

PART 1 (Augusto Ponzio)

Self as Justification: “I Am” as Response to the Other and for the Other. Identity and Alterity in Emmanuel Levinas

1. Premise

Returning to my monograph of 1996, *Subjectivité et alterité dans la philosophie de Emmanuel Lévinas* (l'Harmattan, Paris), I intend to illustrate an issue that is central in life and thought in today's world: the possibility that self has of justifying itself before the other. This possibility subtends the constitution of identity in relation to the individual, class, nation, and community. As regards Western thought, all its culture is a justification towards others. Peoples inhabiting the so-called developed world (15% of the world population) still succeed in justifying themselves in the face of peoples inhabiting the underdeveloped world (85% of the world population), with all necessary means. The reason of identity is reason against the other. But for how long can this situation last? At a certain point it will be necessary to answer to the other not only for self but also for the other him/herself.

2. The infinite insistence of waves on a beach: the work of Emmanuel Levinas

The problem of otherness and the critique of identity as a pivotal category of Occidental Reason are central issues in the whole work of Emmanuel Levinas (1905-1995).

Of all his works *Totality and Infinity* (1961) is certainly the book that gives us an excellent point of view on his research, its sense and purpose, as well as an excellent example of his habit in investigation, his style in writing. Concerning the latter aspect, says Derrida, [...] Levinas's writing, which would merit an entire separate study itself, and in which stylistic gestures (especially in *Totality and Infinity*) can less than be distinguished from intention, forbids the prosaic disembodiment into conceptual frameworks that is the first violence of all commentary. Certainly, Levinas recommends the good usage of prose which breaks Dionysiac charm or violence, and forbids poetic rapture, but to no avail: in *Totality and Infinity* the use of metaphor, remaining the most decisive movements of the discourse. (Derrida 1967, Eng. trans.: 312, note 7)

We may say of all Levinas's work what Derrida says about *Totality and Infinity*:

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Further in *Totality and Infinity* the thematic development is neither purely descriptive nor purely deductive. It proceeds with the infinite insistence of waves on a beach: return and repetition, always, of the same wave against the same shore, in which, however, as each return recapitulates itself, it also infinitely renews and enriches itself. (Ibid.; see also Ponzio 1996)

The predictive and farseeing character of this text considered in relation to today's reality derives from its profound and lucid comprehension of the essential features of Occidental Reason and its logic of

identity, which today the global communication system emphasizes.

In the Preface to *Totality and Infinity* (1961, Eng. trans.: 21-30) Levinas's reflection begins with the topic of war, considered as the very patency, or the truth, of the real, as is evident without reference to Heraclitus's fragments. In war, reality obtrudes in its nudity and harshness.

The state of war rescinds ad interim, the moral imperatives, even better, renders them derisory. On the contrary, war extols politics, the art of foreseeing and winning it by every means, as the very exercise of reason. "The trial by force is the test of the real". (Ibid. 21)

The face of being that shows itself in war is the face of Western reason. War reveals the connection between politics and ontology, as well as showing the subordination of individuals anchored in their identity to the totality, to an ontological order from which there is no escape. The concept of totality, which dominates Western philosophy, is confirmed in war with the reduction of individuals to being bearers of forces that command them unbeknown to themselves. Their sense is derived only from the totality; their uniqueness is sacrificed to objective sense, which exists only in this totality.

But war also reveals the connection between ontology and history.

The totality of being is revealed in objective history, for only the future may show objective sense. There is no sense beyond the totality and beyond history. Individual and collective identities await the judgement of history.

Furthermore, in the logic of war, which is the realistic logic of being, of ontology, politics, totality, history, peace may only be the peace of war, peace understood as the end of war, as truce and preparation for war.

3. The breach of the harsh law of war

The Preface to *Totality and Infinity* starts with the question if lucidity, the mind's openness upon the true, consists in catching sight of the permanent possibility of war. On the basis of the connection between war, ontology, politics, history, totality, and truth in the perspective of Western Reason, the answer is necessarily in the affirmative.

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The protestation of an individual in the name of his personal egoism or even of his salvation is of no avail: "[...] a proclamation of morality based on the pure subjectivism of the I is refuted by war, the totality it reveals, and the objective necessities" (Ibid. 25). Given the irrefutable evidence of the totality and the opposition of peace to war, "evidence of war has been maintained in an essentially hypocritical civilisation, that is, attached both to the True and to the Good, henceforth antagonistic" (Ibid. 24).

The only way out towards a non-hypocritical moral and towards peace that is not based on war is the following: the possibility that "irrefutable" evidence "refers from itself to a situation that can no longer be stated in terms of 'totality'". (Ibid.)

[...] we can proceed from the experience of totality back to a situation where totality breaks up, a situation that conditions the totality itself. Such a situation is the gleam of exteriority or of transcendence in the face of the Other [*visage d'autrui*]. The rigorously developed concept of

this transcendence is expressed by the term infinity. (Ibid. 24-25)
Totality an infinity does present itself as a defence of subjectivity, but it will apprehend subjectivity not at the level of its purely egoist protestation against totality, nor in its anguish before death and in its isolated “being-for-death” (Martin Heidegger, 1989-1976), but as founded in the relation with the other.

The relationship of individual identity, or the same (*le Même*), with the other (the other person, the other man, *Autrui*) reveals the very possibility of the breach of the totality, that is, in Levinas’s words, the “possibility of infinity”: the relationship with the absolutely other overflows the totality. The absolutely other is “*autrui*” (Ibid. 39). “*Autrui*” in French is a personal pronoun that means the personal other, the other person, the other man. The other always overflows the totality, reason, identity, conscience, thought. A real and proper “*infinition*” is produced in this overflowing of objectifying thought. The other is what the totality of being and of thought can neither embrace nor encompass. Infinity, that is, the breach of the totality, identity, order of discourse, which is produced in the relationship of the same with the other, delivers the subjectivity from the judgement of history to declare it ready for judgement at every moment and [...] called to participate in this judgement, impossible without it. (Ibid. 25)

The relation with infinity, which is experience of irreducibility of the other to the same, to the totality—therefore, experience in the fullest sense of the word, if experience means precisely a relation with the absolutely other—is also the breach of the harsh law of war.

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The harsh law of war breaks up not against an impotent subjectivism cut off from being, but against the infinite, more objective than objectivity (Ibid. 25-26).

The relationship with the absolutely other, that is, with what is irreducible to the Same, to Reason, to Identity—the relationship of the same with the other, in which is produced the experience of infinity—is not only beyond the totality, but is also the very basis of totality.

Subjectivity contains the experience of infinity. It results essentially as welcoming the other, as hospitality. Identity is fundamentally a relation of otherness. All knowing presupposes the experience of infinity, which is experience of *non-adequation* in the fullest sense of the word. The relation with the relatively other is based on the relation with an absolutely other.

Identity contains more than it is possible to contain, because it is founded on otherness: there is in the finite the idea of the infinite, as Descartes calls it. According to Levinas who refers to Descartes, “infinite” means both *non-finite*, beyond the finite, and *infinite*, inside the finite.

4. The I-Other relationship

According to Levinas the relation of otherness is neither reducible to *being-with*, Martin Heidegger’s *Mitsein*, nor to Jean-Paul-Sartre’s *beingfor*. Otherness is located inside the subject, identity, the I, which is itself a dialogue, a relation between same and other.

The other is inseparable from the I, the same (*Même* as intended by

Levinas), and as *étranger*, absolutely other, it cannot be included within the totality of the same. The other is necessary to the constitution of the I and its world, but at the same time it is refractory to all those categories that wish to extinguish its otherness, thus subjecting it to the identity of the same.

Otherness is not out of the sphere of the I, which does not lead to its assimilation, but, quite on the contrary, gives rise to a constitutive impediment to the integrity and closure of the I as Identity, as totality, as the same. The relation with the other is intended as a relation of excess, as a surplus, as the overcoming of objectifying thought, as release from the relation between the subject and the object and from the relation of work and trade.

The same/other relation irreducibly transcends the realm of knowledge, of the concept, of abstract thought, even though the latter are all possible thanks to this relation.

Instead the I/other relation, as proposed by Levinas, has an ethical foundation. But what does “ethical” mean in this context? Levinas gives

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the following explanation:

We call ethical a relationship between terms such as are united neither by a synthesis of the understanding nor by a relationship between subject and object, and yet where the one weighs or concerns or is meaningful to the other, where they are bound by a plot which knowing can neither exhaust nor unravel. (Levinas, “Langage et proximité”, in Levinas 1967, Eng. trans.: 116, note)

A movement towards the other without return to the self, to identity, connotes the *specifically human* present in any human enterprise, in “all human work [*œuvre*], commercial and diplomatic” (Levinas 1948, Eng. trans.: 2) whatever this may be. As says Levinas, beyond perfect adaptation to its own goal, the human enterprise

[...] bears witness to an accord with some destiny extrinsic to the course of things, which situates it outside the world, like the forever bygone past of ruins, like the elusive strangeness of the exotic. (Ibid.)

In a chapter entitled “La signification et le sens” in his book of 1972, *L’humanisme de l’autre homme* (Eng. trans. “Meaning and Sense”, in Levinas 1987: 75-107. *Oeuvre* is translated “work”). Levinas uses the term *œuvre* to designate a movement towards the other where the possibility of return to self is excluded:

An œuvre conceived radically is a movement of the Same towards the Other which never returns to the Same. (Ibid. 91)

To accept the concept of *œuvre* as designating the specifically human, the orientation in which the human is realized, means to support a kind of humanism, says Levinas, that inverts the usual itinerary of philosophy when conceived as that which

[...] remains that of Ulysses, whose adventure in the world was only a return to his native island — a complacency in the Same, an unrecognition of the other. (Ibid.)

Identity and *étrangété*, otherness: these are the two faces of the real which realism does not capture. In a paper significantly entitled “La

réalité et son ombre”, 1948, Levinas says:

Being is not only itself, it escapes itself. Here is a person who is what he is; but he does not make us forget, does not absorb, cover over

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I We may say with Jacques Derrida (*Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas*, Eng. trans. 1999) that in Levinas, “Yes, ethics before and beyond ontology, the State, or politics, but also ethics beyond ethics.” Levinas bequeaths to us an “immense treatise of hospitality”, a meditation on the welcome offered to the other.

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entirely the objects he holds and the way he holds them, his gestures, limbs, gaze, thought, skin, which escape from under the identity of his substance, which like a torn sack is unable to contain them. Thus a person bears on his face, alongside of its being with which he coincides, its own caricature, its picturesqueness. The picturesque is always to some extent a caricature. Here is a familiar everyday thing, perfectly adapted to the hand which is accustomed to it, but its qualities, color, form, and position at the same time remain as it were behind its being, like the “old garments” of a soul which had withdrawn from that thing, like a “still life”. (1948, Eng. trans.: 6)

5. An unbounded responsibility

Taking their distances implicitly and explicitly from a tradition of thought on dialogue understood as the exchange of rejoinders among preconstituted and predefined subjects, Levinas considers dialogism as a fundamental condition of human subjects, their consciousness and, therefore, as a sort of a priori. Our allusion is to what Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) (see Bakhtin 1981, Ponzio 2003) calls *substantial dialogue* as distinct from *formal dialogue*, substantial dialogue which is also the structure of the I. Therefore, language as contact, proximity, being one-for-the-other, language as witness, involvement, intercorporeity, exposition to the other, intersubjectivity, complicity antecedent to accordance and to disaccordance is already dialogue. The dialogic relation is inseparably connected with responsibility. As says Levinas:

Responsibility for another is not an accident that happens to a subject, but precedes essence in it, has not awaited freedom, in which a commitment to another would have been made. [...] The word I means here I am, answering for everything and for everyone. [...] Responsibility for the others has not been a return to oneself, but an exasperated contracting, which the limits of identity cannot retain.

[Responsibility for another] is a responsibility of the ego for what the ego has not wished, that is, for the others. (1974, Eng. trans.: 114; see also *Levinas Dieu, la mort et le temps*, 1993, p. 183).

Responsibility is involvement, exposition, proximity of one-for-the-other. The condition of unlimited responsibility testifies to our obligation to the otherness relationship, to dialogism. The I in itself is already dialogue, an I/other relationship. Otherness is present at the very heart of identity; it is structural to identity, a basic condition for the very realisation of identity.

To speak not only means to speak with the words of others, but also to keep account of the other in a relation of inevitable involvement and implication, such that to speak is always to answer, also in the sense

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of to answer for, in the first place, to answer for oneself, to justify oneself. The I speaks and in so doing answers to the other. As Levinas says in "Nonintentional Consciousness" ("La conscience non intentionnelle", in Levinas 1991, Eng. trans. 122-132), the first case in which I is declined is not the nominative but the *accusative* (Ibid. 129). The other interrogates the I. And the question of the something, of being is inseparable from the question of the I itself which must first answer for itself, for the place it occupies in the world, and for its relating to others. This means that *first philosophy*, as Levinas maintains is *ethics*. As says Levinas, the main question is not *why is there being instead of nothingness?* (Heidegger), but rather why is my being here in this place, in this dwelling, in this situation, while another is excluded? The origin of human signification is not "intentional consciousness" (Edmund Husserl) but, as says Levinas, consciousness that is not intentional, consciousness understood in an ethical sense and not in a cognitive sense, more exactly "bad consciousness". This bad consciousness attempts to justify itself, to appease itself, to make itself comfortable regarding questions raised by the other simply because the other is present. Bad consciousness in so doing reconciles itself as illusory "good consciousness".

6. Exposition and outside

According to Levinas, the true problem for us Westerners is not so much to refuse violence as to question ourselves about a struggle against violence which could be a struggle against the institution of violence (1974, Eng. trans.: 177). "Preventive war" is not a struggle against the institution of violence but is itself violence and feeding violence. On the contrary, that which is necessary is *preventive peace*. War against war, war against terrorism, perpetuates that which it is called to make disappear, war against war consecrates war and its virile values in good conscience. We may say, developing Levinas's reflexions, that "Just" and "necessary" wars, "humanitarian" and "preventive" wars are wars made with a good conscience. Refusal of violence which languishes in passive non-resistance to evil, and refusal of violence which is war against war may benefit from the alibi of good conscience, but both encourage violence and prime "infinite war".

The way to preventive peace is the way of *bad conscience*, of *patience* that does not ask patience of others and is based on a difference between one self and others, on an *inequality* in a sense absolutely opposed to oppression. Preventive peace is in *non-indifference*, nonindifference to the other, to another, non-indifference which is responsibility for the other, "the very difference between me and the other" (Ibid. 178). I am answerable before the other, responsible before all others for all others. I am responsible for the very faults of another. The

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condition of being hostage is an authentic figure of responsibility for the other.

Peace that is otherwise than peace of war is otherwise than being, is peace beyond essence. There is not peace without openness to the beyond essence, beyond inwardness to being, the beyond of being at

home, “the being at home with oneself, of which European history itself has been the conquest and jealous defence”(Ibid.). Nevertheless this history of the West bears, in its margins, the trace of events carrying *another* signification, and the victims immolated and ignored in the great sense of History have a separate signification from this sense. Then the very signifyingness of different and exceptional signification is non-indifference for the other, “the-one-for-the-other”.

Non-indifference for the other, that is, responsibility without alibis for the other, is openness toward the other than being. This openness is not the initiative of an intentional subject, an effect again of its will, inwardness in being, interest. This openness has another sense from that of accessibility through open doors or windows, another signification from that of disclosure, or of will to dialogue. It is openness outside the subject, outside the theme, without the possibility of being absorbed in the “object”, without the possibility of seeing, knowing, understanding, grasping, taking in hand, operating and possessing, outside the good intentions of a subject. Openness is “disinterestedness” (*disinter - essemment*) (Ibid.), is openness outside the *essence* (*essemment*)—the process or event of being—outside *conatus essendi*.

Openness signifies the outside without cover, without shelter, it signifies non-protection, homelessness, non-world, non-inhabitation, layout without security. But the significations of openness are not only privative: openness signifies the other side of identity, of inwardness, the demythization of the I, the situation before its closure in the abstract notions of freedom and non freedom, the situation in which one is not yet nailed to the I. There is in openness “a complex of significations deeper and broader than freedom”, where “inwardness frees itself from itself, and is exposed to all the winds”(Ibid. 180). There is exposure without deliberation, which would already be closedness, closure in identity, in its illusory barricades. Non-indifference is a passivity, wholly supporting. It penetrates identity even in the retreats of its inwardness and obsesses it before all thematization, before taking a foothold in being. Non-indifference is exposure of the subject without his “as-forme” of defence and aggression, exposure without reciprocity. “The exposure precedes the initiative a voluntary subject would take to expose itself” (Ibid.). It opens on to the world but is not in-the-world, is not being in-the-world. The restlessness of passivity – a passivity more passive still than the passivity of matter – in the exposure to another, in responsibility for him, the restlessness which takes place without a deci-

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sion, is restlessness in exposure to another exposure, that is to the openness of a face, the face of the other, the openness of its nudity.

Exposure to another is the asymmetric relation in the face to face position (see Ibid. 189-193). Face to face position is exposition of one’s own nudity, out of role, without position, function, power, defence. It is my relation in my alterity to the other in his alterity. Alterity in the face to face exposition is not relative alterity of roles, positions, functions, power. It is absolute alterity. The exposedness of an alterity to another alterity in the face to face relation is before identity, subjectivity, freedom, language, being and it is their condition.

Preventive peace, liberation from the world of war, this opening up, this *beyond*, is in the proximity of a neighbour. The other, my neighbour, concerns me with a closeness closer than the closeness of the being of things, of world, with a proximity closer than presence, a proximity in his same absence. Proximity of the other is responsibility for the other. Proximity means my not delegable responsibility—in my unicity, oneness, as a unique being—for the other, my subjection to the other, the support of a crushing charge of alterity. Singularisation is not a propriety of the subject itself, but the consequence of the not delegable responsibility of the subject in his alterity to the other in his alterity.

Non-indifference to the other—and ever more in the world of globalisation, to my neighbour—is an openness of self without a world, without a place, is the not being walled in being, the not being nailed to being, “*u-topia*” (Ibid. 182). U-topia with respect to the unity, the community, which, in spite of incomparability, the oneness of each one of us, drags us off and assembles us on the same side, “chaining us to one another like galley slaves, emptying proximity of its meaning” (Ibid.). U-topia as beyond being, otherwise than being, disinterested-ness (*disinterestedness*), the excluded middle besides being and not being.

Exposed to the proximity of the other the I of each individual is virtually a chosen one, called to leave the identity of the ego and its extension in the unity of community, people, agglomerations of peoples, to respond with responsibility: *me, here I am*, that is, *here I am for others*. So in the order or disorder of the modern world, in which peoples and their agglomerations or dispersions are in the desert without the manna of their customs, their wretchedness, their illusions and their, already degenerate, redemptive systems, the subject breaking with identity loses his place radically or his shelter in being, to enter into ubiquity, which is also a u-topia.

The responsibility for the other cannot have begun in my commitment, in my decision. The unlimited responsibility in which I find myself comes from the hither side of my freedom, from a “prior to every memory”, an “ulterior to every accomplishment”, from the non-present par excellence, the non-original, the anarchical, prior to or beyond

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essence. The responsibility for the other is the locus in which is situated the null-site of subjectivity, where the privilege of the question “Where?” no longer holds. (Ibid. 10)

U-topia of absolute exposition to the other, responsibility for the other has nothing to do with utopianism considered as such by the realistic vision of modern man who interprets himself as a being among beings, while instead the very character of modernity consists in the fact that it is impossible solidly anchored to self, identity, territory, roots, being, in a word, to remain at home. Concerning his book *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, which is exposed imprudently to the reproach of utopianism, says Levinas:

This book escapes the reproach of utopianism—if utopianism is a reproach, if any thought escapes utopianism—by recalling that *what took place humanly has never been able to remain closed up in its side*. (Ibid. 184)

7. Bad conscience and alterity

Prereflexive, confused consciousness, preceding all intention, all will, all aim, which is not acting, but pure passivity, is *bad conscience* (see Levinas “Nonintentional Consciousness”, in Levinas 1991, Eng. trans.: 123-132).² Without identity, without the protective mask of responsibility delimiting itself in the mirror of the self—self-assured and affirming himself—, without titles, stripped bare of all attributes, consciousness is consciousness not in the world by virtue of its being-without-having-chosen-to-be, as in the Heideggerian *Geworfenheit* (see Heidegger 1927, Eng. trans.: 67), but in question: bad conscience. Bad conscience is consciousness on the hither side of the self that already puts itself forward and affirms itself, or confirms itself in the world and in being, in the very manifestation of its emphatic identity, in saying “I”.

Consciousness preceding the consciousness of a subject already distinguished, identified, justified, posited as the “indeclinable nominative”, assured of its right to be, is a questioning of affirmation and confirmation of being, and the *accusative* in a sense is its first “case”. The questioning of being by death which is always premature does not perturb or thwart the good conscience of being, or the rights of identity.

Bad consciousness is questioning of the very justice of the position in being *by the other*. Being as bad conscience, being put into question is having to answer to another, to one’s fellow man.

The pre-reflective I is the I pre-occupied, non-indifferent, before the face of the other, the I of the bad conscience. The I of the “good conscience”

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²In Levinas the French word “*conscience*” is used for both consciousness and conscience. Bad consciousness is ethical conscience.

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is the I of the bad conscience who has shielded himself, but has also forgotten, under the justifications of identity and its indifferent difference, the first person of whom the accusative is his first case. Good conscience is the I of the interchangeable individual who has forgotten the first person who is subject to others and incomparable to others, non-interchangeable, irreplaceable, unique in his responsibility for others and who is precisely not an individual of a genus (see Levinas 1982, Eng. trans.: 168-169). The I of bad conscience is the I exposed to the very uprightness of the face of the other who—writes Levinas playing on the dual sense of *regarder* as “looking at”, “to concern”—whether he looks at me or not, concerns me [*qu’il me regarde ou non, il ‘me regard’*] (see *Ibid.* 171).

The questioning of consciousness and its configuration as bad conscience is the basis of the I: the I starts from the accusative case, from responsibility without alibis for the other. Being in the first person, being myself, being “I”, is having to answer for my right to be, being as bad conscience: being put into question, but also put to the question, being responsible. Language originates from having to answer for one’s right to be, that is, from bad conscience. Having to speak, having to say “I”: this is justification as regards the other. The essence of language is non-indifference, responsibility; it is “friendship and hospitality” (1961, Eng. trans.: 305). Identity is a combination of justifications. Bad conscience is non-indifference towards the other, fear for the other: a fear that goes back behind and despite my good conscience and comes to me

from the face of the other. The rights of my identity originate in order to justify my “being in the world” or my “place in the sun”, my home. They originate in order to silence bad conscience and its fear for the other who has already been oppressed or starved by me, by my usurpation of place that might belong to the other (“Nonintentional Consciousness” 1983, Eng. trans.: 130-131). The question about my right to be is already my responsibility for the other. To be or not to be, says Levinas, is probably not the question *par excellence*. The question *par excellence*, or the first question, is not even the Heideggerian question “why is there being rather than nothing?”, but the question that is repressed by good conscience: “have I right to be?” (1982, Eng. trans.: 171). Exposed to another in the face to face position, the I is without alibis, in the accusative case, in the situation of having to answer for his being in the world, for his place, for his usurpation, for the *Da*, here, of his own *Dasein* (here-being) from which the other is excluded.

Return to bad conscience and its responsibility and non-indifference for the other is a suspension of the rights of identity with their negation of all otherness and their exclusion of the other: “a suspension of war and politics which pass themselves off as relation of the Same to the Other” (“Nonintentional Consciousness”, in Levinas 1991, Eng. trans.: 132). The human, writes Levinas (Ibid.), is the return to bad conscience, *Self as Justification 21*

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to the possibility, as says Socrates in *Gorgia*, of fearing injustice more than death, of preferring injustice undergone to injustice committed.

8. Responsibility, justice, and state

Responsibility for the other is the original relation with the other. It is unlimited responsibility. This responsibility, according to Levinas, is the “secret of sociality” (“Diachrony and representation”, in Levinas 1991, Eng. trans.: 169). From the start, the encounter with the other is the responsibility for him, for one’s “neighbour”, which is the name for the man, whoever he is, for whom one is responsible. Love, as non-indifference, charity, is original, and it is original peace (see “Philosophy, Justice, and Love”, in Ibid. 103-121).

Peace cannot be identified with the end of combats that cease for want of combatants, by the defeat of some and the victory of the others, that is with cemeteries or future universal empires. Peace must be my peace, in a relation that starts from an I and goes to the other, in desire and goodness, where the I both maintains itself and exists without egoism (Levinas 1961, Eng. trans.: 306).

Original peace is what Levinas calls an “asymmetry of intersubjectivity”, an exceptional, extraordinary situation of the I. Levinas recalls Dostoevsky on this subject. In *Brothers Karamazov* one of the characters says: “we are all guilty for everything and everyone, and I more than all the others”.

Original peace is the absolute anteriority of the face of the other. The face of the other, encounter with the other, requires me as the one responsible for the other. This responsibility is inalienable. It is a responsibility of the I as a singularity, unique, and it is different from a responsibility you, as the individual of a genus, yield to someone. Unlimited and inalienable responsibility for others is the very possibility

of the uniqueness of the one and only, beyond the particularity of the individual in a genus. In the relation to the face, to the absolutely weak, to what is absolutely exposed as bare and destitute, responsibility is an election, an individuation without the genus, a principle of individuation. Says Levinas: “on the famous problem: ‘Is man individuated by matter, or individuated by form?’ , I support individuation by responsibility for the other” (“Philosophy, Justice, and Love”, in Levinas 1991, Eng. trans.: 108). I am responsible for every man, my neighbour, and no one can substitute me. In this sense I am chosen.

I am responsible for the other, although the other is not responsible for me. As says Dostoevsky, I am responsible for another more than anyone else. The relationship with the other is not symmetrical, it is not at all in Martin Buber (see Levinas, “Martin Buber and the Theory of Knowledge”, in Levinas 1976, Eng. trans. : 17-39).

According to Levinas’s analysis, “at the outset I hardly care what

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the other is with respect to me, that is his own business; for me, he is above all the one I am responsible for” (Ibid. 105). The other, my fellow, is the first comer. From the outset, encounter with the face of the other is my responsibility for him. The other, my fellow, is also a foreigner. I am responsible for the other even when he commits crime, even when he bothers me, even when he persecutes me. But I do not live in a world in which there is but one single “first comer”; there is always another other, a third, who is also my other, my fellow.

The third is himself also a neighbour, and also falls within the purview of the I’s responsibility. Otherness, beginning with this third, is a plurality. Proximity is a human plurality. The I has to know which one of the two others has precedence. The I, as responsible for the other and the third, is responsible for their interactions. The I is responsible for the other even when he commits crimes, even when others commit crimes. The I is responsible for the persecution of his neighbours. They have a right to defence. If self-defence is a problem for the I, this problem appears because one threatens his neighbour. For the I the question of the others is a demand for justice. There is a necessity for justice (see Levinas, “Diachrony and Representation”, in Levinas 1991, Eng. trans.: 166-167). There is the obligation to compare unique and incomparable others. This is the moment of knowledge. Justice emerges from responsibility for the other. Responsibility for the other precedes justice. Justice is born from non-indifference, love, charity.

Justice calls for judgement and requires a comparison of what is in principle incomparable, is unique. Comparison, equity, objectivity appear with justice. Justice requires perception of the individual in a genus, it requires species and genus.

The I, precisely as responsible for the other and the third, cannot remain indifferent to their interactions, and in the charity for the one, cannot withdraw its love from the other. The self, the I, cannot limit itself to the incomparable uniqueness of each one, which is expressed in the face of each one. Behind the unique singularities, one must perceive the individuals of a *genus*, one must compare them, judge them, and condemn them. There is a subtle ambiguity of the individual and the

unique, the personal and the absolute, the mask and the face. This is the hour of inevitable justice—required, however, by charity itself.

The hour of Justice, of the comparison between incomparables, who are grouped by human species and genus. And the hour of institutions empowered to judge, of states within which institutions are consolidated, of Universal Law which is always *dura lex*, and of citizens equal before the law (Levinas, “The Other, Utopia, and Justice”, in *Ibid.* 229).

Justice requires judges, institutions, laws and, consequently, the state. In a world of citizens, identities, individuals, persons, masks, belonging to a community is necessary, and not only the face to face

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relationship, of unique to unique. “If there were no order of justice, there would be no limit to my responsibility” (Levinas, “Philosophy, Justice, and Love”, in *Ibid.* 105). Thus the state emerges from the limitation of non-indifference and charity and not, as in Hobbes’s vision, from the limitation of violence and fear of others (*homo homini lupus*). According to Levinas, the problematic of justice is opened in terms of justice and defence of the other, my fellow, and not in terms of threat that concerns me (see *Ibid.*; also Poirié 1987: 104-105 and 115-119). On the basis of justice and state there is not a fear of the other, the other that bothers and persecutes me. On the basis of justice and state there is a fear for the other, a fear of persecution of my neighbours, because I am, more than anyone else, responsible for the other even when he commits crimes, even when he suffers crimes and persecutions.

According to justice, asymmetry of intersubjectivity tends to become symmetry, equality, exchange, relations under the same conditions, equal rights. To treat all men with justice also means to treat myself with justice, and certainly my unlimited responsibility, my responsibility for all, can and has to manifest itself also in limiting itself. The I is himself third in the relation of the other to another and he too calls for justice. In the name of his unlimited responsibility, the I is called to look after himself, to care for himself. But unlimited and asymmetric responsibility which justifies this concern for justice, for oneself can be forgotten. In this forgetting, says Levinas, consciousness is pure egoism (see Levinas 1974, Eng. trans.: 128). Egoistic interests take dramatic form in egoisms struggling with one another, each against all, in the multiplicity of allergic egoisms which are at war with one another and are thus together. (*Ibid.* 4)

War is the “deed or the drama” (*Ibid.*) of egoistic interest. Nobody has patience, is patient with the other, there is no time for the other. Nobody can await his hour. The extreme synchronism, without time for the other, without patience, without alterity is War. In the “inevitable” determination of war there is “extreme contemporaneousness or immanence” (*Ibid.*).

To the extent that the face of the other relates the I to the third party, the irreducible relation of the face to face assumes the form of the We, moves into a state, institutions, laws, which are the source of universality. But politics left to itself deforms the I and the other, because it judges them according to universal rules. Politics bears a tyranny (see Levinas 1961, Eng. trans.: 300). Justice founded on non-indifference, charity and

love for the other becomes indifference and cruelty. Only the responsibility of I as unicity and its relation to the face constitute the reference to which justice and the work of the state must be reconducted, and which they must take as their model.

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Augusto Ponzio (b. 1942) is Full Professor of Philosophy of Language and General Linguistics and Head of the Department of Linguistic Practices and Text Analysis at Bari University, Italy. His principal research areas include philosophy of language, general linguistics, semiotics, and theory of literature. His recent major publications include: *Production linguistique et idéologie sociale* (1992); *Signs, Dialogue and Ideology* (1993); *El juego del comunicar. Entre literatura y filosofía* (1995); *Sujet e alterité. Sur Emmanuel Lévinas* (1996); *La revolución bajtiniana. El pensamiento de Bajtín y la ideología contemporánea*, (1998); *La coda dell'occhio. Letture del linguaggio letterario* (1998); *Enunciazione e testo letterario nell'insegnamento dell'italiano come LS* (2001); *Individuo umano, linguaggio e globalizzazione nella filosofia di Adam Schaff* (2002); *La differenza nonindifferente* (2002); *Il*

linguaggio e le lingue (2002); (with M. Lomuto) *Semiotica della musica* (1998); (with S. Petrilli), *Signs of Research on Signs*, *Semiotische Berichte* Jg. 22, 3, 4 (1998), *Fuori campo. I segni del corpo tra rappresentazione ed eccellenza* (1999), *Philosophy of Language, Art and Answerability in Mikhail Bakhtin* (2000), *Il sentire della comunicazione globale* (2000). *Thomas Sebeok and the Signs of Life* (2001), *I segni e la vita. La semiotica globale di Thomas A. Sebeok* (2002), *Semioetica* (2003); (with T. A. Sebeok and S. Petrilli), *L'io semiotico* (2001); his most recent monographs include *I segni tra globalità e infinità. Per la critica della comunicazione globale* (2003); *Elogio dell'infunzionale* (2004); *Semiotica e dialettica* (2004).

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