in the realm of the history of Being. Rather, ethical selves are the ones who are elected for their irreplaceable responsibility for the others: “it is not the last judgment that is decisive, but the judgment of all the instants of time, when the living are judged”⁷⁰ in front of the face of the suffering Other. In other words, Levinas’ messianism is an “ethical messianism” that insists upon the “kingdom of an invisible king, the kingdom of Good” where “inhuman is to be judged.”⁷¹

According to Levinas, another world [*arrière-monde*] behind this world is still dominated by the modality of ontic image. In order to capture “the other than being”, which is the true transcendence for Levinas, one should go beyond the ontological categories, which are “the rules” that lead “only to the worlds behind the scenes.”⁷² This is the limitation of Plato’s attempt to reach beyond being, “outside of being”, as eventually he falls back to the realm of being by positing an unchanging perpetual eternal soul in the afterlife which seeks for the preservation of oneself beyond this world. That is to say, on the contrary, Levinas not only attempts to set us free from the traditional Biblical notion of the Kingdom of God and the belief in afterworld, but also urges us to rigorously rethink its metaphysical implications of by delving deeper into the notions of time and the materiality of the human beings without representing another world behind this world. Accordingly, Levinas refers to “a diachrony refractory of all synchronization, a transcendent diachrony”⁷³ which shatters the order of being.

When the suffering Other speaks to me and solicits help, Levinas calls this encounter with the face as “saying” which is beyond any contextual horizon, the “pure expression” of the “saying without the said.”⁷⁴ This is the contact with the Other lacks content, as it does not provide something thematized, but “this utterance of the contact says” only from “this very fact of saying”, “like a caress”⁷⁵

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁷¹ Levinas: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁷² Severson, Eric R: *Levinas’ Philosophy of Time: Gift, Responsibility, Diachrony, Hope*, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh 2013, p. 260.

⁷³ Moati: “L’ontologie d’autrement qu’être”, in Cohen-Levinas, Danielle; Schnell, Alexander (eds.) : *Relire Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence d’Emmanuel Levinas*, Vrin, Paris 2016, p. 43.

⁷⁴ Cohen-Levinas, Danielle: “Dire qui ne dit mot : l’appel, le tiers, la justice” in Cohen-Levinas; Schnell (eds.) : *Relire Autrement qu’être ou au-delà de l’essence d’Emmanuel Levinas*, Vrin, Paris 2016, p. 103.

⁷⁵ “Nothing will be uttered but this very contact, this alliance and this complicity, which is precisely a complicity or alliance ‘for nothing,’ without content, if not for the sake of this very complicity or this alliance, this proximity antecedent to every convention, all understanding or misunderstanding, all frankness and guile. This utterance of the contact says and learns only this very fact of saying and learning—here again, like a caress.” (Levinas: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, *op. cit.*, p. 121.)

“a bearer of the message”, which cannot be fully thematized in consciousness.⁷⁶ It is where one’s visible figure dissolves and becomes a pure saying that designates the trace of God unrepresentable for finite human beings. Therefore, the face is non-phenomenal, and “the divergency between visible and the invisible”.⁷⁷ In this sense, the epiphany of face transcends phenomenality.

The face itself is the spirit, the soul.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, for Levinas, “the body is neither an obstacle opposed to the soul, nor a tomb that imprisons it” for the soul itself is “exposed to sickness, suffering, death”, and “compassion” towards the suffering Other, up to the point of sacrificing oneself.⁷⁹ As a further extension, Levinas presents the metaphor of the maternal body that reaches to the point of sacrificing oneself. According to Levinas, psyche, in other words, soul, designates alterity in identity, animates the body as “the-one-for-another” Just as the mother gives the part of her life to her child; the body is the psyche of the ethical subject dedicated to the other.⁸⁰

Furthermore, in the face of the Other, “a unique face and in relationship with faces”, encompasses all faces and therefore, refers to the whole community of men, namely, “the universal dimension of the Other [*la dimension universelle d’autrui*]”.⁸¹ Here, Levinas envisions a judgement which is utterly different from the myth of the final judgement in the afterworld. It is the judgment in front of the suffering Other, the face that encompasses all humanity who “looks at me in the eyes of the others”.⁸²

The signification of the “said” of the saying of the face as a pure expression, is “justice”⁸³, which is the meaning of the manifestation of the face is understood by the consciousness given by the “visibility of faces”.⁸⁴ Hence, “the Kingdom of the Good”, “the Kingdom of invisible king”⁸⁵ that Levinas describes in *Otherwise than*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

⁷⁷ Levinas: *Otherwise than Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

⁷⁸ Claude Romano: “Signification et phénomène”, in Cohen-Levinas, Danielle (eds.) : *Lire Totalité Et Infini D’Emmanuel Levinas: Études Et Interprétations*, Hermann, Paris 2011. p. 14.

⁷⁹ Levinas: *Otherwise than Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

⁸⁰ Levinas: *Otherwise than Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

⁸¹ “Il souligne la dimension universelle d’autrui, l’idée qu’autrui est une figure de l’humanité toute entière, alors que dans *Autrement qu’être*, le tiers devient un idiome à part entière, il est le ‘prochain de l’autre et non pas simplement son semblable’, un universel concret qui interrompt de facto le face à face, nous exhortant à nous abstraire de notre responsabilité exclusive qui peut engendrer l’irréparable.” (Cohen-Levinas: “Dire qui ne dit mot : l’appel, le tiers, la justice,” *art. cit.*, p.108.)

⁸² Levinas: *Totality and Infinity*, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

⁸³ Levinas: *Otherwise than Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 158.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Being, signifies “peace to the neighbor and the one far-off”⁸⁶ in this world. This is because, for Levinas, “man is not a ‘fallen angel who remembers the heavens’; he belongs to the very meaning of the Infinite”.⁸⁷ Thus, Levinas does not insist on the concept of eternal peace in the Kingdom of God. On the contrary, he rather speaks of the “break up of eternal rest”.⁸⁸ The ethical self resists “any rest in itself” and does not ask for a personal spiritual compensation.

For Levinas, the salvation of the eternal soul designates repetition of the same and is another mode of preservation of the self that seeks for personal immortality as a reward for ethical deeds. On the contrary, the ethical subject is the one who lives in this world “in the exposure to wounds and outrages, in the feeling proper to responsibility, the oneself is provoked”.⁸⁹ The self devotes oneself to others and therefore, the soul is “incarnated in order to offer itself, suffer and to give”.⁹⁰ Thus, Levinas’ task was to speak of “messianism against teleological histories and conative assumptions”⁹¹ that provides a spiritual compensation and therefore, justifies the suffering of the innocent. Rather than positing another world or history of redemption, Levinas’ ethics aims to “affirm man as a power to judge history”.⁹² The final judgement in the afterlife is replaced by the judgement of the suffering faces, who awaken my responsibility for others. In other words, Levinas announces the messianism of Judaism “as a personal vocation among men”.⁹³

Hence, there is a need for “each person” to act “as though he were the Messiah”.⁹⁴ The ethical self is characterized by its finiteness, in other words, vulnerability towards the suffering Other. Correspondingly, the ethical self as “being for death”, itself signifies patience as well as obedience. The aging and death of the unique subject is the one who is elected as being responsible for the other. To age and to die is living for the other; in other words, it is living for the future beyond my time

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Cohen-Levinas: “Le premier Dire. Retrait, trace et an-archie,” in *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*, 2020, Vol. 76, Nr. 2-3, p. 559.; Levinas: *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, Stanford University Press, California 1998, p. 51.

⁸⁸ Levinas: *Otherwise than Being, op. cit.*, p. 105.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ “Levinas’ task was to preserve messianism against teleological histories and conative assumptions of our mortality. He did this even as he held possibility of a here and now for hope, together with justice understood as a comparable possibility for the future (and in a sense too, the past)” (Bergo: “Levinas’ Weak Messianism in Time and Flesh, or The Insistence of Messiah Ben David,” *art. cit.*, p. 61.)

⁹² Levinas: *Collected Philosophical Papers, op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁹³ Levinas: *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism, op. cit.*, p. 88.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

and fulfilling the ethical vocation in obedience. Consequently, “the unique one assigned in the passive synthesis of life” is emphasized.⁹⁵

This resonates with Levinas’ words in *Difficult Freedom*; “within the body, the heart is the foundation stone of the heavenly Temple.”⁹⁶ Levinas’ messianism solely relies on “inner self”, the “shelter” as well as the “conscience” of mankind, “exposed to all the winds” of hardships and injustice.⁹⁷ “One must become the sanctuary itself, the place of all holiness, and responsible for all holiness.”⁹⁸

The ethical self is the one who endeavors to bring the Kingdom of Good to the world even though it cannot be fully actualized. Levinas does not think of the true future as the triumph of utopia, “the final hour of History” where “every man who has the grace or good fortune.”⁹⁹ There is no promise of certitude regarding the future. Nonetheless, it is heading towards the future that “no eye has seen or prophesized.”¹⁰⁰ According to Levinas, “the eschatological consciousness that lives for the time of the other and aims for the triumph in time without me.”¹⁰¹ This reveals the true meaning of eternity as diachronic time, which is impossible to be synchronized, and thus, is the “apocalyptically bursting” out of the ontological time.¹⁰²

The Levinasian reflection underlines that the “genealogical process” through which human consciousness is constituted aligns with the structuring of temporality. This is indeed different from “the teleological philosophy of history”, which is dominated by the order of being. This difference also allows us to qualify consciousness in moral terms, since it contributes to defining it “as the place where the demand for justice arises”.¹⁰³

Moreover, for Levinas, reaching out to the suffering neighbor is approaching the infinite. The face appears from beyond being as “the stranger, the widow, and

⁹⁵ Levinas: *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, Athlone Press, London 1994, p. 159.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ Levinas: *Proper Names*, Stanford University Press, California 1996, p. 122.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 158–159.

⁹⁹ Levinas: *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹⁰¹ “Patience does not consist in the agent betraying his generosity by giving himself the time of a personal immortality. To renounce being the contemporary of the triumph of one’s work is to envisage this triumph in a time without me, to aim at this world below without me, to aim at a time beyond the horizon of my time, in an eschatology without hope for oneself, or in a liberation from my time.” (Levinas: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, *op. cit.*, p. 92.)

¹⁰² Levinas: *Otherwise than Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

¹⁰³ Durante, Massimo: “Mélancolie et messianisme. L’infinition de l’infini comme horizon du jugement,” in Hanus, Gilles and Brenner, Carine (ed.): *Cahiers D’études Levinassiennes*. Vol. 4, Messianisme, Institut D’études Levinassiennes, Jérusalem 2005, p. 55.

the orphan” who “disturbs the order of the world” and solicits help.¹⁰⁴ Levinas says that the face is “the trace of illeity” as it appears as the trace of God who “passed by is forever absent”.¹⁰⁵ God who is transcendent to the point of absence in this world, hides Himself but leaves His trace. This trace is an enigma, the manifestation of the face of the Other that signifies “the very emptiness of an irrecoverable absence” of God.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, in the face of the suffering Other, God is revealed. Therefore, the face is the place upon which the shadow of God’s presence looms; it is the implication of presence without presence.

The face is “there, in the third person” as a concept that encompasses all of the suffering faces. It is characterized by its visibility and invisibility, manifesting itself as the trace of the absolute which effaces Himself into the face of others.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, the face is not the incarnation of God, but it is the place where the height of God is revealed. Therefore, responding to the call of the other means hearing the word of God with my unwitting complicity in the history of humanity that answers to the appeal of the other’s past embodied by the face.¹⁰⁸ Becoming an ethical subject signifies traversing history, and reconstructing an ethical history in this world by responding to the faces who cry out for justice.¹⁰⁹ Thus, even though God is the absolute transcendence who is beyond measure, and accordingly, invisible, God “rises to his supreme and ultimate presence” through “justice rendered unto men”.¹¹⁰

As the face of the other overflows the cognitive ability of the subject, the time of diachrony also goes beyond consciousness as it is “the time as to-God [*à-Dieu*]” that refuses to be a conjunction.¹¹¹ “The absoluteness of the presence of the other”, in diachronic time is different from “the simple presence” that “belongs to the present of my life” that can be fully assembled in my consciousness.¹¹² Contrarily, the time of diachrony breaks the temporality of the self, and therefore, it is impossible for the finite self to close on “any final syllable”.¹¹³ However, this means the self

¹⁰⁴ Levinas: *God, Death, and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 193.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

¹⁰⁶ Levinas: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

¹⁰⁷ Levinas: *Otherwise than Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 158

¹⁰⁸ Levinas: “Diachrony and Representation,” *art. cit.*, p. 84.

¹⁰⁹ “I do think that the unlimited responsibility for another, as an enucleation of oneself, could have a translation into history’s concreteness. Time, in its patience and its length, in its awaiting, is not an ‘intentionality’ nor a finality, it belongs to the Infinite and signifies dia-chrony in the responsibility for another.” (Levinas: *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, *op. cit.*, p. 81.)

¹¹⁰ Levinas: *Totality and Infinity*, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

¹¹¹ Levinas: *God, Death, and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

¹¹² Levinas: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

¹¹³ Levinas: *God, Death, and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

contains “more than it can contain” in diachronic time and endures the weight of responsibility for the whole world bestowed by infinity with patience.¹¹⁴

The time of diachrony shows that through ethical relation, we can reach out to the Good as well as infinity in this finite world. In other words, we relate ourselves to infinity within the condition of finiteness through the ethical relation with the Other. For infinity bestows the meaning of finitude as responsibility for the Other, from the perspective of the ethical subject, the “time temporalizes itself as diachrony in the everyday event of my responsibility for the Other”.¹¹⁵

For Levinas, the true temporality as diachrony has never begun as it has its origin in “irrecusable gravity”¹¹⁶ of trace of infinity, and its does not have its end in itself, and is always a “flickering of interruptions” by the other, as “rebeginnings”.¹¹⁷ Thus, it is the time that ascends towards infinity.¹¹⁸ Levinas affirms that “Judaism does not, therefore, carry with it a doctrine of an end to History which dominates individual destiny”.¹¹⁹ He goes on to say, “salvation does not stand as an end to History, or act as its conclusion. It remains at every moment possible.”¹²⁰ In other words, “to hope” then is “to hope for the present”, which is “reparation of the irreparable”.¹²¹ In order to elaborate upon this utopian future in which the present is rooted, Levinas refers to Ernst Bloch in *God, Death, and Time*. The ethical moment of encountering the face of the other is “evoking those privileged moments in which the darkness of the subject is shot through by a ray of light coming from the utopian future”.¹²²

The meaning of anarchic subjectivity, who is elected to be responsible for others, gains a clearer signification in Levinas’ account of a utopian future; “it is a subjectivity of” “a dedication to a world to come”, which is the time beyond my time.¹²³ This refers to an ethical self who is indifferent to one’s own death, and also to the personal immortality that preserves my being beyond death. There is an altruistic investment in a future that death cannot impinge on for even as the self dies, the others will live on.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 116

¹¹⁵ Levinas: *Otherwise than Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ Sebbah, François-David: *Testing the Limit: Derrida, Henry, Levinas, and Phenomenology*, Stanford University Press, California 2012, p. 153.

¹¹⁸ Levinas: *God, Death, and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

¹¹⁹ Levinas: *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Levinas: *Existence and Existents*, p. 93.

¹²² Levinas: *God, Death, and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

Levinas centers on Bloch's words that "a place is left for the consciousness of the glory of utopia in man", which comes from the ethical moment of astonishment when encountering the face of the other.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, this moment needs a fissile present within the self, in order to welcome the face of the Other.

For there to be a possibility of disturbance, a fissile present is required, "destructuring [*déstructurant*]" itself in its very punctuality. The alterity that disturbs order cannot be reduced to the difference visible to the gaze that compares and therefore synchronizes the same and the other. *Alterity occurs as a divergency and a past* which no memory could resurrect as a present. And yet disturbance is possible only through an intervention. ... The temporal continuity of consciousness is overwhelmed, whenever it is a "consciousness of the other", and "against all expectation", counter to all attention and anticipation, the "sensational" turns back the sensation that brings it. ... Their grandeur is due to this exorbitance exceeding the capacity of phenomena, of the present and of memory.¹²⁵

This designates that "the highest manifestations of transcendence"¹²⁶ appears by overflowing the realm of phenomenality, and this otherness could be "solely grasped in its total passivity".¹²⁷ In other words, the non-phenomenality of the face reveals itself to the finite human beings as an absolute alterity which cannot be fully comprehended. However, by welcoming the Other in passivity, the self withdraws and renounces itself and reaches beyond "the comprehension that thematizes", in other words, the self goes into infinity.¹²⁸ We can also relate this to "a new point of present" that Levinas suggests in "intentionality and sensation".¹²⁹ In this moment,

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 101. It is worth mentioning that although Levinas refers to Bloch's utopianism, he distances his own idea from it as while Bloch searched for "a perceptible future" Levinas seeks for the future that cannot be fully grasped by human consciousness. However, Levinas praises Bloch because Bloch was able to think of a hope beyond death by referring to a utopian future without denying the anguish of death. However, in Bloch's utopianism, the anguish of death gains a meaning that is different from Heideggerian anxiety. This is because, for Bloch, it stems not from a concern for one's own being, but from the fact that one has to leave this world without fulfilling the task of transforming this world into utopia. (Levinas: *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, *op. cit.*, pp. 97-98.)

¹²⁵ Levinas: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

¹²⁶ Cohen-Levinas: "To Pass on Justice Infinitely: The Jew and the Greek" in Bielik-Robson, Agata; Lipszyc, Adam (eds.): *Judaism in Contemporary Thought: Traces and Influence*, Routledge Jewish Studies Series, London 2014, p. 70.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.72.

¹²⁸ Levinas: *Totality and Infinity*, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

¹²⁹ Indeed the context is rather different, as here, Levinas attempts to redefine Husserlian "the proto-impression" with his own terms. But Levinas tries to seek new possibilities of intentionality, namely what he calls "the mystery of intentionality" in relation to time consciousness, which seems to anticipate his concept of diachronic time that appears in his later works. (Levinas, Emmanuel: *Discovering Existence with Husserl*, Northwestern University Press, Illinois 1998, pp.144-145.)

the consciousness is “fulfilled beyond all conjecture, all expectation”, and “all continuity”.¹³⁰ In absolute passivity and receptivity, the Other penetrates the same.¹³¹

The face of the Other is the revelation of “appearing of the immemorial”.¹³² Therefore, “the irruption of time” opens itself up to “the immemorial time that commands to the present”.¹³³ The manifestation of the face of the Other reveals the task given by God in the immemorial past; one should become an ethical subject, who is responsible for the suffering Other. This is why Levinas says that “the first meaning, ‘older’ than the first, lies in the future”.¹³⁴ The face, as the trace of infinity, is the place where “eternity takes form” by stretching to “a past more remote than any past and any future which still are set in my time”.¹³⁵

The miraculous implication of the ethical moment is that it encompasses the immemorial past and the unrealized utopian future in the mode of discontinuity without synthetization. This fissile present, which is the opposite of the presence fastened to its own being as self-care, enables the true advent of the other as well as a true future. Owing to the finiteness of the self as well as a fissile present that is self-destructive, “the supreme presence of face” becomes possible.¹³⁶

According to Levinas, the ethical self empties itself of its being.¹³⁷ As a self who dedicates oneself to others, the one who sustains the universe with responsibility for others not only “goes beyond the limited and egoist fate” of himself, but also demonstrates the possibility of the self to situate itself “beyond essence”.¹³⁸ Levinas goes on to insist that this signifies the otherwise than being, in other words, where the being transcends itself. Goodness clothes me with “my obedience to the hidden Good”.¹³⁹ Thus, the self is defined as one’s disinterestedness in one’s own being, and in this sense, “I am an other [Je est un autre]”. In the fissile present, where the self embraces the disturbance of the Other, the self loses its being by “turning itself inside out”, but nevertheless, finds its true self as the one who is responsible for the whole universe.¹⁴⁰ This fissile present enables the self to approach the suffering

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Bernasconi, Robert: “Different Styles of Eschatology: Derrida’s Take on Levinas’ Political Messianism”, in *Research in Phenomenology*, Vol. 28, Brill Academic Publisher, Leiden 1998, p. 7.

¹³³ Cohen-Levinas: “Dieu n’est pas l’être : la Révélation comme récit du temps,” in *Revue Germanique Internationale*, Vol. 18, 2013, pp. 171–185. <https://journals.openedition.org/rgi/1450>

¹³⁴ Levinas: *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

¹³⁵ Levinas: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

¹³⁷ Levinas: *Otherwise than Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

faces without being held back by concerns for one's own being.¹⁴¹ It would be a form of time that overlaps with the withdrawal of God that refers to Lurianic *tsimtsum*; according to this myth, "God is held to have enacted a 'self-contraction' in order to 'make a space' for the created world."¹⁴² Similarly, the ethical subject is characterized as having "the mark" of "torsion", and "this fission". Moreover, this also reveals that the self was already "formed with absolute passivity"¹⁴³ in the past "already older than the time of consciousness".¹⁴⁴ In one of his early works, *On escape*, Levinas says that the self aspires for "elsewhere than in itself", due to the fact that the "presence of being" "is experience of its powerlessness".¹⁴⁵ Nonetheless, for Levinas, this impotence of presence that self experiences is the very source of ethics. In this fissile present, which destructures itself, the disturbance of the Other brings the true future, which is unrepresentable and "counters to all attention and anticipation"¹⁴⁶. In other words, the future that lies beyond universal history, but could be actualized through the time of this world. This is because the fissile present that destructs itself has a potential to be open to alterity in this moment, through encounters with the other.

For Heidegger, the future of Dasein is anticipated and projected by one's own possibilities. However, for Levinas, the future is "what constitutes itself outside of the present and brings to the order of the present the new; its essence is structured as a positive alterity".¹⁴⁷ It is the moment of rupture that awakens the ethical subject and reveals the future, the unknown future of not-yet. Although the messianic future cannot be fully accomplished in consciousness, it is anticipation for an unexpected future beyond the ultimate redemption; namely, beyond any perceptible future of traditional teleology.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴¹ Bergo: "Levinas' Weak Messianism in Time and Flesh", *art. cit.*, p. 46.

¹⁴² "Notably, in challenging Western philosophy's privileging of unity over separation and otherness, Levinas also employs language emphasizing the significance of 'contraction.' He writes that 'Infinity is produced' via 'a contraction that leaves a space for the separated being' (Levinas: *Totality and infinity*, *op.cit.*, p. 104). This idea of 'contraction' appears to be a direct allusion of the Lurianic notion of *tsimtsum*, in which God is held to have enacted a 'self-contraction' in order to 'make space' for the created world." (Weiss: "Tsimtsum between Bible and Philosophy: Levinas, Luria, and Genesis 1", in Bielik-Robson, Agata, and Weiss, Daniel H. (eds.): *Tsimtsum and Modernity: Lurianic Heritage in Modern Philosophy and Theology*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2021, p. 65.

¹⁴³ Levinas: *Otherwise than Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 104.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹⁴⁵ Levinas, Emmanuel; Rolland, Jacques: *On Escape*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2003, p. 69.

¹⁴⁶ Levinas: *Basic Philosophical Writings*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1996, p. 72.

¹⁴⁷ Levinas: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, *op. cit.*, XXVI.

¹⁴⁸ Cohen-Levinas: "Dieu n'est pas l'être: la Révélation comme récit du temps", *art. cit.*

The futuration of the messianic future is, below or beyond any promise, a moral investment of consciousness. The latter is invested by the future before having invested it with a project: the consciousness is invested, aroused, solicited, and it is precisely from the bosom of this pre-original susceptibility that the messianic promise can emerge and be heard... consciousness is the place or, more precisely, the trace of the tension proper to messianic time, which, while being a principle external to history [*supra-historique*], is inscribed in the structure of consciousness and of the present [*intra-historique*].¹⁴⁹

The messianic future is beyond any promise of teleology or concrete utopian vision. Nevertheless, even though it is “external to history”, it resides in consciousness and history in the “present” moment, as the fissile present encompasses the ungraspable future as well as the immemorial past beyond the present, the trace of infinity. This paradoxical character of the ethical moment lies in the fact that “for Rosenzweig and Levinas, Judaism connotes a meta-historic vocation at the heart of history, which shifts the question of redemption that could be only realized through the temporality of the world and history”.¹⁵⁰

In this respect, the double meaning of the messianic future as “supra-historique” and “intra-historique”, could be unraveled where Levinas depicts the characteristics of moral activity. “Nothing can alienate moral activity”; “the good I wish to do, of which I am conscious, spills over into reality, without getting lost in the conflict”.¹⁵¹ Moral activity makes changes in reality, namely, in the history of the world. However, “the moral agent” remains truthful without being contaminated by the “historical reality”, and in this sense, the ethical subject transcends history.¹⁵²

This paradox is spoken in enigmatic words when Levinas says that in messianic time “the perpetual is converted into eternal”.¹⁵³ However, as I’ve already mentioned before, it is clear that when Levinas speaks of eternity he is not referring to the unchanging eternity of traditional religion, which is characterized by its perpetual presence, and nothing but an “intensification, or radicalization, of

¹⁴⁹ “La futuration du futur messianique est, en deçà ou au-delà de toute promesse, un investissement moral de la conscience. Celle-ci est investie par le futur avant de l’avoir investi par un projet: la conscience est investie, suscitée, sollicitée, et c’est précisément du sein de cette susceptibilité pré-originale que la promesse messianique peut se faire jour et être entendue. Comme nous le verrons, la conscience est le lieu ou, plus précisément, la trace de la tension propre du temps messianique, qui, tout en étant un principe extérieur à l’histoire (supra-historique), s’inscrit dans le tissu de la conscience et du présent (intra-historique).” (Durante: “Mélancolie et messianisme”, *art. cit.*, p. 57. Translation by the author.)

¹⁵⁰ Cohen-Levinas: “Dieu n’est pas l’être: la Révélation comme récit du temps”, *art. cit.*

¹⁵¹ Levinas: *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ Cohen-Levinas: “Dieu n’est pas l’être: la Révélation comme récit du temps”, *art. cit.*

the fatality” “of being”.¹⁵⁴ The time of the Other is different from the optic time of the repetition of the same. The messianic consciousness of “the new structure of eternity” is characterized by its discontinuity, mobility, and absolute newness.

For Levinas, “history” and “time” are not the shadow of eternity, the imperfect reflection of perfect immobile eternity. The mobility of time is not imperfection, but a characteristic that invites an absolutely new future, which is unpredictable as it is beyond any comprehension of the human mind. This is the reason why history and time cannot be defined as a “corrupted” image of eternity.¹⁵⁵ On the contrary, “Time is pure hope, it is the birthplace of hope.”¹⁵⁶ Then, why does Levinas want to name diachronic time “a new structure of eternity”? What does eternity signify in this context? Although Rosenzweig’s concept of eternity differs from Levinas’ diachronic time, the concept of eternity described in *Star of Redemption* provides clues to understand this mystery.

Peter Gordon provides a compelling interpretation of Rosenzweig’s eternity in the present moment of the now. Gordon says that Rosenzweig “infuses temporality with eternity, yet without truly effacing the finitude of life”.¹⁵⁷ This eternity is not beyond the finiteness of temporality, rather, it is an “eternity in the moment”.¹⁵⁸ This is because, for Rosenzweig, even “God requires redemption just as man and the world do”.¹⁵⁹ God also is perfected throughout the process of becoming. Thus, “redemption must remain a kind of cooperative event – the mutual opening of Man and the World, their cooperative readiness toward God”, and God’s “unanticipated intrusion”. Nevertheless, through this process, “God redeems himself” as well. Therefore, the “‘eternity’ now means something quite novel: ‘eternalization’” that implies that “eternity is a process and so necessarily temporal”.¹⁶⁰

Indeed, as Gordon also acknowledges, this causes difficulty in construing this concept of eternity “in the manner of traditional metaphysics”¹⁶¹, as for Rosenzweig, “time and eternity are mutually inclusive”.¹⁶² This is where Gordon finds the

¹⁵⁴ Levinas: *On Escape*, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

¹⁵⁵ “History is not simply a diminished and corrupted eternity, nor is it the mobile image of immobile eternity; history and evolution have a positive meaning, an unforeseeable fecundity; the future moment is absolutely new, but it requires history and time in order to come about.” (Levinas: *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, *op. cit.*, p. 67.)

¹⁵⁶ Levinas: *God, Death, and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

¹⁵⁷ Gordon, Peter Eli: *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between Judaism and German Philosophy*, University of California Press, Berkeley 2003, p. 204.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 189.

affinity between Heidegger's deconstruction of eternity through the temporality of Dasein. For Gordon, Rosenzweig's eternity is ultimately a temporalization of the eternal, because "it is a stance towards the future that nonetheless remains within time"¹⁶³; "by finding acceptance in time (eternity) itself becomes – like Time".¹⁶⁴ As eventually Gordon reduces Rosenzweig's eternity to temporality, he opposes Karl Löwith's insistence that there is an irreconcilable dichotomy between Heidegger and Rosenzweig, which is represented as Temporality vs. Eternity.¹⁶⁵

Nevertheless, Gordon's reading of Rosenzweig is problematic as Rosenzweig's concept of eternity has a transcendent character beyond temporality. Gordon's misleading interpretation is due to the fact that he does not pay enough attention to Rosenzweig's use of mathematical methods in his philosophy, which can be put down to the influence of Hermann Cohen.

Although Rosenzweig acknowledges the limitation of mathematics, unable to touch reality due to its atemporal abstract characteristics, he sees more in mathematics. This is because mathematical method entails a paradox that plays a crucial role in Rosenzweig's thought as this captures that "something that slumbers in the womb of nothing".¹⁶⁶ It is "the magnitude", as "it loses itself in the immeasurable", "and then it also borrows, all the properties of the finite magnitude *with the only exception of finite magnitude itself*"¹⁶⁷, as the "infinitesimal".¹⁶⁸ Rosenzweig goes on to affirm that this teaches us "to recognize the origin of the something in the nothing".¹⁶⁹ Rosenzweig emphasizes the depth of immeasurable greatness, which cannot be simply reduced to the finite realm, despite its participation in finiteness.

Correspondingly, Rosenzweig's moment of eternity is different from that of Heidegger as it encompasses eternity within the finite realm without reducing it to temporality. And this is a crucial difference indeed, as for Rosenzweig, the moment

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 189.

¹⁶⁵ Löwith: "M. Heidegger and F. Rosenzweig or Temporality and Eternity." *art. cit.*, pp. 53–77.

¹⁶⁶ Rosenzweig, Franz: *The Star of Redemption*, Notre Dame Press, Illinois 1971, p. 20.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Rosenzweig's use of this word has its origin in Hermann Cohen's *Religion of Reason*. According to Hermann Cohen, "the infinitesimal is able to combine two seemingly contradictory aspects (namely, being both something and nothing) into *one single concept*. . . . Instead of having to engage in the indirect communication of stylistic oscillations, one can simply say directly: the concepts of religion are represented by the mathematical concept of the infinitesimal" Weiss, Daniel H.: *Paradox and the Prophets: Hermann Cohen and the Indirect Communication of Religion*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012, p. 187.)

¹⁶⁹ Rosenzweig: *Der Stern der Erlösung*, p. 23. Translation and emphasis by the author.

entails something beyond the present, and transcends its finitude even though it remains in the finite realm at the same time.

Although the world is not created completely from the beginning, but is created with the provision to be completed [fertig werden]. [...] Or, to speak only from the side of the world, to become complete [das Fertigwerden] lies in the world [...]: the kingdom is the vitality of existence that comes from the very beginning, and is always in coming [...]. It is future as well as already there. [...] Eternity is not a very long time. It is rather a tomorrow, that could also be today. Eternity is a future, which is nevertheless a present, without ceasing to be a future. Eternity is a today that is conscious of being more than today.¹⁷⁰

Rosenzweig believes in the notion of an ultimate redemption facilitated by the intervention of God at some point in future, although the exact moment of the fulfillment of the provision of the world is unknown to human beings.¹⁷¹ In this aspect, Levinas has a distinctive view. While for Rosenzweig, the certainty of redemption itself is not questioned, Levinas thinks its uncertainty puts more importance on the moral act of ethical subjects, even though Levinas does not exclude the possibility of ultimate redemption.¹⁷² Nonetheless, what I would like to stress here is that Levinas' declaration of a new structure of eternity in messianic consciousness has a strong correlation with Rosenzweig's remarks on eternity as "it is future as well as already there".¹⁷³

For Rosenzweig, eternity dwells in the present moment that preserves the "provision" from the very beginning of creation, and also bears the future, as "a today that is conscious of being more than today". Thus, "the absolute or messianic Today is, in the strongest sense, *Augen-blick*, that 'moment' that can reveal new to every

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 250. My translation.

¹⁷¹ "His [Rosenzweig's] correspondence at the time gives us some further clues about his vision of the messianic future: it was to be not a celestial but an earthly coming of the New Jerusalem, which would bring today's perspective, even miraculous —recasting (*Umschaffung*) of human nature" (Löwy, Michael: *Redemption and Utopia: Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe*, Verso, New York 2017, p. 59.)

¹⁷² "There is no immorality without God; without God morality is not preserved against immorality. God emerges here in His purest essence, one distant from all imagery of incarnation, through the moral adventure of humanity. God is here the very principle of the triumph of good. If you do not believe this, if you do not believe that in any case the Messiah will come, you do not believe in God. This helps us to a better understanding of the famous paradox that the Messiah will come when the world is wholly guilty. This statement is the extreme consequence of an obvious proposition: even if the world is absolutely plunged in sin, the Messiah will come." (Levinas: *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, op. cit., p. 77.)

¹⁷³ Rosenzweig: *Der Stern der Erlösung* op. cit., p. 250.

time it opens. Between the present moment and the completion, the period is still nothing but, in the meantime, renewed to the new.”¹⁷⁴ Namely, in the moment of eternity, the present relates to the true future, the time of the Other which “is not an extension of the possibilities coiled in my present”.¹⁷⁵ This is where Levinas’ diachronic time resonates with Rosenzweig’s eternity and breaks with Heidegger’s fundamental ontology.

From Heidegger’s perspective, “the moment of vision” is “the ultimate focus on which fundamental ontology, as the science of the manifold meanings of Being, relies”.¹⁷⁶ For Heidegger, eternity shadows this authentic understanding of temporality, as the traditional concept of eternity is captivated by a continuous “sequence of ‘nows’” in the mode of “constant presence”¹⁷⁷, which lacks the Dasein’s ecstatic horizon of temporality of past and future. On the other hand, “the moment of vision” is disclosed by Dasein in resoluteness, in Dasein’s embracing of its own death and temporality.¹⁷⁸ Hence, for Heidegger, eternity is an illusion derived from the “present at hand”, due to the inauthentic understanding of temporality and being of Dasein who fails to seize its own finiteness and ownmost possibilities. As traditional philosophy depends on this inauthentic understanding of being of Dasein, for Heidegger, “the key to the entire deconstructed history of metaphysics” lies “in this moment of vision”.¹⁷⁹

However, this precisely reveals the limitation of *Being and Time*. Although Heidegger attempts to reach beyond Dasein’s own being through history, he could not stretch to the time itself as the historicity of Dasein also relies on its own being, its temporality.¹⁸⁰ Thus, the ontology of Heidegger that finds “the key to the meaning of being in my own temporality” not only “leads to a self-sufficiency, to egoism”¹⁸¹ but also fails to transcend beyond the being of Dasein. This is the rea-

¹⁷⁴ “L’aujourd’hui absolu ou messianique est, au sens le plus fort, *Augen-blick*, cet ‘instant’ qui peut ‘dévoiler du neuf à l’œil chaque fois qu’il s’ouvre.’ Entre l’instant présent et l’accomplissement, le délai est toujours nul mais, en attendant, reconduit à neuf.” (Bensussan: *Le temps messianique: temps historique et temps vécu*, *op. cit.*, p. 131.)

¹⁷⁵ Severson, Eric R.: “The Missing Sequel.” in: *Levinas Studies*, Vol. 9, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh 2014, p. 137.

¹⁷⁶ Taminioux, Jacques: *Heidegger and the Project of Fundamental Ontology*, State University of New York Press, New York 1991, p. 68.

¹⁷⁷ Heidegger: *Being and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 475.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 376.

¹⁷⁹ Taminioux: *Heidegger and the Project of Fundamental Ontology*, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

¹⁸⁰ “In analysing the historicity of Dasein we shall try to show that this entity is not ‘temporal’ because it ‘stands in history’, but that, on the contrary, it exists historically and can so exist only because it is temporal in the very basis of its Being.” (Heidegger: *Being and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 428.)

¹⁸¹ Taminioux: “The Presence of *Being and Time* in *Totality and Infinity*,” in Hansel, Joëlle (ed.), *Levinas in Jerusalem: Phenomenology: Ethics, Politics, Aesthetics*, Springer, Dordrecht, 2009, p. 13.

son why eventually; Heidegger was unable to fulfill his task of interpreting time as a possible horizon to understand Being-in-General.

On the contrary, Levinas envisions the ethical moment that embraces its origin and its future in the mode of discontinuity that connects to the unrepresentable immemorial past and invites absolute newness of the messianic future. This is possible because Levinas starts from the proximity of neighbor and openness of the self where the essence of being of the self is surpassed in inspiration that comes from the Other. That being said, the Other gives inspiration that transforms the self from a “being for the other”. Thus, the ethical self who “substitutes itself for others”, transcends one’s own being.¹⁸² As a result, Levinas was able to reconstruct time itself as that which transcends the self’s own being by starting from the ethical subject. Reading Levinas through Schelling sheds light in this aspect.¹⁸³

What is most striking is that in Levinas, the every moment that arises from time is also the “whole [*entier*]” time (Schelling), also “dynamically dissociated” (Schelling), and this dissociation is the very principle that allows “to reconnect with the thread of history”.¹⁸⁴

Therefore, despite the fact that Levinas’ time is characterized by its discontinuity, the time of diachrony “arises from” “the ‘whole’ time” in every moment. In other words, paradoxically, there is a connected thread of history in “dynamically dissociated” instants. “The event of the encounter, the disturbing irruption of others that never fills ‘a goal of expectation’ (Levinas)”, but it “will come to touch a pre-origi-

¹⁸² Levinas: *Otherwise than Being, op. cit.*, p. 117.

¹⁸³ There are no significant references to Schelling’s work in the work of Levinas, and accordingly, we cannot say precisely what works of Schelling Levinas read or studied; when asked, Levinas said that he only studied Schelling’s works partially. Moreover, Cohen-Levinas also denotes that there is a formidable difference between Schelling and Levinas, as for Schelling, creation and revelation are the possibility of the advent of the concept that starts from an original being. Hence, Schelling’s method is deductive; the deity depends on the meaning of Being and its understanding. On the contrary, Levinas and Rosenzweig think that the intelligibility of being does not reside in its understanding. That’s why for them, the world reveals itself to human beings in the pronominal form of a “Tu”, what Rosenzweig calls a “neighbor” and Levinas calls “others”. Correspondingly, the relationship to time is the result of the “breaking of being” (Rosenzweig) and the paradoxical experience of the future that always remains to come, about to arrive. Thus, interruption (Levinas) and anticipation (Rosenzweig) are the two modalities on which the question of Redemption is based. Nevertheless, Schelling’s concept of time as a whole helps us to understand how Levinas rebuilds the continuity of time, as a new structure of eternity, from creation to messianic future within the discontinuity of diachronic time. (Cohen-Levinas: “Dieu n’est pas l’être : la Révélation comme récit du temps”, *art. cit.*)

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

nal, immemorial”.¹⁸⁵ In other words, “eternity is the very irreversibility of time”, that refers to the unrepresentable immemorial past¹⁸⁶, as it comes from beyond all “remembered past”, and “does not concern the subject’s reminiscence”.¹⁸⁷ Its origin is beyond “the order of presence”, but is included in every moment of answering the call of the suffering other. Therefore, according to Levinas, the immemorial past is “an absolute past which unites all times”.¹⁸⁸

I am responsible for the other not because I’ve agreed to be, but because I am obliged to answer the call of the other, which I am always late for. This responsibility is characterized as immemorial as it commands me from “the hither side of my freedom”, “prior to every memory”.¹⁸⁹ Even though this responsibility for the other is embedded in self, it is a non-subjective memory beyond personal consciousness or past experience. Nonetheless, “there is an ethical significance in that responsibility — without the remembered present of any past commitment — in that anarchic responsibility”.¹⁹⁰ Therefore, even before my own freedom to make a commitment, I have always been responsible for “the faults or the misfortune of others”.¹⁹¹

Levinas explains this primordial consciousness of the immemorial past in relation to trauma. “The subject is sensitive to the provocation that was never presented but struck it with a trauma” that is “sensible to the immemorial, to the unrepresentable, to a profound *jadis*”.¹⁹² Hence, Levinas speaks of “subjectivity as an-archy”, which does not have an origin in itself.¹⁹³

The oneself cannot form itself; it is already formed with absolute passivity. ... It was made in an irrecoverable time which the present, represented in recall, does not equal, in a time of birth or creation, of which nature or creature is more past than any rememberable past, any past convertible into a present. The oneself is a creature, but an orphan by birth or an atheist no doubt ignorant of its Creator, for if it knew it would again be taking up its commencement.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ Levinas: *Collected Philosophical Papers, op. cit.*, p. 103.

¹⁸⁷ Levinas: “Diachrony and Representation,” *art. cit.*, p. 87.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Levinas: *Otherwise than Being, op. cit.*, p. 10.

¹⁹⁰ Levinas: “Diachrony and Representation,” *art. cit.*, p. 84.

¹⁹¹ Levinas: *Otherwise than Being, op. cit.*, p. 10.

¹⁹² Levinas: *God, Death, and Time, op. cit.*, p. 193.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

¹⁹⁴ Levinas: *Otherwise than Being, op. cit.*, pp. 104–105.

Here Levinas explains the time of creation is immemorial and reveals the passivity of human beings in their timeless creation. Metaphysically, the finiteness of human beings stems from such a lack of agency that begins in creation itself. The vulnerability of the subject, exposed to the suffering of others, is juxtaposed with the issue of finiteness. For Levinas, answering to the call of the Other “without a prior commitment”, signifies “human fraternity” as the provision given in creation by God.¹⁹⁵

In the time of creation, the self is “formed with absolute passivity”.¹⁹⁶ The passivity of human beings in the process of creation also alludes to the finiteness of aging and dying. A human being as a one who “ages in this world”, and in the end, who “withdraws from this world”¹⁹⁷ acquires its own meaning: “veritable abnegation, a substitution for the other”.¹⁹⁸ This finiteness refers to the soul that is characterized by “sensibility, vulnerability” which designates openness towards the suffering Others.¹⁹⁹ By embracing the other, one realizes the need to fulfill the task of becoming an ethical subject who is radically open towards the Other’s appeal and heads towards the true future as “the possibility of moral life fulfills the creature”²⁰⁰ by aiming towards the time beyond my being, my mortality, the time of the Other.

The advent of the Other, inviting the true future, discloses the fact that from the very beginning, the responsibility for the Other is the structure of subjectivity of being “who ‘is’ otherwise than being”.²⁰¹ This “investiture” “of a being who is not for-itself but for all being”²⁰², signifies the election of “the invisible glory of infinity”.²⁰³

I approach the infinite by going generously toward you, who is still my contemporary, but, in the trace of illeity, presents himself out of the depth of the past, faces, and approaches me. I approach the infinite insofar as I forget myself for my neighbor who looks at me[...]. I approach the infinite by sacrificing myself.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

¹⁹⁷ Levinas: *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁹⁹ Levinas: *Otherwise than Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

²⁰⁰ Levinas: *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

²⁰¹ Levinas: *God, Death, and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

²⁰² *Ibid.*

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 193.

²⁰⁴ Levinas: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

By reaching out to the suffering Other, finite human beings approach the infinite. In other words, “responsibility of a mortal being for a mortal being” is “the relationship with infinite”.²⁰⁵ The paradoxical relationship between infinity and the finitude of human beings plays a crucial role in Levinas’ ethics. Levinas maintains that through the manifestation of the face of the suffering Other, “the infinite” “encircles me and commands me by” “my own voice”.²⁰⁶ This shows the overlap between my being and the infinite Other. “The infinitely exterior becomes an infinitely interior secret, to the fission of the very giving of the sign”.²⁰⁷ Although the manifestation of the face cannot fully transfer the meaning of infinity, the infinity shows itself “in some sense”.²⁰⁸ This sign is an untranslatable message, nevertheless, it “solicits across a face”, with “the term of my generosity and my sacrifice”.²⁰⁹ Consequently, through diachronic time, we can acquire the meaning of the trace of infinity, as well as the meaning of the self: an ethical subject responsible for others. According to Levinas, this is the primordial horizon of ethics, “the signification” of “a before-being”.²¹⁰

Levinas names the face of the Other as “Epiphany”, which manifests itself apart from the historical world, the words of God. Therefore, the face of the Other is “the revelation of the love of the other man”, and also “the transcendence of the unto-God [*à-Dieu*]”.²¹¹ This is where “the meaning itself of the word ‘God’ comes to mind”.²¹² The ungraspable meaning of infinity is attested through my voice that says “here I am” that responds to the call of the suffering Other.²¹³ That being said, “the responsible response to the call of others indicates the very trace of the divine within us”²¹⁴; namely, “God in me [*Dieu-en-moi*]”²¹⁵ as “the mark of the infinite in the finitude of condition”.²¹⁶ Thus, the presence of God who hides His face in the face of the others as a trace, would be dependent on man, whose “soul comes

²⁰⁵ Levinas: *God, Death, and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ Levinas: *God, Death, and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

²⁰⁹ Levinas: *Collected Philosophical Papers*, *op. cit.*, p. 73.

²¹⁰ Levinas: *Otherwise than Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

²¹¹ Levinas: *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ Levinas: *God, Death, and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

²¹⁴ Cohen-Levinas: “Le premier Dire. Retrait, trace et an-archie”, *art. cit.*, p. 562.

²¹⁵ Levinas: *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, *op. cit.*, p. 167

²¹⁶ Cohen-Levinas: “Le premier Dire. Retrait, trace et an-archie”, *art. cit.*, p. 562.

from the divine breath”.²¹⁷ Hence, finiteness has “the sort of excellence proper to Spirit: perfection, or the Good”.²¹⁸

Nevertheless, this does not deny or overlook the bruteness of the reality of the world we live in. According to Levinas, the suffering of the innocent throughout the history of mankind testifies the absence of God in this world; He has withdrawn Himself from this world and has left only a trace. However, Levinas draws out theological meaning from this renouncement of God. God hides His presence in order to appeal to “the full maturity of the responsible man” who hears the cries of the victims of inhumanity that “continue to resound”, but have been forgotten by the world.²¹⁹

This diachronic time is the “non-said time”²²⁰, the time of primordial saying that preserves the words of God and relates to the self before one’s own being.²²¹ Accordingly, I am called to be an ethical self “who has promised itself that it will carry the whole responsibility of the world”²²², despite the fact that I am always late for the call of the suffering Other. The Other reclaimed me before the time when I came into this world; and in this sense, my presence is insufficient to the extreme urgency of the Other’s solicitation, and I am always “accused of having delayed”.²²³ However, the ethical self searches for the time which has been lost, and here, the fissile present that invites the absolute alterity, finds the trace of an immemorial past in the encounter with the face of the Other, which also invites the true future. Thus, answering the call of the other also signifies that by renouncing one’s own being and losing “his place radically”, the self enters into “the ubiquity” [*l’ubiquité*], namely, into a utopia which is unforeseeable to a finite mind.²²⁴

²¹⁷ Levinas: *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*, *op. cit.*, p. 158. “In Genesis 2 and 3, the creation of the human being involves God forming the first man from “the dust of the ground” and breathing into him “the breath of life,” *nishmat hayyim*, so that he becomes “a living being,” *nefesh hayah* (Gen. 2:7). ... That is to say, while there are two elements here – the ‘dust of ground’ and the ‘*neshamah* breathed by God’ – the living person as a whole, the *nefesh*, is identified not with either one of the two elements, but with the union between them. Again, this stands in contrast with a notion that would identify the ‘true self’ with the soul or mind in contradistinction to the body. Likewise, there is no indication that one could talk about the *nefesh* or the ‘self’ apart from the body: the self is linked with God’s breath in the body.” (Weiss: “Embodied Cognition in Classical Rabbinic Literature.” in *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*, Vol. 48, Nr. 3, 2013, p. 792.

²¹⁸ Levinas: *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-other*, *op. cit.*, p. 221.

²¹⁹ Levinas: *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, *op. cit.*, pp. 142–143.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, Levinas: *En découvrant l’existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² Levinas: *Totality and Infinity*, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

²²³ Levinas: *Otherwise than Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas says that “the election of the I” is “revealed to be privilege” but a “subordination”, as well, because it is the election that demands sacrifice for others, “in face of them, to serve them”.²²⁵ The ethical moment of the face-to-face encounter enables me to realize my universal responsibility. The Messiah is the one who does not evade “the burden imposed by the suffering of others” with his unique responsibility.²²⁶ Thus, “the messiah is Myself [*Moi*]; to be myself is to be the Messiah”.²²⁷ This signifies that the “Messiah is anyone who is ready to surrender oneself to the suffering others”²²⁸ and responds to the call of the other at an ethical moment without having any promises of a redemptive world or personal salvation as compensation. Therefore, the ethical subject is defined as “the poignancy of suffering ‘for nothing’”; it is the messiah of “useless suffering”.²²⁹ Nevertheless, for Levinas, there is hope only to the extent that it is uncertain.

“The Talmudic adage testifies to the absolute incommensurability of hope and its representations”; “hope cannot hope for what is hope-able [*l’espérable*], but only the un-hoped [*l’inespéré*], or even what would have gone through the greatest despair”.²³⁰ Hence, Levinas’ messianic hope diverges from “the messianic hope of all confident anticipations” of “happy ending”, which are merely “deceptive consolations [*trompeuses consolations*]” of other-worldly hopes; despair is the most proper name of “false hopes [*des fausses espérances*]”.²³¹

However, “the talmudic ‘despair’ safeguards” the true hope because it widens the hope to the extreme that pushes towards “the exodus to the impossibility of coming”.²³² This enables hope to reach out to the un-hopable; as Heraclitus said, “if you do not hope for the un-hoped [*l’inespéré*], you will not find it”.²³³ Paradoxically, this will form “the condition of the moment of breaking in [*l’instant de l’effraction*]” of the incomprehensible infinity in time.²³⁴

²²⁵ Levinas: *Difficult Freedom: Essays on Judaism*, op. cit., p. 91.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

²²⁸ Chalier, Catherine: “Le bonheur ajourné” in Collège International de Philosophie (ed.), *Rue Descartes*, Vol. 19, Nr. 1, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1998, p. 38.

²²⁹ “It is in the interhuman perspective of my responsibility for the other, without concern for reciprocity, in my call for his or her disinterested help, in the asymmetry of the relation of one to the other, that I have tried to analyze the phenomenon of useless suffering.” (Levinas: *Entre Nous: On Thinking-of-the-other*, op. cit., p. 101.)

²³⁰ “Celle-ci démarque l’espoir messianique de toute attente confiante et raisonnablement optimiste d’une issue ou d’un résultat qu’on escompte heureux, cette *Zuversicht* dont Bloch fait l’exact contrepoint de principe *Hoffnung*.” (Bensussan: *Le temps messianique*, op. cit., pp. 126–127)

²³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 128.

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

Thus, only after the falsifying otherworldly hopes are dissolved in despair, the true hope invites infinity through the time of the other which is beyond any of my expectations. In other words, the ethical subject constantly invites the messianic future in this world through its infinite responsibility towards the others, without expecting any individual salvation or spiritual compensation in the afterlife. Through “messianic dynamic”, “the new revives the old and makes it other” in history. This alteration is the condition for men to be able to be “constantly renewed without being identical to themselves”.²³⁵ This is how “mortal human beings” participate in “immortality” through the discontinuous diachronic time.²³⁶

Conclusion

As we have seen throughout the analysis, the ethical moment of encountering the face of the other is at the center of Levinas’ ethics. As the face of the other is the trace of infinity, bestowing an infinite idea on the subject that overflows its cognitive ability, the ethical moment of encountering the face of the Other is the site which entails the utopian future without the certainty of its realization in the world. Furthermore, the true future, which is the time of the Other beyond one’s finiteness, evokes the immemorial past and awakens one to fulfill the task of human beings to become an ethical subject. In this sense, Derrida points out that Levinas’ diachronic time claims that the experience of face-to-face itself is “eschatological at its origin”.²³⁷ Thus, it is a new structure of eternity beyond all dogmas, teleological histories and theodicies that speak in the language of being.

It is clear that Levinas does not deduce ethical principles from the existence of God or the final judgment of the end of history. For Levinas, God is unrepresentable and beyond the comprehension of finite cognitive ability as he is transcendent to the point of absence in this world. Thus, we can only relate to the trace of God through the manifestation of the face of the Other although God is “the alterity prior to the alterity of the other person”.²³⁸

Levinas’ messianism is a way of approaching the question of justice, without relying on categories of onto-theology that represents God as a supreme being. It rather refers to unique individuals who suffer, and who are willing to respond to the call of the suffering Other. Based on the “copresence”, of the faces, I am called

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

²³⁷ Derrida: *Writing and Difference*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1978, p. 95.

²³⁸ Levinas: *God, Death, and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

upon as a self who is responsible for all Others.²³⁹ For Levinas, without the responsibility for others, a relationship with God is unthinkable: “we understand this much from the Bible: to know God is to do justice to the neighbor.”²⁴⁰

Therefore, the pure expression of the Saying of the face of the Other sets up an ethical self who is not for itself but is “for all” and is characterized as disinterestedness in one’s own being.²⁴¹ This is the horizon of ethics where the meaning of otherwise than being arises from. The finiteness of the self acquires a new meaning, as the one who knows “how to sacrifice oneself.”²⁴² Here, the “ontological categories” are transformed into “ethical terms.”²⁴³

Levinas’ Messianism signifies ethics itself, “because it engages with ‘a personal vocation of men’.”²⁴⁴ This answers to Heidegger’s enigmatic words, “only a God can save us”²⁴⁵ without falling back into the trap of onto-theology by declaring that “the true object of hope is the Messiah.”²⁴⁶ Moreover, Levinas overcomes the limitation of the project of *Being and Time*, which was to interpret time as the horizon of understanding Being-in-General. Whereas Heidegger’s fundamental ontology, the analysis of Dasein, could not be stretched beyond Dasein’s own being as well as its temporality, Levinas succeeds in thinking time beyond the self, and reestablishing a new concept of eternity as diachronic time.

Levinas’ diachronic time deconstructs the traditional concept of time, a linear succession of sequences, by deconstructing the present with the concept of fissile present that invites the true future, which simultaneously awakens the immemorial past, the origin of creation. Under the influence of Rosenzweig’s “moment of eternity,” Levinas construes the ethical moment of the present that encompasses the whole time in the mode of discontinuity: the unrepresentable immemorial past as well as the unimaginable utopian future. Therefore, through diachronic time, the ethical subject relates to infinity and realizes the task given by God to be responsible for others. Specifically, to be a Messiah who endeavors to bring a utopian future in this world.

Levinas’ messianism resonates with the words of Rosenzweig that “the miraculous thing is that, although each of us stands in the mire himself, we can pull out

²³⁹ Levinas: *Otherwise than Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

²⁴⁰ Levinas: *God, Death, and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

²⁴¹ Levinas: *Otherwise than Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

²⁴² Levinas: *Nine Talmudic Readings*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1994, p. 50.

²⁴³ Levinas: *Otherwise than Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

²⁴⁴ Bensussan: *Le Temps Messianique*, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

²⁴⁵ Heidegger: “Nur noch ein Gott kann uns retten,” in *Der Spiegel*, Vol. 30, Spiegel-Verlag, Neckarsulm 1976, pp. 193–219.

²⁴⁶ Levinas: *Existence and Existents*, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

our neighbor, or at least keep him from drowning”.²⁴⁷ In the ethical moment of the face-to-face encounter with the Other, there lies the new structure of eternity of “messianic consciousness”; the diachronic time where immemorial past and utopian future reside, without reducing one another to the same²⁴⁸ : “this allegiance before any oath is the Other in the Same; that is, it is time, the passing through [*se passer*] of the Infinite”.²⁴⁹ Consequently, “concreteness of responsibility in its extraordinary future of the uncontainable” should be understood as God’s words ordered in the face of the Other that orders my sacrifice and this enables “the meaning of word I” as “here I am”, “the answering of everything and for everyone”.²⁵⁰ For Levinas, not the being of Dasein and its temporality, but the manifestation of the face of the other and diachronic time is the horizon of ethics that reveals the meaning of otherwise than being, as fraternity and justice.

Haeyeun Han graduated from University of Chicago Divinity School (M.A.) last spring, majored in philosophy of religion under the guidance of Professor Paul Mendes-Flohr. She studied previously at Seoul National University and her Master’s Thesis titled “Different Perspectives of Death between Heidegger and Levinas” was advised by Professor Chan-Kook Park. Recently she presented “Levinas on Time” at the Western Jewish Studies Association annual conference last March. She centers on the intersection between Continental Philosophy and Judeo-Christianity. Interested in aesthetics and literature as well, she mainly focuses on Plato, Descartes, Kant, Schelling, Hermann Cohen, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Husserl, Heidegger, Benjamin, Buber, Rosenzweig, Michel Henry, Levinas, and Soloveitchik. cutegummy@icloud.com

²⁴⁷ Rosenzweig, Franz; Glatzer, Nahum N: *Franz Rosenzweig: His Life and Thought*, Straus and Young, New York 1953, p. 92.

²⁴⁸ “This is a strong sense of what we are calling diachrony. It is an irreducible difference that does not enter into the unity of a theme; an untraversable difference between the Good and me; a difference without simultaneity of unmatched terms. Yet this is an irreducible difference that is still a non-in-difference: a relationship with the Good that has invested me in assigning me to responsibility for another.” (Levinas: *God, Death, and Time*, *op. cit.*, p. 177.)

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 201; Levinas: *Dieu, la mort et le temps*, Paris: Grasset 1993, p. 234.

²⁵⁰ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, *op. cit.*, p. 114.