

# IN LEVINAS' „HOUSE”<sup>1</sup>

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## 1.

According to Weber, modernity is the specific process of rationalization. The new rational structures get free from the normative presupposition of Tradition and from the foundations of the vital world. Thus, both modern economics and politics arise as the new features of the rationalization process. The price modernity has to pay for this specific affirmation of the human being as well for the disenchantment of the traditional world is, according to Weber, the loss of freedom and meaning. On one hand, the new structures that manage and determine modern life emerge. On the other hand, the disappearance of the idea of a substantial rationality causes the fragmentation of the meaning of life.

Instead of the normative presuppositions which still, inside Protestantism, make modernity arise, utilitarianism is affirmed. Kant - who anticipates Weber's posture - says this process of Modernity engenders only heteronomy, and not the human being's autonomy. Kant's question will thus be how to affirm human autonomy. Is it at all possible to do so inside Modernity? Kant's answer is different from Weber's, since the latter thinks about the ethics of responsibility, facing the consequences of modern utilitarianism. Kant, following the philosophical presuppositions of his system, asks about the ethics within human interiority. In this context, Kantian ethics can be understood as a specific secular continuation of Luther's thought. Only our interiority offers a safe road towards ethics. Just the form of our normative thought, aside from its empirical contents, offers our life practical orientation. It offers the rules of moral behavior. Hegel, in turn, is going to oppose this Kantian perspective. The duty articulated by reason cannot be the basis of morality. Hegel, in this sense, does not pose the morality as the last word to affirm the practical. Morality - as the specific affirmation of human beings' legislation - is just a presupposition to attest the possibility of ethicity, or of the objective morality. The question for



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Hegel is how men's freedom can be articulated into the social world and not only within the inner structures of human beings. The revolutionary context of time, the French Revolution, determines this kind of Hegelian thought.

Thus, we can see that duty is not fundamental for Hegel. He believes the difference between duty and our real, concrete, contingent and empirical situation merely confirms the relation between subject and object; which cannot be overcome according to Kant. In this way, Kant thinks that just the form of our reason is able to determine a practical action. For Hegel, this is a specific degradation of reason. Subject apart from object, reason apart from world do not represent - according to Hegel - reason's strength, the possibility of reason to be realized in the world. This realization comes about the French Revolution. At least the first period of that Revolution makes Hegel feel enthusiastic about it. So, the question now is how are philosophers to articulate such affirmation of reason, to overcome the difference between subject and object which still besets the Kantian position. Hegel thinks that Kant is not a modern philosopher yet since he still does not discuss this strength of modern reason. He still does not see the identity between reason and reality, with which Hegel begins his *Philosophy of Right*.

The question we are interested in is whether Hegel, when trying to overcome the relation between norms and facts, between *sollen and sein*, between duty and concrete practical action, still keeps this difference. Hegel talks about the lacks of the concrete, about the particular which must be overcome. The particular is supposed to realize its own generality. In *Philosophy of Right*, this is articulated as the necessity of the individual to overcome his particularity and to affirm his own generality. The individual must be overcome inside the State. The individual's essence is to be citizen of the state.

This necessity of overcoming the individual will trigger strong reactions in post-modernity. Hegel will become one of the main enemies of this orientation in philosophy. We are still getting to this point. It also caused the discussions on the presuppositions of German culture. On the one hand, we have individual inwardness, established in the Lutheran as well as Kantian context and, on the other hand, the idea of the superiority of the state. Thus we have, on the one hand, the individual and, on the other hand, the State. There is no mediation between them, which characterizes, for instance, the tradition of American and British Puritanism. The lack

of this mediation, the gap between the individual and the state opens a catastrophic possibility in history, which took place in Germany with fascism.<sup>2</sup>

What concerns us here is the idea that Hegel, when criticizing the Kantian position on the relation between duty and being, still maintains the idea of duty as the basic presupposition of his system. Reason must be realized and this is the meaning of history. I think the idea of duty only appears in the other context of Hegelian philosophy. Our question is if the ethical and normative discussion still needs this dimension of duty. This very question remains open with Kant and Hegel's philosophy, and it is one of the most important questions within a possible confrontation with modernity.

However, there is also another open question. As we have seen, Hegel overcomes the kantian morality within the discussions about the philosophy of right. We still need the discussions on morality. Maybe this intention is already articulated in Kantian thought itself. He also asks himself about the juridical consequences of his philosophy. But the *Metaphysics of Morals* did not become Kant's fourth *Critique*, for he thought the social and empirical dimension of the questions about right did not offer a safe access to our practical behavior. Nevertheless, our doubt is whether this juridical posture is not implicit in Kant's second book, in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. Here I think of the famous Kantian example about lying. Are we supposed to lie or tell the truth to somebody who searches for a hidden person in our home?

Kant's answer is clear. Lying cannot be universalized, nor can it be the moral law and we have to say the truth. We must also respect the social order. Thus, it is better to break with the hospitality than with the duty to say the truth.<sup>3</sup> But here we find the almost juridical aspect in the Kantian discussion. Kant does not determine the relation with the other, with the interlocutor according to moral laws, but according to juridical obligations. Kant answers as if he were almost a policeman, respecting the idea of the social order, which the lie can only disturb. He practically plays the role of policeman within the discussion on morality. Is it at all possible to think the relation with the other, with the interlocutor, or with the person hidden in our house beyond this juridical obligation? Is it possible

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2 See MUNCH, R., *Die Kultur der Moderne*, Frankfurt, 1986, specially the second volume.

3 Comp., DERRIDA, J., DUFOURMANTELLE, A., *De L'hospitalité*, Paris, 1997, p. 67.

to keep the specifically moral dimension with the others? This is the second question I would like to discuss here. One of the most immediate critics of Kant — B. Constant — already asks precisely who has the right to listen to the truth. Who is this truth addressed to?

The question whether the relation with the other can be ethical relation remains open, as well as the previous question about the relation between duty and being, between the general and the particular.

## 2.

One of the changes in this modern perspective is found within Apel and Habermas' philosophy, in which Modernity is radicalized, searching for the new founding in philosophy. According to the authors, it seems that the communication paradigm is the new foundation just because it cannot be overcome. Also the skeptical — with whom the discussion on modern certainty begins — has to argue, so that he articulates his doubts. This founding within communication is for Apel and Habermas, a specific exit from metaphysics, for it refers to a structure that is — so to speak — self-reflexive. In order to argue for or against communication, we must use the arguments, we must already be inside the communication. Therefore this perspective is still modern but it is not metaphysics anymore. What do we get from this? Can we still defend Modernity? And does it still have the philosophical strength to be defended?

It seems that the arguments of the communication paradigm are not only the philosophical ones. Within the perspective of German culture, it seems that Habermas, for instance, almost changes the historical perspective of the arguments. It seems Habermas is doing philosophy as if he were an American in Germany rather than affirming the presuppositions of his own culture. The idea of communication philosophy is exactly the mediation between a particular and real community of communication and the ideal conditions of communication, which are accepted for all kind of discourses. Herein we can see two consequences. The rules of the ideal community of communication are almost the new forms of duty. Once again *sollen* overcomes *sein*; being is supposed to overcome its own limits. Hence Habermas starts as an American philosopher in Germany, but finally ends up as a good German philosopher, almost as a good Hegelian one. The intention of the philosophy of communication is to overcome metaphysics, including Hegelian metaphysics. However it seems

that in the end it retains some aspects of modern metaphysics. In this case the difference between duty and being is the primacy of duty, of duty to realize the conditions of the ideal community of communication.<sup>4</sup>

Such relation between duty and being equally thematizes the relation of the general and the particular. The question is to know if it is possible to think the particular within ethical structures or, as appears to be the case, if the ethical subjects are always related to setting the rules and the general structures of our practical behavior. This doubt about losing the particular within the philosophy of communication caused many doubts, mainly in Latin America. The question is if — and how — the ethics of communication, discourse ethics, can be applied in the specific context of Latin America.<sup>5</sup>

Habermas aims to overcome the Hegelian model where — as *Phenomenology of Spirit* articulates — the asymmetry of social relations thought in the story about masters and servants, creates the possibilities of history and of the constitution of the specifically human world. Instead of the Hegelian asymmetry Habermas wants to propose the symmetry of social relations. But such symmetry which seems to make space for several interlocutors, including these from Latin America, also limits the conditions of communication. The Other is thematized as me. Habermas thus sets the idea of social symmetry which can be grasped as the regulative idea to build up the new rational and future society, in order to conclude the modern project. This is precisely the relevant aspect of Habermas' position. But this symmetry articulates the new general ways of duty which do not articulate the specific particularism of the Other. The individual must be overcome within the new general forms of ideal communication, thus the question if the other, the particular, is a constitutive interlocutor remains open. Some authors deduce from this the question whether ultimately everyone is to accept the new conditions of the modern, European rationality.<sup>6</sup> Is the Other like me? Can ethics determine the Other as me, in the sense of this perspective of philosophy of communication? (For instance, how to

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4 I have discussed some aspects of this relation between Hegel and Habermas in the article „Crise da Filosofia”, Lumen, Sao Paulo, vol. 4, no. 9, 1998, pp. 79-91.

5 Comp., for instance, SIDEKUM, A., (org). Ética do discurso e filosofia da libertação. Sao Leopoldo, 1994.

6 Comp. Also the questions in this book, if, for example, the defense of the real community of communication can be thematized as a specific apology for the existing social system and if, for instance, affirming again the idea of the constitutive subject in the form of intersubjectivity, the discourse ethics is marginalizing its own position in society, because the system marginalizes the subjects. (THIELEN, H., Ética e experiência, in: SIEDEKUM, A., *ibid*, p. 209.)

think the others within the discussion on the agrarian reform in Brazil? Is it possible to reach discursive solution between farmers and the landless?)

How and where are we supposed to look for an ethical orientation? Can we always refer to the regulative and normative conditions of the ideal community of communication? Is duty always a safe guide? The relation between the ideal and the real community of communication is the reference, so to speak, in a normal situation, where the real community can be reproduced as well as assure the path to realize the conditions of the ideal community in the long run. (To some authors this is already the doubt, because „in the long run we are all dead” and who knows if we will still live until that moment?). However my doubt is another. Let's think about a community which is not that normal, for instance let's think about a homosexual society. I do not mean that this kind of society is not normal in the normative sense, but it is not normal for it cannot reproduce itself nor establish the orientation thinking of an ideal society of communication. When I say this kind of society is not normal it is exclusively in this sense. Hence how are we to conceive of the ethical orientation when what we have are just the normative conditions of a real society which lacks the references of an ideal one? Can a real society be its own ideal community? What would be the criteria for the real community to think about itself in the meaning of an ideal community? We can leave these questions now since the doubt is even simpler. How can we think in the ethical sense right here and right now? How are we supposed to set the reference criteria within a real community, which means out of an ideal community which we might never experience in our lives?

These doubts leave open the question whether the important idea of Emancipation announced by Habermas and implicitly thought of within Adorno and Hockheimer's *Dialectics of Enlightenment* can be realized within discourse ethics. We can also generalize the question and doubt whether ethics is able to realize the emancipation project. Habermas' aim is to radicalize Modernity considering that it has not yet realized its own potential. Modernity still has not pursued to the last consequences the idea of foundation. According to Habermas, modernity's attempt comes true within the communicative perspectives of theory, practice and our social life. Then our question on emancipation may be even more generalized, that is, can emancipation be realized within Modernity? In other words — still thinking about the ethical possibility of determining the conditions of emancipation — our question may be posed as follows: Is Modernity still the most suitable place to discuss ethics? Since its very beginning

Modernity has doubts on ethics. Politics is apart from ethics, Modernity does not ask itself about the normative presuppositions and ethics comes as a late reference in the sense of an ethics of responsibility. Ethics remains exclusively inside ourselves (Kant), or when it goes to the world, it loses its constitutive possibility (Hegel). There are innumerable doubts as well as the examples we could present. Then the doubt is radical: can we think the alternatives? Along this way we must not lose the questions previously posed and that have determined our inquiry: they concerned the relation between duty and being, the relation of general and particular in the ethical sense.

### 3.

Spinoza's philosophy is an important resource to think about the alternatives against Modernity. His *Ethics* may engender doubts in this sense. It's a cold book, done in a geometric way. The idea of „cogito” with which Modernity starts is no longer the first certainty, but God. *Cogito* is simply an attribute of substance. It could be concluded that it means coming back to the tradition previous to Cartesian thought. To Spinoza, the act of affirming God is done within a specific identification between God and Nature. Substance does not come before the attributes and does not have a primacy. God or Nature: that makes the difference between Spinoza and Descartes, and I believe also the possibility of articulating new alternatives against Modernity. The identification has anti-Platonic and anti-Christian motives. God is not out of the world. On the contrary, He is immanent. The world does not have to realize any end but merely realize its own power. Herein I believe we find the arguments for a discussion against Hegel as well as against the modern social world. Both Hegel and capitalism have a common presupposition concerning the explanation of the structure of the world. The world is essentially lack. Hegel overcomes these lacks through the idea of the development of the Spirit, while capitalism does so by the offerings of the market. Spinoza's idea, on the other hand, is that there is nothing missing in the world. The world develops through its own powers and this strength of being is called *conatus*. As a result Spinoza's ontology prepares the political and ethical matters. If the world and the beings inside it do not have to realize any historic plan nor any rule, we don't need any morality. Spinoza leave ethics and morality apart — which I consider to be an historic happening.



„Acting absolutely for virtue is nothing else than acting, living, keeping you own being (...)”<sup>7</sup>. The idea of God is articulated this way. „(...) the supreme virtue of soul is to know God”<sup>8</sup>. It seems herein that knowing God means to affirm yourself as an active being, to affirm one’s own freedom against many kinds of domination in the world.<sup>9</sup> Freedom is not just the freedom of will, because we must also do something. But not to do something is grounded in the passions. If the action is grounded in them, it means we are determined by external causes. The action must be based on our own reason. Be active and rational — this is Spinoza’s message. Therefore, „God or Nature” can be understood as the pantheism formula, but not in the sense of substantialism or of the affirmation of any kind of external authority. (These arguments were enough for the Jewish community to exclude Spinoza — this decision has not yet been reversed). By setting the *conatus*, Spinoza is affirming the individual’s posture. Of course in this context he merely affirms the identity between existence and essence, but not yet the primacy of the existence itself.

Politics is also going to face the power of being against several forms of power which are established within the modern world. Potency *versus* power —this idea of Spinoza provoked a great deal of inspiration within political thought.<sup>10</sup> Then the alternatives against many kinds of affirmation of State superiority which we can find in Hobbes, Rousseau, and Hegel, are built.

Spinoza’s arguments — such as the affirmation of the individual — had a big influence on Nietzsche’s work as well as on some other contemporary authors, such as Foucault. Nietzsche’s idea is that the strength of being, the affirmation of life, have always been denied by rationalism and normative structures. History after Socrates is precisely the story of nihilism. Morality and science are two forms of the will of truth which establish the criteria according to which life must be determined. On the one hand, life is determined by moral norms; on the other hand, this is done by criteria of scientific objectivity. These are two forms of essentialism and of the dominating metaphysics. The latter undervalues life and the question now is how to think of the alternatives. This is the project articulated by Nietzsche as the „transvaluation of values”. The question is

7 Ethics IV Proposition XXIV.

8 Ibid., prop. XXVIII.

9 comp. DELEUZE, G., „Spinoza et le problem de l’expression. Paris, 1968. From the same author: „Spinoza. Philosophie pratique”. Paris. 1981.

10 Comp. For instance NEGRI, A., A anomalia selvagem. Rio de Janeiro, 1993.



whether this project may be identified with ethics. He himself talks about artistic production which has the structure of cyclic time, which has in itself its own meaning. The linear structure of time from the Hegelianism, capitalism, Christianity and Platonism have as a presupposition a meaning outside themselves. Only art is —to Nietzsche — the great affirmation of life. About ethics we can only speak in the derived sense. Ethics is present only within the question about the origin of norms which are not outside our life, determining it and dominating it. It is life itself which is the origin of norms. But the strong man makes his own rules. The weak man of belief, on the other hand, „is necessarily a dependent one — a man who is not able to propose himself as an end, who is in general not able to propose ends from himself.”<sup>11</sup> The transvaluation is exactly this change of the normative origins; it is the beginning of a new civilization — the artistic one that Nietzsche announces in the *Book of the Philosopher*.

Foucault is following the same path as Nietzsche. After having asked about the presuppositions of modern social perception — which already excludes non-reason — Foucault continues the discussion on modern knowledge where man becomes the object.<sup>12</sup> Science makes us slaves rather than freeing us. A similar posture is found in Adorno and Hockheimer's *Dialectics of Enlightenment*. Foucault's thought is a specific archeology of knowledge, a specific link between knowing and modern power. The *History of Sexuality* starts with the analysis of life — managed by Christian and modern structures. Instead of erotic *ars* from the Antique, we affirm the sexual sciences. Our bodies are disciplined and not just in the theory. Therefore we must first free them. Foucault once again poses the Kantian question on illumination.<sup>13</sup> The answer is not within a new affirmation of human being's maturity and its autonomy but within an affirmation of creativity. We must make ourselves and affirm life itself as an artistic work. The care for oneself, determined in the last part of the *History of Sexuality*, ends up with a new aesthetics of life. The ethical question on rules ends in an aesthetics.

Neither the first Foucault of archeology nor the second Foucault of „aesthetics” offers us an adequate framework for articulating social theory, according to Habermas' followers.<sup>14</sup> Habermas' critique against Foucault is similar to his critique of *Dialectics of Enlightenment*. Foucault

11 NIETZSCHE, F., *The Antichrist*, #54.

12 Comp. MACHADO, R., *Ciência e Saber*. Rio de Janeiro, 1982, p. 133.

13 Comp. FOUCAULT, M., „Qu'est — que ce les Lumières?”, *in*: *Dits et écrits*, IV, Paris, 1984.

14 Comp. For instance KELLY, M., (org) *Critique and Power*. Cambridge, 1995.

as well as Adorno and Hockheimer, makes the mistake of performative contradiction. To criticize reason we must beforehand presuppose it. Otherwise what would we criticize?

Hence where does the individual affirmation end within philosophy? In a specific „autism” of the contemporary individual? Does philosophy still have the possibility to think the individual? What we have got so far are two types of monologue within philosophy: the monologue of the modern subject and the monologue of the post-modern individual. The third alternative — which we have with Habermas — is to overcome the two types of monologue mentioned above thinking about the possibility of intersubjectivity. However this alternative ends up in an abstract structure of discourse. What then is the possibility of philosophy at the present? Can it overcome all these alternatives?

We also have another doubt. We have seen that Modernity articulates the notion of subject. Spinoza, Nietzsche and Foucault pose the question about the individual. Herein we can ask if by doing this they are escaping modern metaphysics. When Deleuze speaks about Spinoza he articulates the specific dependence of the modes of substance.<sup>15</sup> Deleuze believes that the first person to pose the principle of difference at the foundation of philosophy is Nietzsche.<sup>16</sup> Heidegger, on the contrary, aims to situate Nietzsche's philosophy within Modernity.<sup>17</sup> The will of power is the last affirmation of the subject. Instead of changing the paradigm, Nietzsche remains within the subject-object paradigm, forms of metaphysics, affirming the structures oppressed by tradition. It is even more difficult to tell whether if Foucault overcomes Modernity, etc.<sup>18</sup> However these questions do not concern us at this point. Our question is another: we have seen that within Spinoza, Nietzsche and Foucault's positions - among others — ethics frees itself from the metaphysical tradition. But we have also seen, with Nietzsche and Foucault, that when ethics is freed from metaphysics, it ends up in aesthetics. Is it still possible in this case to think about ethics nowadays? All these doubts open the discussion with Emmanuel Lévinas.

15 DELEUZE, G., *Différence et répétition*. Paris, 1968, p. 59.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 313.

17 comp., HEIDEGGER, M., *Nietzsche I, II*, Stuttgart, 1996-1997.

18 comp., DERRIDA, J., „Cogito et histoire de la folie”, in: *L'écriture et la différence*. Paris, 1967, pp. 51-99.

## 4.

In the history of philosophy we have many alternatives. Here we have analyzed some moments of the transformation of the idea of the subject within the affirmation of the individual. However it seems that all the history of philosophy commits a deep injustice when it thematizes the various forms of the Same and forgets the Other. How are we supposed to thematize the Other? We can imagine the relation of the symmetry between the Same and the Other, but in this case the doubt is if in this way we affirm the authentic position of the others. Another alternative would be the assymetric position in favor of the Same, which is something philosophy represents to thisday. And the third alternative would be the assymetry in favor of the Other. This last one is precisely the position of Lévinas.<sup>19</sup>

To elaborate such an idea, Levinas begins with the confrontation with Husserl and Heidegger. The historic importance of phenomenology is to identify being and appearance besides liberating philosophy from the dominating structures. Consciousness is an act, not a thing (*res cogitans*). To think means simply to exist, and in this case Levinas will affirm phenomenology as the philosophy of freedom.’ The practical is constituted also in intentional acts, and in this context Sartre is going to affirm the idea of freedom<sup>20</sup>, while Hannah Arendt seeks for the new possibilities of thinking politics outside the world of essences. Nevertheless, Husserl remains within Modernity and the relation between the constitutive subject and the object. The Other is considered only within the analogy with the Same.

The critique of Levinas follows that of Heidegger against Husserl. But also within Heidegger’s philosophy Levinas does not find the possibility of affirming the Other. The existential structure of *Dasein* remains closed in its own world, and the possibility of intersubjectivity becomes just a promise that Heidegger will never elaborate. In the last analysis *dasein* stays alone. Ethics and politics do not appear in Heidegger’s philosophy. It is not philosophy of the imigrants or of the others.<sup>21</sup> A specific selfishness, maybe a European one, determines Heidegger’s posture. „To him Europe and the

19 Comp. The discussion in „Les nouvelles morales”, Magazine litteraire, 361, 1998, p. 32.

20 Lévinas, E., En decouvrant l’existence avec Hursserl et Heidegger. Paris, 1974, p. 49.

21 Lévinas, E., Entre nós. Petrópolis, 1997, p. 160.

Western are central. There is a kind of geopolitics in Heidegger.”<sup>22</sup> Also the hermeneutic structure of *dasein* shows this. In all acts of understanding we have to presuppose our existence. The understanding is always self-understanding. Heidegger wants to destroy the idea of the subject, but once again being - the Other - depends on the subject.<sup>23</sup>

The ontological difference between Being (das Sein) and particular beings (das Seiende) must be overcome precisely through the ethical structures which are lacking in Heidegger.<sup>24</sup> This is the point where Levinas radicalizes the idea of Heidegger’s destruction of the metaphysical tradition. However Levinas maintains the idea of metaphysics. „Ontology presupposes metaphysics”<sup>25</sup>. The presupposition of the beings of finitude or totality is the notion of the infinite, of the Other. Philosophy is grounded on the Other, on the difference. It is only the Other that can be different for it does not arise as a specific posture of consciousness. Consciousness simply affirms the subject - the Same - and that is why it cannot be the place to affirm the Other. Because of this M. M. Ponty transforms phenomenology towards an affirmation of the body. Again we can notice such corporality and the other’s fragility in the discussion about the face. „(...) the Face is absolutely not a plastic form as a portrait; the relation towards the face is at the same time relation towards the absolutely weak - to what is absolutely exposed, what is nude and what is deprived. It is the relation with deprivation and consequently with it is alone and can suffer the supreme isolation that we call death.”<sup>26</sup> The face exposes us to nakedness without the other’s defense: it exposes his misery and mortality.<sup>27</sup>

All this means to Lévinas that an ethics today cannot be elaborated with the idea of reason, but, rather with the idea of sensitivity. Ethics is new sensitivity towards the others. The subjectivity is founded on such heteronomy. Subjectivity is Other within the Same.<sup>28</sup> This is precisely an anti-Kantian context for the foundations of ethics which are not in the autonomy of reason but in heteronomy instead, in this fundamental

22 *Ibid*, p. 161.

23 Comp. The discussion on the hermeneutic circle in: Sein and Zeit. Tübingen, 1976, p. 202.

24 Due to this J. L. Marion calls the ontologic difference the ontologic indifference (MARION, J. L., Note sur l’indifférence ontologique, in: GREISCH, J., ROLLAND, J., „Emmanuel Levinas. L’éthique comme philosophie première”. Paris, 1993, pp. 47-63.

25 Lévinas, E., Totalidade e infinito. Lisboa, 1980, p. 35.

26 Levinas, E., *ibid.*, p. 144. The State extinguishes the faces as J. Llewelyn says on his book on Lévinas: Emmanuel Levinas. The Genealogy of Ethics. London, 1995, p. 65.

27 *ibid.*, p. 269.

28 Comp., Levinas, E., Autrement qu’être ou Au-delà de l’essence. La Haye, 1974, p. 31.

responsibility towards the others. This is equally an anti-Habermasian context because the Other is the presupposition of communication. Language only exists, or we only need it, if there is the Other. The essence of language is within such hospitality towards the Others.

The ethical relation is almost religious where Levinas faces Kierkegaard. God is where the Other is affirmed. God loves the foreigners.<sup>29</sup> God is in the places where identity is overcome and where difference is found. In a discussion with Derrida, Levinas affirms that his interest is not ethics itself, or better, it is not only ethics but also the holy, the holiness of the saint.<sup>30</sup>

Where are we to hide ourselves in this dangerous world? Where will we find safe places? Certainly it won't be at a utilitarian house whose calculus may send us to the criminals. It certainly won't be at a Kantian's house who must say the truth in all circumstances. I would be much in doubt about going to a Habermasian's house, for anything could happen to our lives before we get to a discursive solution. I would have the same doubts towards a post-modern's house, orientated by the aesthetic perfection of his own life. The only safe place seems to be Levinas' house, open to the Others. Such a house offers us hospitality without reciprocity,<sup>31</sup> besides the economic influence<sup>32</sup>. In spite of this I used the word „house” in the title of this article within quotation marks. It is not a space - or at least a real one - because space reflects the metaphysics of presence. We must neutralize space to open the possibility of time. With the affirmation of the Other, the future, the perspective of time and history are opened - which is something Heidegger also searched for. With the Same we can only affirm the presence, this metaphysics of presence where there is nothing new in the world.

Levinas' house is practically a virtual one, something which is found in the way of a nomad life, without essence. It is a possibility. Ethics can only exist within this possibility of hospitality. Even Kant mentions hospitality in his work *On Perpetual Peace*, but merely in the political-

29 DERRIDA, J., *Adieu a Levinas*. Paris, 1997, p. 180.

30 *Ibid.*, p. 15.

31 It may cause some doubts. For instance whether the idea of tolerance can be established with Levinas. Should we be tolerant with those who are not with us?

32 Derrida talks about this within the discussion on ethics of gift- about the idea of giving the death. (comp. DERRIDA, J., „Donner la mort”, in: RABATE, J. M., WETZEL, M., *L'ethique du don*. Paris, 1992, pp. 11-109. Abraham gives the death. He wants to sacrifice his own son to follow his duty towards God. In that way he follows his duty towards the absolutely Other.

juridical sense. This is certainly progress, but on the other hand hospitality begins to depend on the State. For this reason the recent European initiatives to affirm such an idea of hospitality include the sovereignty of the city, the structure of society and not of the State.<sup>33</sup> Politics also enters the discussion, but only after having set the ethical presuppositions. Ethics once again gets the primacy, however, not in the Kantian sense. Without ethical presuppositions, politics distorts the individuals, judging them according to universal criteria and as if they were absent.<sup>34</sup> Without ethical presuppositions elaborated in Levinas' sense, politics remains in the form of an anonymous universality. Politics comes to us from the Other, from abroad. The relation with the Other is justice and society. Within tradition, philosophical injustice had equally its political consequences. Wars are always the denial of the others. The others were very often the enemies. Hence the enemies justify the politics of the State - being without enemies means to some States being without politics. The latter in Levinas' sense affirms the difference. In this way it is the possible sign of democracy to come.

When we affirm the difference, are we at the same time showing sensitivity towards cases of violence? The question whether it is possible to articulate the theory of tolerance based on Lévinas' philosophy was already posed. Is the one who commits violence also the Other? Levinas' answer is clear: respecting the other means to respect someone who equally shows respect toward others. Moreover, the other is always the victim and his face shows fragility.

We still have an open question. Is ethics always related to metaphysics? We have seen that Lévinas is opposed to tradition although he reserves the name metaphysics for his own philosophy. Lévinas is different from the other philosophers who articulate post-modern tendencies. It seems there are two conceptions of the idea of difference.<sup>35</sup> On one hand we have, for instance, Foucault and Deleuze who affirm the difference but from the individual himself, from the Same in the post-modern context and from his own creation. Such difference does not refer explicitly to the Others. On the other hand, both Levinas and Derrida think the difference beginning with the Other and not with the Same. Within such alternative we can again distinguish - this is important - between Levinas and Derrida. The former thinks the difference and the Other preserving

33 See DERRIDA, J., *Cosmopolites de tous les pays, encore un effort!*. Paris, 1997.

34 comp. DERRIDA, J., *Adieu ...*, p. 170.

35 Comp. CAPUTO, J., *Against Ethics*. Bloomington, 1993, p. 59.

metaphysics. The Other is the new center in philosophy and ethics is the new form of hegemony.<sup>36</sup> Is Levinas within post-modernity or not? Such classification does not matter, but the question is whether it is possible to think the difference without metaphysics. This is Derrida's attempt. Is ethics necessary to think the individual?

A person or child's suffering - for instance - does not need any further ethical interpretation. It does not need the categorical imperative's help which thematizes it as an end in itself. The categorical imperative is superfluous in a situation where a child suffers.<sup>37</sup> Do we at all need such imperatives or even speeches, in cases of suffering, to take any decision? Do we need Levinas' metaphysics? The call from a child who suffers is finite and fragile and no longer infinite or absolute.<sup>38</sup> Our obligation is no longer ethical but poetical without patterns. Hence ethics is transformed into a poetical obligation.<sup>39</sup> Obligation without ethics is already announced by Abraham and once again thought of by Kierkegaard and Derrida. Perhaps within such poetics - and no longer within ethics - is it possible to think the future of politics.

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36 *Ibid.*, p. 252.

37 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

38 *Ibid.*, p. 85.

39 *Ibid.*, p. 35.