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# The Ethics of the Other

Luis Ruben Diaz

*University of Texas at El Paso*, [lr Diaz2@miners.utep.edu](mailto:lr Diaz2@miners.utep.edu)

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THE ETHICS OF THE OTHER

LUIS DIAZ

Department of Philosophy

APPROVED:

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Jules Simon, Ph.D., Chair

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John Haddox, Ph.D.

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Guillermina Gina Núñez, Ph. D.

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Patricia D. Witherspoon, Ph. D.  
Dean of the Graduate School

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By

Luis Ruben Diaz

2009

To my Father

THE ETHICS OF THE OTHER

By

LUIS RUBEN DIAZ, BA.

THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at El Paso

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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## The Ethics of the Other

### Introduction

I consider that our society is going through a globalization process where different systems are being questioned by the presence of other perspectives. This process has revealed the flaws of our traditional moral systems where conflicts were solved through a belief system that had been proved and accepted by the majority of the individuals of a given society. However, since an inclusive global society needs to incorporate different beliefs systems into its moral considerations, and this implies a clash between the different moral codes that exist in different cultures, we need to find a way where persons establish an ethical relation with each other regardless of the endorsement of a system. In my thesis I propose that Levinas' philosophy is the best alternative to build this ethical relationship between the I and the other. In the first chapter I will analyze Levinas' idea of Ethics as first philosophy, as well as the way language is affected by this ethical need. After I analyze Levinas' ideas I will move to the second chapter where we will see that the admission of diversity is vital to have a better knowledge of the world and with this we can achieve a well-rounded life. In the third chapter I also use Antonio Caso's philosophies to support Levinas' position that contrary to an individualistic society--where individual independence is of the highest importance--interdependency between the I and the other is necessary for it is in this ethical relationship where the individual freely becomes himself. The last chapter of my thesis is a sketch of my ideas of the relationship between the I and the other. In this chapter I propose that the other plays a more active role than just questioning the I. I argue that the other, understood here as the person that does not fit mainstream society, is an active member of society that is not only

a form of resistance to any attempt to totalize him, but has his own identity. He uses this identity to support the idea of diversity as opposed to standardization, as the best way to create a society where a person can achieve a well-rounded life.



## Chapter I: Levinas' Philosophy

### 1.1 Ethics as First Philosophy

In his essay "Ethics as First Philosophy" (EFP 77) Levinas presents us with his answer to the question of the meaning of being: the ethical responsibility to the face of the other. Levinas says that a direct responsibility is gained from the Other by recognition of his visage. This assertion is a result of Levinas distancing himself from Husserl's transcendental idealism and Heidegger's hermeneutics. It is possible that this placement of total responsibility for the Other on the I was partially his personal response to the horrors of the Holocaust, but he was also contending Husserl's phenomenological case of making intentionality the ultimate meaning-giver of the world. Levinas instead proposes Ethics to be the first philosophy.

Levinas critiques Husserl's position by saying that it creates a circular situation that soon would require the I to isolate itself from the otherness of the world in such a way that does not value different perspectives. A prime example lies in contemporary philosophy wherein it is a rarity for philosophers to study or even know about Mexican philosophy or philosophical traditions other than Continental and analytic philosophies. With this in mind, it is not difficult to accept Levinas' argument that a person shapes the world from a limited perspective; every conceptualization of the world obeys his ideas of how the world is in such a way that the identical and non-identical are identified, leading him to a position where he intentionality defines the objects of his consciousness. In other words, the world and the people of which it consists are mere objects at the mercy of the consciousness of the I. If the I perceives an object to be an extension of his being, then he has ownership of the object. The only parameter that the I has to evaluate the soundness of his proposition is his own

conception of this relationship. He does not establish this as a conversation between equals for the other is objectified and should thus surrender to his will. There is no room for the other to have a voice in this definition. It is clear to see that his propositions will always be confirmed for he is asking and responding to himself, creating in this way the circle that Levinas cautions against.

Levinas also attacks Husserl's argument that the independence self-consciousness has from the world should prove it as the master of the universe that can impose power upon anything that resists. As we will see later, Levinas says that there is a non-intentional consciousness that prevents intentionality from being the first philosophy, but for the moment allow me to focus on his critique of Husserl's conception of intentionality as first philosophy. As I said before, for Husserl the idea that consciousness does not depend on the world to confirm its existence because it is able to think about itself, as in being conscious of his consciousness- confirms the supremacy of consciousness over the world. Levinas says that this "transcendental reduction suspends all independence of the world other than that of self-consciousness, and causes the world to be rediscovered as noema" (EFP 79). In other words, the I gives meaning to the world under the mask of the pursuit of truth and conceives the world as an object waiting to receive an interpretation. For us to know objects, we essentially bestow their state of being. However, by virtue of this mere act, the otherness loses itself into the knowledge and the apprehension that the I now has of it.

As we have seen, under Husserl's conception, self-consciousness would be the first philosophy; the way we approach and apprehend the world. Under this principle of self-consciousness as a meaning giver, a person is entitled to make the first contact with the other

and surrender him to his own categories. The other is totalized by the conceptualization that the I makes of him with the obvious risks this may carry. Levinas argues that if “the *wisdom of first philosophy* is reduced to self-consciousness ... [and] the labor of thought wins over the otherness of things and men” (EFP, 78), we will be in danger because that is to admit the idea that a person who considers self-consciousness the ultimate meaning-giver of the world has the right to totalize other people under his own categories. Furthermore, I would argue that once we accept the principle that the I’s intentionality is the supreme ruler of the world, the I would be self-justified, and may reject the idea of the other as a subject with dignity and value by himself. This in consequence will reduce the other to a mere object of the I’s self-consciousness. This thought may lead the I to think that he has the right to do what he pleases with other people and the world, and has no need for an ethical code to justify or constrain his conduct. As we will see later, Levinas does not maintain that this ethical code is to be expressed in laws or social pacts; it is unconstrained by time. This is to say that the ethical duty to the other does not depend on an agreement that we may reach as in social pact theories or is forced upon us by the laws of a nation. Our ethical duty is there even before we or our civilization were born. This responsibility made apparent by the other is in fact the place where we start to build our own presence in the world.

In addition to the risks already elucidated by Levinas, there is yet another reason to not consider intentionality the ultimate decision maker. This reason is non-intentional consciousness. For Levinas, there is the question of “whether, beneath the gaze of reflected consciousness taken as self-consciousness, the non-intentional, experienced as the counterpoint to the intentional, does not conserve and free its true meaning” (EFP 80). This

non-intentional consciousness becomes part of the world, yet it is only an essence of what could have been otherwise, and that which is never realized. It is not an integral part of a world; the world can exist without its presence. In other words non-intentional consciousness never comes to be; it never becomes part of the beings. This consciousness turns to itself, analyzes itself, becoming a consciousness of its own consciousness, confirming in this way its independence, taking control of the first intentionality. However, this consciousness of consciousness never becomes intentional, for that will constitute the same mistake that Husserl makes in his argument; this reduced consciousness “also remains a non-intentional consciousness of itself, as though it were a surplus somehow devoid of any willful aim... unknowingly as knowledge, as a non- objectifying knowledge” (EFP 79). Allow me to elaborate in this Levinas’ deep concept; as we have seen, non-intentional consciousness remains passive and does not play a role in the apprehension of the world. On the contrary, it becomes the guide that reveals to the I his incapacity to obtain a complete knowledge of the world, or to objectify it. Since non-intentional consciousness never comes to be, it cannot be apprehended by the I’s intentionality, consequently the I fails to have full knowledge of the world. This situation undermines Husserl’s argument that because intentionality provides a complete image of the world to the I, then it must be the first philosophy. Now we can see that, as established before, non-intentional consciousness is the darkness that cannot be illuminated by the light of the I’s intentionality in the form of language or any other form for that matter. In this way the I is forced to recognize that he cannot fully know the world and needs to be humble to the presence of the other who cannot offer the I a full picture of the world, because that is an impossibility under Levinas’ philosophy, but instead can offer a richer view.

Levinas argues that this passivity of the non-intentional cannot be explained by potentiality, as some philosophers have tried, for it is an actual presence that is there without having chosen to be there. He also argues that under a phenomenological analysis, this presence that seems to be afraid of guiding us is as a *mauvaise conscience*. As a consequence of this hidden non-intentional consciousness the I will always have an incomplete picture of the world where something is missed. This of course causes a big problem for Husserl's phenomenological analysis for it depends on human beings' ability to fully know the world. On the other hand, this non-intentional consciousness plays a vital role in Levinas' philosophy. It is the origin of the humility of the I, where the I has to recognize that it is not possible for him to fully grasp the world as he is not even able to totally know himself. The non-intentional consciousness does not allow the I to claim his identity, for it does not come to existence because it is afraid of being. Non-intentional consciousness is afraid of being because if it comes to be, then it may be apprehended by the I's intentionality, or even worse, become intentional which might cause it to try to totalize the world according to its categories. As Levinas says "this is either *mauvaise conscience* or timidity; it is not guilty, but accused; and responsible for its very presence" (EFP 81). This non-intentional consciousness will never take control, or ever apprehend itself as an object of knowledge. It will always remain in its passivity, reminding the I of his finitude and his limitations. Those limitations become more obvious when the I faces the anguish of death, a territory that resists being discovered.

The passivity of non-intentional consciousness denounces the *mauvaise conscience* that leaves the I with a feeling of incompleteness that forces him to question himself. For Levinas, this *mauvaise conscience* implies a position where the being is open to question, but

more importantly “also to questioning” (EFP 82). It is in this questioning that language, not natural, but rather the mere possibility of, is born in responsibility. When the other questions the I’s well-being, he must respond. The I must be responsible for his right to be. This responsibility is not in some moral, ethical or other variety of code as modern society claims. This responsibility is to the other, to a specific someone, a specific face whose presence in the world the I may be affecting simply by making himself present in the world.

On Levinas’ philosophy the I fears the wars and the killing that may happen as a consequence of his presence in the world. This fear prevents the I from taking his place in the “*Da* of his *Dasein*; it is the inability to occupy a place, a profound utopia” (EFP 82). It is important to notice that Levinas is not talking about the master-slave<sup>1</sup> fight that Hegel proposes, nor of fear for the revenge of the other, but rather about the fear of causing damage to this face, whose mortality is revealed to the I before it is revealed to him. As Levinas says the mortality of the other summons the I, and thereby makes his death his worry and responsibility. This responsibility for the Other comes before being; it exists in a time immemorial. This responsibility goes “beyond what I may or may not have done to the Other, or whatever acts I may or may not have committed” (EFP 83); as if the I was responsible for the other’s death even before being. The I can see what is hidden to the other: his own death. Through his expressions, the I can see the reality that the other will die; his mortality is more apparent to him. The I is responsible to him even before he is responsible to himself, even before the I becomes a being. This fear of the death of the other does not become a fear of his own death, but rather it “extends beyond the ontology of the Heideggerian *Dasein* and the *bonne* conscience of being in the sight of that being itself” (EFP 85). His responsibility for the

other does not refer to his unique features as a particular being; it is not about ontology but about metaphysics. Thus the I's accountability to the Other is ultimately vast. This responsibility is born in the very Being of the other, for the I can see the death that lies hidden in the face of the other.

It is in the encounter with the other that the I, a self-consciousness individual, finds what Levinas deems the 'infinity' that challenges and actually defeats his intention of totalizing the world. It is within this encounter with a being that the I realizes his duty to protect the other, within an "I am the unique, the chosen one" mindset. The I's infinity remains hidden to him and to everyone, yet in this encounter, the I's fixation to erase the otherness of the world stops. Levinas' states "It is the laying down by the ego of its sovereignty (in its hateful modality), that we found ethics and also probably the very spirituality of the soul, but most certainly the question of the meaning of being, that is its appeal for justification" (EFP 85). It is easy to infer that it is at the peak of his ego that the I recognizes how useless his inclination to totalize the Other is. On the contrary, the I reconciles itself with its ethical duty to protect the Other, in such a way that he is ready to have knowledge of the world without objectifying it. The I is now able to match knowledge with Being.

## **1.2 Language**

As we have seen, it is through language that the I builds his picture of the world. In other words, it is how the I relates and directs his intentions to the world. Since these intentions are affected by the face of the other, the ethical mandate that the other makes on the I needs to be reflected in language. Given this importance, Levinas amplifies his critique of Husserl's intentionality as first philosophy based on what he considers failures in the

contemporary conception of language. Levinas argues that it is not viable for any natural language to capture the mandate of the Other. In his encounters with the other the I tries to totalize him. However, the I sees in the face of the other a call for justice that requires the other to speak and let his voice be heard, for discourse is justice. This discourse is built on the need that the other arouses in the I, a desire to know him, yet at the same time calls for respect to his exteriority. The I only sees the other's exteriority, for his subjectivity is hidden. In fact, it is possible that he may deceive the I, but his desire to know him leads the I to take this risk and engage in a discussion with him. It can be said that from this encounter, justice is actualized as a discourse where we suspend action to theorize; we then have a theory "in which truth arises" (TI 82).

It is important to keep this in mind because later in this essay, I will develop the idea that it is possible to match the position of the other as equal to the I, for my idea of the other is not necessarily those with economic need. Rather, the other is one who has been deposed of his identity because he has been totalized by the I, but he is now ready to claim his place in the world. He does this by questioning the I, so that they may engage in conversation where the other compels the I to include words such a ajolote in the discourse.

It is important to notice that in this conversation with the other to find out the just way to act does not involve only the I and the other, but also a third party, the other people that are also part of the conversation. This conversation already implies the Other, with a capital O to denote the metaphysical Other who represents not a particular being, or a particular other, but the "faces of the poor, the stranger, the widow and the orphan" (TI 255) who have suffered the abuse of the I. This Other makes his way to the conversation through what



Heidegger defined as the “house of Being”: language (LH 76). He is there even before time or any natural language had been constructed.

In his encounter with a face the I sees the mastering of the Other, whose desires he welcomes making this mastery unmistakable. The I comes to realize that “my freedom does not have the last word; I am not alone in the world.” (TI 101) As a consequence of this encounter, the I and the other communicate with each other with words that precede language. Levinas attacks the notion that the pronouns I, we, us, etc, have a complete meaning independent of an understanding of language. Notice that in this case Levinas is using language not in the sense of a natural language such as French, English, Spanish, etc., but in the same sense used by Heidegger where language, is taken as the medium to possess the world. In other words, it is only through language that we can access the world and make it ours.

However, Levinas modifies this notion by saying that the language, has been broken up by the Other. In other words, the declaration of the title ‘the other’ reveals the existence of an accusative case that is there before time. The face of the other testifies to the positivity of the I’s being accosted by another human being, an event that holds ‘the secret of the birth (naissance) of thought itself and of the verbal position by which it is conveyed” (CP 125). Allow me to clarify this concept, before the I starts building a language, the Other is there in a place before time, demanding him to build a language in such a way that the I takes him into consideration, forcing the I to name things not based on the I’s needs or intentions, but on his response to the Other’s questioning. This inapprehensible presence will always be there to remind the I of the other. The Other cannot be named. He represents the *il* that cannot be

contained by any specific being in the world or by any natural language. Levinas argues that *il* does not enter into any present time, that the names and verbs that it intends to represent are no longer suited, but it refers to everything that cannot be totalized.

In his essay “Levinas and Language”, John Llewelyn presents us with the theory of Structuralism, and the use that Levinas makes of it to create his notion of language. In this notion the Other makes the I talk about a true humanism, in opposition to what Llewelyn calls anti-humanist theories where *Significance* is outside the human beings’ realm. Llewelyn explains to us that for Saussure, one of the creators of structuralism, the signs that symbolize the objects do not stand positively independent of the objects they represent, but in the relation they have with other symbols. To clarify, meaning is to be found in written language, not in the objects that symbols represent. According to Saussure, there are “...two distinguishable but inseparable components: a phonetic, graphic or otherwise embodied signifier (*signifiant*) and a signified concept (*signifie*)” (CCL 119). The *signifiant* is the meaning-giver in the communication process, and the *signifie* is the passive object/concept that waits to be defined. Under this conception the being of an object is not in the object itself, but in the word we use to talk about it, in the writing graphics where we can read “book” and establish the relation to the object which in some sense is now in the word and not in the object itself.

Levinas will modify and use the concept of *signifiant* as a vital part of his justification of Ethics as first philosophy. For Levinas, in contrast with Saussure who places the role of signifiant in the letters of a name, the *signifiant* is the person who is saying the phrase; in other words, the entity that is pointing out the object, and through this action giving meaning to the concept. It is important to notice that this individual is not an impersonal I, or the first

person of the singular we, as in the “I” who use a language that is common to the community of speakers of that language. Levinas underlines that saying is extremely personal because through what he says he gives meaning to the world. It refers to the specific individual who is writing the word. For example, when a Spanish speaking person writes *campesino* to refer to the person who labors the land, and with it he does not only refers to what most Spanish speaking people would understand as a farm worker but also to the implications that his subjectivity carries on the word, he is the person that establishes the relationship between the nine letters and the person in the world he is pointing out, not the code by itself. Levinas argues that the code does not give sense outside of the person that is speaking, in other words the code does not give meaning independently of the person doing the saying. He says that the one who speaks is a face; a face where the active subjectivity of the speaker is revealed to the world. However, this saying does belong entirely to the I who is speaking, for as we pointed out before, the Other is already in language. He is there even before the I or the other say a word.

As we have seen, under Structuralism, the words that are said carry the semantic signification of the message, but under Levinas’s argument it is the person doing the speaking who attempts to give the meaning, but is limited by what has been already said. The saying of a person is already the saying of his saying. The I cannot subtract himself from the relation between signifiant and signifier, for he is the one establishing the relation between the object pointed out and the code used to describe it. Levinas adds that the *signifiant*, the person doing the speaking, directs his language towards the *signifier*- understood here not as an object as Structuralism says, but towards the face of the Other. In other words, the saying of the I does

not describe objectively the world, but rather he should direct his saying through his unavoidable subjectivity to satisfy the demands of the Other.

At this point a question can be made: How is it that the Other interferes in the being? In order to answer this, we need to remember that even when Levinas separated himself from Heidegger and his conception of Being still his theory has some roots in this concept. As I explained before, for Heidegger, language is the way we possess and totalize the world. According to him, it is in the Being where we can find the answer to the meaning of life. However, for Levinas, language needs to reflect our responsibility for the Being. This responsibility can be seen in the way language describes beings: the particular entities that reflect, but are not the Being. We can see now how Levinas adopted this idea of language as responsibility, but he says that this responsibility must be directed towards the other human, not to an abstract Being. In "Levinas and Language" Llewellyn explains to us that for Heidegger the *Da-sein*, is to be understood as a presence in the world possessed by language (TB 87). The only possible way to know this presence is through the dialogue with other people who share the language. While for Heidegger this possession by language is a way of being with others, Levinas would take this concept further and say that it is also possession by others. The call to be responsible to the other and the Other is anterior to being responsible for the Being. Levinas recognizes that there is a paradox in this responsibility "in that I am obligated without this obligation having begun before me, as though an order slipped into my consciousness like a thief, smuggled itself in, like an effect of one of Plato's wandering causes" (OB 13). He solves this by saying that since it is impossible for this to happen in consciousness, but still happens, we can infer that we are not longer in the realm of consciousness. Therefore the I's duty to the

other must have happened before he was conscious of himself. This argument is offered by Levinas as a proof that this smuggling of the Other into his consciousness must have happened before the I came to existence. The Other broke out into language, and set himself before the I's consciousness in such a way that when he speaks and gives meaning to the world, the other is there to influence the I, to direct the I's subjectivity to his face, inspiring him not to be responsible to the Being, but to the face of the other.

John Llewelyn explains that "*Signifiante* as what I shall call 'deep' saying testifies to the positivity of my being accosted by another human being, an event that holds the secret of the birth (*naissance*) of thought itself and of the verbal proposition by which it is conveyed" (CCL 120). Language reflects the summons that the other makes to the I. Signifiante is then the expression of the I's neighbor; his saying is prior to any culture, to every history of language. The face that summons the I only needs to show its appearance; it does not need a natural language or a justification for its demands to the I. This appearance shows the history where damage has been done to the Other—to the I's neighbor, but the Other does not depend on this history to validate its demands, for the demands of the Other come from a place before time. This is to say that the I's duty to the Other, does not depend on the present circumstances or in what the I has done to the other, but on his ethical duty to any stranger that asks for his help, for the I's well being is a reflection of the abuses that the I has committed to the other by the mere fact of his existence.

It is by placing responsibility before the dichotomy being-language that Levinas nullifies the possible justifications of the I using objectivity as an excuse to escape from the demands of the Other. He wants me, the I, a person not a system, to give meaning to the world in response

to the Other. By assigning the responsibility of meaning giver to the I, Levinas prevents the I from saying that the world works in a way that the I cannot control, therefore he does not have responsibility for the Other. He emphasizes the idea that he is the I who establishes the relation between his conceptions and the objects he wants to conceptualize. However, it is very important not to forget that this saying is preceded by the face of Other. Levinas says that the face of the Other is there before the saying that signifies the world, tying the I to the responsibility to the Other. This responsibility for the other goes to a “psychosis, intending us to hear in these resonances both of Husserl’s *Beseelung*, animation, and of madness or folly, the topic taken up from Freud in the work of Foucault and Lacan” (CCL 124). Does this mean that the I is not free to make this decision, the decision of protecting the other? No, in fact the I can make the decision of breaking contact with the eyes of the other. He can choose to kill the other. Even when he is consumed by his desire of knowing him, he can, at a big cost, resist this impulse. The I by both a rational decision where he can see the need of the other, and his own need of the other to build a better knowledge of the world, surrenders himself to his ethical duty to the face of the other and gives up the idea of killing the other.

This responsibility to the face of the other does not stop in a passive feeling of compassion or pity towards the face of the other, but becomes an active mandate that compels the I to first lay down the hand he was holding a knife to kill the other with, and later to place in this same hand his own breath to offer it to the other. The responsibility of the I to the other does not finish with this action; it extends to the point where the I helps the other to build his own dwellings in a way that the other can enjoy life again.

Unfortunately, the situation where the I, the person with power, aids the other to establish himself in a situation where the other has his needs satisfied is not common yet. It is still the case when some people based on their power or customs think it is acceptable to ignore the needs of other people or even take advantage of them. We can think in a person who, through all his life, has been told that some people are inferior to him and that he has the right to classify them according to his desires and intentions. A clear example of an I that does not acknowledge his ethical duty to the other is in the Lomas del Poleo<sup>2</sup> conflict where the Pedro and Jorge Zaragoza brothers dispute the possession of a land situated two miles from the border between United States and Mexico in the west side of Ciudad Juarez to 50 families that have lived there for more than 30 years.

Since Lomas del Poleo is the middle of the desert, this land was of no use or interest to anybody but the people who live there. However, when the project of having a commercial corridor that runs through this land became real this land called the attention of powerful business man whom despite the opportunity they have to be fair and help Lomas del Poleo inhabitants to improve their life, they instead pretend to use their power to force the residents of this community to leave the land in dispute. Lomas del Poleo residents live in a community with its inherent problems and conflicts, but some of these inhabitants became united as one person when their homes and identities were threatened by the Jorge and Pedro Zaragoza brothers whom claim to be the legal owners of the land. It is important to remember that the Tribunal Federal Agrario (The Agrarian Federal Court) has not ruled in favor on any of the parts involved in the conflict. It ordered for things to remain the same while the conflict was solved. This is to say that the residents have the right to stay and live there as free citizens. However,

in a clear demonstration of power and disdain for the other the Zaragoza brothers ordered the construction of a fence around the community kept by armed guards that control the access to the community. By building a fence and not being present when the court requires both parts in conflict to be present, the Zaragoza brothers deny the existence of the other.

Even though the Zaragoza brothers have a lot of relations with other members of the business community, they do not want to start a dialogue with the other, the one that is different to them and they seem to consider an object without a face, an other that should not only be respected but also helped to reach a comfortable life-style. They instead want to totalize them by putting the residents of Lomas del Poleo under their categories, meaning maquiladora workers with jobs that barely allows them to survive, and not dignity or recognition of their identity as individual, self sufficient, ethical beings whatsoever.

It is clear to see that they are failing to live up to their personal duty to protecting the other against a system, as well as any other circumstance that represents a danger to the other based on the excuse that they are just following the dictates of a global economic system. This of course goes against Levinas' philosophy where the responsibility is personal and directed to the face of the other, not to a system.

### **1.3 Saying and Said**

Another way that Levinas uses to explain his concept of the other is through the distinction between said and saying. Levinas argues that the pronoun I, in the phrase "I think", as well as other pronouns such as "she" and "them" may very well not be limited to the person they wanted to point out at the beginning of the saying. These pronouns "do not designate pure sensible receptivity, but engage the conceptualizing activity of the understanding, albeit



not in the same ways as do common nouns” (CCL 128). When a person says “I”, pretty soon he will realize that this implies the understanding of his own sentience. He cannot have a private language that may allow him to give arbitrary meaning to the word. In other words, he needs to participate with the language that was there before words were created. Levinas says that there are concepts that cannot be written for they are written in the human soul and it is better if we do not translate them to a written work for they express principles that are there before the comprehension of any particular language.

These principles evoke the fraternity that captures all human beings through past and future time. This fraternity does not refer only to the I’s encounter with the other, but with the Other, with “the face of the poor, the stranger, the widow and the orphan, and at the same time, of the master called to invest and justify my freedom” (TI 255). They command the I to serve the other, based on the accusation that the Other makes to him. The impersonal Other throws in the I’s face the comfort reached at the expense of had taken his place in the Da-sein. This displacement of the other is not the consequence of a specific action of the I, but just the consequence of his being in the world. The I is to respond to this call that the face of the other makes on him by questioning his well being. In Llewellyn’s words, “My being called by them is my owning it to them not to require a demonstration of their right, not to require even that philosophy produce a logical refutation of the conclusion of some anti-humanist science that responsibility is a laughable delusion”(CCL 132). This means that even when Levinas would agree that reason, logic and all totalizing systems are needed to some extent they cannot comprehend the infinity that is the being; they do not capture what is otherwise than being.

To be clear, I say that for Levinas the saying is taken as pure signification. In consequence the pure communication of the said can be understood to be prior to communication and it is crucial to the inter-subjective essence of being. The resounding of the said includes things like poetry in truth claims, but even poems can be thematized. Levinas wants to leave open the idea that there is this traumatic experience that is unpredictable. While we are continuously assembling and disassembling things, as well as creating theories of language, and so forth, he is trying to get us to accept the phenomenon of exile<sup>3</sup> and the ambiguity of certainty as a possible reality.

#### **1.4 The Face**

The face of the other is revealed to us as an epiphany that is different to sensible experience. The information that our senses gives to us does not complete the concept of sensation. Levinas argues that the psychological theories that advocate for sensation being just a mental process, which can happen in introspection independent of the object that caused the sensation, have already lost the physical character of the sensation. Even when sensations need the object they are referring to, they are not reducible. A question can be asked here: if sensations are not in the object or in the physical senses: where are they? They are in the relation between the I and the non-I, where sensible life is “lived as enjoyment” (TI 187). This dynamic relation escapes a mere objectification of the entities observed for the enjoyment of life is there before the instantiation of an I and a non-I, before the establishment of a relationship between subject and object. Levinas explains that “the specificity of each sensation is reduced precisely to that quality without support or extension” (TI 188). This lack of content testifies that sensations cannot be reduced to the mere data of the physical

qualities of the object observed. Rather these sensations are complemented by the phenomenology of sensation as enjoyment, as a transcendental function of our senses. This means that beyond the physical senses as sight and touch that identifies the identical with itself, sensations are to be interpreted not only in the pure objective aesthetic and sensorial value that the object has, but in the enjoyment the I, as the observer, finds in the contact with an object. In other words, an object or situation is not only valuable only for its obedience to the mathematical relations or the right proportions it may have; it is also valuable because the joy the I finds on his relationship with it; a joy that goes beyond the physical perception of the object.

Even when sensations are discovered by all our senses, vision has a privileged position in the disclosure of the world. Vision presupposes the light; a light that is necessary to establish the relation with the object. In other words, objects come from nothingness; this origin allows them to resist the attempt of being totalized. However, when they are brought into the light we can start a relation with them. For example, when the Zapatista rebellion came to the light in the southern state of Chiapas in Mexico the first day of 1994 mass media showed to the rest of the world the existence of indigenous communities that live under extreme poverty and discrimination. By making themselves present in the world and attracting the light to them, they came out of the *larga noche de los quinientos años* ( FS 77 ) awaking people's desire to know them and their problems at the same time that Zapatistas offered an alternative perspective of reality. Light invites us to touch the objects, "by the hand the object is in the end comprehended, touched, taken, borne and referred to other objects, clothed with a signification, by reference to other objects" (TI 191). However, we should notice that light

only establishes the conditions for the face to face relation, it is not signifiante by itself. We should not forget that light does not go beyond what already is: the sameness of the object with itself, there is an interiority that gives identity to an object. Levinas' conception does not deny this; he only adds that this interiority, in other words this sameness of the objects with themselves, gives them a total identity for this interiority has to be contrasted with their exteriority, which is the perception that other people may have of the object.

Even in darkness where light cannot reveal the objects, there is a void which is not equivalent to nothingness. This void gives us the sense of the impersonal *there is*, the existence of something that does not need a specific being to come to life. This causes a vertigo that comes from a mythical facelessness. However, light brings the beings that are covered by darkness to our view where we can name them and with that give meaning to them. We separate the objects through language not light, but the darkness or the never ending conversation that remains in them prevents us from totalizing them. In addition to that, the *there is* does not allow people to have a full perception of the object. As it is easy to see now, two elements, the exteriority and the *there is*, prevent us from totalizing an object. It is important to notice that this lighting of the objects that allow us to distinguish them gives us enjoyment for by having a relation with the objects we name, we move from a mere objectification of the objects to the affective content.

This effort to totalize an object is even more futile when it comes to an attempt to totalize a face. The difference of the Other does not come from physical differences for that would imply our common membership to genus and that would nullify alterity. The face of the

Other resists to be apprehended. In Levinas words, "The face of the Other breaks with the world we have in common" (TI 194). This happen because its appearance breaks with my continuity, with the regularity of the world. Its appearance makes infinitude present to me. This infinity that breaks with logic is possible only in language, where both me and the other keep our identities but cannot comprehend the other. Logic cannot fully operate here for as we know logic requires complete definitions in order to be applicable to the world, but in Levinas' philosophy we never archive a final concept, they are always changing according to the presence of other people whom join the conversation and the interiority of people and objects that prevents the I to ever have full knowledge of the world.

## Chapter II: Diversity

### 2.1 Diversity as a Value

Opposite to totalitarian ethical systems, Levinas' philosophy asks for diversity in order to have a better perception of reality. His concept of infinity offers an open room for people who want to challenge the idea that a total conceptualization of human beings is possible. Humanists, phenomenological philosophers, artists, etc, say that there is no social, economic, or physiological theory that could contain all the possibilities of expressions that a human being is capable of. They claim that there is more to reality than just a naturalistic conception of the physical world; human experiences or the way humans experience is transcends the realm of natural world. It is important to note that I am making a distinction between the natural world, which includes the physical world and its laws, and reality, which for the purpose of this text; I will define as the way human beings experience the natural world. I will accept this difference based on the phenomenological position that claims that the world is experienced by someone whose subjectivity is unavoidable. Of course, this experience must be grounded in the natural world, but I would claim that the way we form our knowledge of reality is unavoidable affected by the way persons perceives the world; it is then about how a person perceives the world rather than about how it actually is. I conclude then that even when we have a direct access to the world it is subject to interpretation. Thus we act in the realm of reality not in the natural world. Reality, thus, can be altered insofar as the limits that the natural world imposes on us. Once this has been established, it can be inferred that the range of experiences is as diverse as the world's population and that this diversity must be recognized in order to build an accurate representation of the world. As I will show later, this

does not mean that we will accept all of them; there are criteria to justify which perceptions should be accepted into our belief system. We can safely ignore the demand of taking all ideas into our belief systems because the problem of cultural relativism has been largely discussed and the conclusion has been set: cultural relativism leads to contradictions; therefore it must be avoided<sup>4</sup>.

The possibility of having wrong interpretations of the world implies the existence of a world as it is, which we want to describe under one language, a common ground where ideas are brought to trial and are condemned to be forgotten or to become a vital part of the world as we conceive it. The existence of this common language is an ideal long time pursuit for investigators of all fields. The description of reality in terms of a language system based needs to “go along with innumerable differences” (UD 552); differences that represent the voice of the other whom has been ignored in the I’s representation of the Being. These differences come when we ask how, not what happens. The answers to the how-questions come with different levels of knowledge-as the physical, the organic, and the social that must be reconciled in order to accommodate the novelty that comes form the viewers’ experience or sensations to put it in Levinas’ terms. In this way we will achieve our goal of reconciling unity with diversity. A diversity that is necessary for a person to enjoy life through a well-rounded life.

To promote this idea that diversity is a vital component of a well-rounded life, I will analyze the significance of omitting the *progress* that a standardized, totalizing society offers. Although this kind of society offers a faster way to reach economic goals, economic improvement cannot fulfill human nature alone. It is known that, unfortunately, not all people

benefit from economic development. However, for the sake of clarity, allow me to ignore this fact in my argument, which is that by ignoring alternative voices in favor of efficiency, totalizing societies lose the critiques and contributions of people who are not submerged in the system. With that they lose the opportunity to better the living conditions of the community by allowing persons to have a more complete knowledge of the Being through the recognition and inclusion of the voice of the other. These conditions contain, but are not limited to economic conditions. This also includes other dimensions that make life more affluent such as art, music, self expression, dignity, etc. It is clear that for a society to reach these goals it must be inclusive, but not to the point where we accept all beliefs as equal.

It is patent that we do not want to give true value to ungrounded opinions because we do not want arbitrariness in our belief system. Every perspective that becomes part of our belief system must be tested against reality and the natural world. We need to take a position that disregards false beliefs because they can take us to make wrongs decisions. These include those that are not subject to trial, and have no predictive power or desirable effect in the world. These desirable effects refer to the strength of ethical relationships within human beings and our environment as well as the emergence of aesthetic experiences<sup>5</sup>.

It is important to observe that it is not advantageous to tolerate positions that claim to have a special access to reality; an access that cannot be proved right or wrong by what some exclusive groups call outsiders. I sustain that the inclusion of different ideas does not imply open admission because there are some of which that, upon being intolerant or contrary to reality, undermine the whole purpose of diversity which is to make life better-rounded through the unique experiences that diversity can create. They meet neither the ethical nor



the descriptive criteria to be included into our belief system. In other words, for an idea to be useful in our belief system it must offer either an accurate description or an ethical effect of/in the world. Otherwise, it is just an empty set or an argument that cannot be tested in its soundness. This is not to say that an idea that at the present moment does not have a correspondence with reality should be rejected automatically. We need to take into consideration that some ideas take longer to be instantiated. However, in all cases the aim is that they are to be judged within the tribunals of both reality and the natural world.

There are some positions that claim that reality is not a safe port where we can find certainty. Skepticism, for example, claims that since we have limited cognitive capacities we can never be sure that our knowledge of the world is correct. The other one is extreme phenomenology, which claims that intentionality is the ultimate meaning-giver. This stance holds that even when the universe behaves according to its inner rules; it is only until an observer apprehends the world through language that its being comes into existence. Thus, since the world resides in language which is ultimately shaped by the speaker, he in turn can modify the world according to his desires.

Husserl says that since we, as human beings, have a *superior* access to the world we can give arbitrary interpretations to it. As established early in the essay, Levinas cautions us against this phenomenological tradition that pretend to make intentionality the ultimate tool we use to create our picture of the world and want this interpretation to be taken as truth. Allow me to refute both ideas. To answer the first one, we can safely agree that there is a natural limitation to the way we human beings acquire knowledge of the world, but that is not to say that we have no epistemological access to it at all. In fact, even when our brain has

limited capabilities, we are able, through science, reason, experience, and intuition of having an accurate picture of the world.<sup>6</sup>The fact that our best scientific theories have a high predictive power is enough proof that there is a physical world that follows rules to which we all have to surrender. To answer the second, we can agree with them that we cannot escape ourselves and have a fully objective view of the world; we interpret the world according to our subjectivity. In this process of apprehension of reality we give new elements to it; however these new elements such as ideologies, perspectives, culture, etc, are contained by the realm of nature. It is not possible to say that my interpretation of the world is truthful based only in my own certainty of that idea because if we accept this as a valid argument we will live in a sea of indeterminacy. In other words, even there is subjectivity and we cannot escape from it that is not to say that we must give all subjective opinions the same value.

It is important to notice, however, that as the phenomenological position claims the world also has the component of a viewer, who has a unique perspective on it. Through this perspective he enriches and modifies reality. The world is not just out there, but it is experienced by someone. Robert Sokolowsky points out that in phenomenology the world is experienced by a person who is “not isolated in a bubble... but has a conscious relation with the world” (IP 8). This relationship evolves to interpretations of it and they demand a place in the conceptualization of reality. If somebody’s experience, qua experience, has a factual existence in the world, this implies that there are as many experiences as human beings. As a consequence, we need to take all of them into consideration; otherwise we would be facing an ever incomplete picture of reality. At first, having a world with countless positions does not seem like a desirable world to live in. However, as I will try to prove, it is better to be open to

new ideas, which we can disregard after we analyze them, than to reject ideas a priori based on an extreme naturalistic position.

In a naturalistic position in order to have a stable conception of the world, we ignore perspectives that cannot be mapped out to the physical world as it is now. In the position that I promote, we open our scope in a way that we include not only what it is now but also what could be. Of course, since there is only one natural world, all realities, meaning all the propositions of what could be, must fit in it. This is to say that since we have not explored all the possibilities that are contained in the natural world we should be open to the questioning that alternative positions suggest to us. It is clear that ignoring ideas that do not fit into our current conception of the natural world is not the best option. The reason being that the conception of the natural world we have now is also a human experience; it belongs first to the realm of reality and later to the natural world.

It can be argued that we are limited to the possibilities contained in the natural world. Nothing is easier to agree on. However, since we do not have full knowledge of nature, we need to stay in the realm of reality and push it to the limits that nature has imposed on us. In other words, we can accept revolutionary and rebel ideas and then test them against the effects they have first in reality and later in the natural world. If they survive this test they should be admitted on our belief system. My advice then is that in order to have an accurate representation of the world, we need to take in consideration the different experiences, evaluate them, and, if they survive, incorporate them to our conception of reality.

It is important to remember that the survival of an idea is not limited to his descriptive power because it can mutate to another form that makes it desirable for us. One of these

forms is traditional beliefs. By traditional beliefs, I mean the way of life that some people have received from their ancestors, where they believed that some rituals would help them to control nature. With the advance of science, it has become very clear that such rituals do not have the power that ancient people thought. However, I would argue that they, since they have an actual effect in the world and are needed for us to fully understand it, should remain in our belief system. I will offer two reasons for this. First, as Faber Marvin<sup>7</sup> says since culture is part of the physical world we need to treat it with the same consideration that we pay to natural phenomena. Experiences as experiences, already exist in the world; all what we need to do is to recognize this existence. Since they are already in the world, at this moment I am willing to convey that they may be false beliefs, they still are there so we need to study them in the same way that we study some failed scientific and philosophical theories that have helped us to build our best philosophy. We need to learn what about in them is desirable and what is not in our belief system. In this process we may learn that different visions of life still have some validity under different criteria. This take us to my second reason, even when they may not be an accurate description about how the world actually works, they also have worth as cultural and ethical expressions that manifest their significance by becoming present in the world. This presence may not be its original purpose, but still plays a vital role in making reality meaningful. In other words, even when they have no direct predictive power and they do not meet the first criteria; we should accept them as valuable cultural and ethical expression. We need to recognize that they deserve to be protected because they contribute to enrich the human experience.

Under this concept, an idea should be judged not only by its immediate effects in the world, but also in the secondary ones. These effects include the strength on the ethical relationships that a ritual causes in a community. When people get together to perform a ritual they create ties between them and their environment which has an actual effect in the world. This effect may not be the one they wanted in the immediacy but still is very important for its ethical and cultural consequences. These ethical consequences refer to how people's understanding of their relationship with the environment and other members of the community grows as they get in direct relation with it. We can see this phenomenon in indigenous communities that perform this kind of rituals. They have a healthier relation with the Earth and the other members of the community which creates a non-exploiting relation with the other, with the weak person. In addition to this, there is the aesthetic value that dances, rituals, prayers, etc. have. Allow me to introduce an example to make the concept clearer. Consider the indigenous Zuni tribe where a dance to cause rain is still performed even when thanks to the knowledge that we and they have now, it is clear for a rational person that it is not going to happen. However, they still they do it as part of their life-style; a life-style that promotes beauty and intuition as valid forms of knowledge at the same time that it strengthens the ethical relationships between them.

There is the argument that false beliefs, in the form of traditions, arouse more problems than benefits, and that this is one of the cases where good will actually results in bringing more damage than good to the people. Nevertheless, if people would solely accept them as traditions rather than a means to secure or manipulate nature there is no detriment. It is important to emphasize that I am advocating the idea that rituals should not be essential

factors in the decision making process, but only as a part of what makes life interesting and colorful while adding value to human experience. As established before, these traditions have value so far as they are understood and exercised as traditions that modify reality, not as accurate descriptions of how the natural world works. In other words, we know that the world was not created by the Mayan Gods<sup>8</sup>, yet undeniably there was and to some number, still are some people that believe it was. People as such should be prevented from taking traditional beliefs out of their scope which in turn can lead to horribly bad decisions, such as suicide or despair because of the belief that the world will come to an end after the Fifth Sun Cycle come December 2012.

There is a great difference between beliefs as self-deception and those that hold that keeping tradition alive is a form of cultural identity. Self-deception stems from one's irrational fixation in maintaining that his system of beliefs is absolute. One who is self-deceived prefers to stay in a state of ignorance or denial. An example can be found in the distinction between using traditional cures for minor illnesses such as the flu as an alternative to standard medication, and the refusal to receive specialized medical attention to major illnesses simply because archaic ideas advise so. Beliefs should obviously not take precedence over one's physiological well-being. On the other hand, a person who knows the rituals he performs has no direct relation with the physical world but performs them for the ethical relationship with others involved, is causing no personal damage or any to others for that matter.

## **2.2 Unity and Diversity**

There is still a problem to solve: how can we reconcile a pluralistic view of the world where different experiences are counted as inherent in it, and the unity that is necessary to

explain the common universe we all inhabit? As established before, a good resolution is not limiting the definition of the world to just “as is”, but including the very persons experiencing it. Some people with a naturalistic perspective say that there should be a unified vision of the world where objectivity plays a vital role in coalescing it in one unique picture, where all *right* perspectives must concur. However, this monistic and extreme ideal of a complete reality is unattainable because it ignores experience which, according to Marvin Farber, in agreement with Levinas, “... must be taken seriously; [because] it is a changing process involving a changing reality which is open forever” (UD 547). This experience and the person that is experiencing the world cannot be taken out of the picture of the world, because his experience is part of the physical world that he breaks into with his very participation in it.

The defenders of a unified universe say that the world exists as one unity, that the explanation of the world must be directed towards the way the world is. The obvious problem with that view is that having a single level unified universe implies the co-existence of opposite and contradictory phenomena. A holistic vision of this kind does not account for, say, the principle of avoiding unnecessary pain and the fact that it still occurs. This position makes no difference between ethical principles which exist in the realm of reality and the physical world. If this position were true we would have a naturalized ethic,<sup>9</sup> which for the most part we do not. However, there is a distinction between ethical principles and natural laws. The problem here would reside in the belief held by people who cause unnecessary pain. This belief that caused such a faulty action, then, is obviously wrong and must be eliminated because it goes against both the ethical principle of protecting the other and the equilibrium in nature of killing only to the extent necessary to survive.

In order to explain this problem, we must allow room for diversity. We need to accept that this world is experienced in various ways by people of various cultures, and that these differing experiences all contribute to the knowledge of the very nature of the world. This vision challenges the idea of a closed system compared to the ones proclaimed by Spinoza, Hegel and others. Farber says that “the Eleatic school could prove that reality is necessarily one, while apparently sacrificing the facts of experience” (UD 543). Under a naturalistic position all the facts in the world, present and future, must be contained in the system. This leaves no room for elements other than the ones already present in the physical world. However, as we can see, this is not the case. Rather, new elements emerge and modify it. These new elements are the experiences that every human being brings to the world. Allow me to elaborate. Since these elements must be contained by the system itself, and low capacity consciousness as in lower animals may not have the capacity to modify the world beyond their minor capacities, the best alternative for changes in the world is a superior mental capacity as the ones human have. This level of consciousness gives experience a material validity. This is not to say with Husserl that consciousness is the ultimate meaning giver, but that neither are totally physical entities as trees or chickens.

Marvin Farber argues that there is a middle ground between monistic realism and plural universes. He says that the way we use language gives us the idea of one universe. When we say world, we declare the existence of one substance, but according to him this “one substance leaves open the possibility that some regions of the universe are irrelevant to others in a practical sense. It may also be maintained along with epistemological dualism which recognizes the difference between the ‘content’ of the knowing mind and the object known”



(UD 549). If we pay attention only to the first sentence, in which Farber proposes the existence of different levels of reality, we face a scenario that is rather unsettling. The first problem is that if there are realities that are irrelevant to each other, and one of these realities is experience, then experiences would not necessarily be consistent with the world. One of the consequences of this approach is that if that is the case then we would be living under a totally subjective universe, without a common world to contrast the different interpretations of the world. Or, we would be living in a physical universe where experience is not relevant. This of course is a scenario that does not solve the original problem of counting experiences as a vital part of the physical world. It only places experience in another frame of reference and leaves the unity of the physical reality untouched. Nevertheless, the second part suggests a solution to the problem.

Before we move on, it is important to assert that the difference between the object known and the knower is philosophical, not scientific. In other words, the process of physical perception is not being denied. It is well admitted that all forms of knowledge come from the physical world including its social- historical aspects. As Farber says “one should never lose sight of it, whatever in formal thought or in phenomenology, where forms are treated as disengaged from their natural setting for purposes of analysis” (UD 550). This is to say that the source of knowledge is sensorial experience, and that then the logic-systematic analysis of the phenomena experimented is done. The structures we have given and continue to give to the world all originate within human thought. Some of these organizational means have failed, and others have succeeded. Some of them have survived in the original form and for the original

purpose they were created for. And still others, such as traditions, have evolved to a more useful form, where they serve a different purpose than originally created for.

These structures that we have given to the world present different degrees of possibility. In other words, it may be the case that these structure-explanations are wrong. From the point of view of formal possibility these structures can be ideally treated as a “set of variables, one set of the possible values of which is the world itself” (UD 551). I would claim that the main reason to support the position that there is not a complete logical relation between the world and the way we perceive it is that the future cannot be foreseen. I say this because we know the natural world as it is now, and we know the logic relations between them. Seemingly we should then be able to fully predict people’s behavior, but we are not. I agree that we can, to some degree, predict nature’s behavior, but there is another segment that remains hidden to us. Naturalistic philosophers would argue that we cannot fully predict nature yet because we lack the proper knowledge to do so. In principle, they argue, when we are able to obtain this knowledge we will then be able to control nature to a higher degree. Even when Levinas says that we cannot ever get full knowledge of the world, I am willing to concede this point for it is not of interest to my argument to fight for the ultimate knowledge of the physical world, as far as human experiences are not fully considered part of the physical world. This is to say that does not matter how much we advance in physiological theories, we will never be able to fully predict human behavior because human beings resist to be totalized; there is something, the non-intentional consciousness in Levinas’ words, that is never revealed to the world. My claim is that there is a common world but it is subject to change by the way we perceive it and act in consequence. If we perceive the world not as a finished reality, but as

one that is subject to the modifications that our experiences tell us that are possible, then through our acts we will modify it according to our unique visions. By doing this, the world is then closer to the subjective model we make of it.

This is not to say that we can give arbitrary interpretations to the world, and expect the world to be as we wish. We cannot just consider the world to be a fair place and think that just by virtue of our intentions and perceptions this is the case. We need to test our intentionality by acting in the world in an attempt to shape it according to them. It is important to recognize that some of these changes may not be possible. In fact, that is why we need to take them to the tribunal of nature to see if they do not break the limits of nature. One of these limits is the non-contradiction rule. I agree that every description as the one we want to give to the world obeys at least to this basic rule. If a contradiction<sup>10</sup> is given in the structure, this is enough proof that something is wrong in the system.

I will attack the position where some dialectical philosophers argue that the law of non-contradiction applies only to formal systems, as logic, but not to reality. They say that contradictions happen in real life and that they are indeed the driving force of reality. This argument can be easily override by the distinction between a conflict among two opposed but no contradictory poles, and the logic and natural impossibility of something being and not being at the same time. Saying that there is tension between wealthy and poor people does not represent a contradiction. It is possible for this tension to exist without breaking the rule. What is not possible to say is that poor people are at the same time no poor people as in wealthy people. That is something that just cannot exist. Poor and wealthy people can, and in fact exist at the same time, without this being a contradiction. Presenting this conflict as such

is a matter of how the statement is made, not about the world itself. In other words, if the discourse to explain the world is done in the wrong way, contradictions may appear, but the world cannot be and not be at the same time.

This example proves that taking the position of including experiences and perspectives to accurately describe the world is not to say that the perspective of a viewer can be automatically accepted as truth container. It is possible that a person makes mistakes in the way he describes the world such as presenting the world as ideal systems where contradictions exist. In this case his position must be counted as wrong, and be disregarded or used with caution. However, it is important to notice that these mistakes do not work against the phenomenologist perspective of taking a person's intentionality into our account of the world. We need to remember that also science, recognized as the most objective vision of the world<sup>11</sup>, also depends on the person who is doing the research who can also make mistakes. Even science relies on the personal perspectives, intentions and background of the scientist. The mistakes that the person may make are to be corrected by the performance of his description and the community that is interested in these results. This principle applies to both the phenomenological and the naturalistic view of the real world. If a scientific claim does not match the real world, it is likely that it will not survive for a long time in our system of beliefs. It is the same case in the phenomenological position where some beliefs that have no use will be ignored pretty soon.

What about getting the discourse as close as possible to the natural world? This is the point that I am trying to make; an accurate picture of the world should include the experiences of the people that are experiencing it. These experiences are to be translated into the world.

This acting in the world would give more importance to experiences that the one that realistic people want to give to it. If a person believes that the world can be otherwise and act according to this belief, he will be having a physical effect in the world, modifying in this way the physical world. This acting in the world gives experiences an additional value to the one they have already by virtue of its existence; a value that makes life worth-living.

### **2.3 Diversity and Morality**

Through this essay I have presented Levinas' idea of Ethics as first philosophy. This is to say that an accurate construction of reality must take in consideration the voice of the other in order to have a better and richer representation of the world. As I hope I have proved, diversity is the logical consequence of the acceptance of alternative voices in the conception of human reality. This consequence is not only necessary but also desirable, for listening to other voices enhances the life of a person in a way he might have not realized before. An example to prove my point is language. If we concord that language is the way a culture has conceptualized the world, the most languages a person understands the better picture he has of the world. In fact by increasing his knowledge of language a person also increases his opportunity to survive as well as his capacity to incorporate the voice of the other in a more diverse ethical discourse.

This call for diversity allows the I to instantiate his ethical duty to the other not according to an established moral code, but to the agreement that the I, the other and the third party can reach with the mutual benefit of having a life plethoric in perspectives. In order to understand my claim that it not necessary or desirable to have a stable and unique moral

code where the I can instantiate his ethical duty to the other, we should briefly discuss Owen Flanagan's paper "Admirable Immorality and Admirable Imperfection." On this paper, he says that "we have been addressing such problems without the concept of *morality* itself being of much service, despite the ubiquity of the word moral"? (AIAI 59) In other words, we have been using the word moral to talk about the consensus that some pre-enlightenment society reached, but that does mean anything about the nature of morality. Flanagan takes this point even further by affirming that the content to this consensus does not imply that we have any knowledge about the nature of the morality, for it may "have no nature." (AIAI 55) It is important to stress the idea that morality may have not a fixed nature, however, the idea of morality has a clear origin: the I's duty to the other.

Some people may argue that even if morality comes from a consensus and that is all what we have to determinate our morality then we should stick to it. However, beyond the obvious flatness of the argument for the goal of moral philosophy is to find moral rules that are applicable to all societies and times, there is another argument against that position: such consensus is not reachable anymore. The point that I am trying to prove is that moral codes have traditionally come from an agreement between the members of certain society, but as more cultures come in contact with others this agreement has become harder if not impossible to reach. As Flanagan states this "consensus is not reachable even within modern moral theories" (AIAI 58), not to say in ordinary situations. All what modern moral theories- utilitarian, Kantian, contractarian, or virtue theoretical- have done is to find solutions to specific situations within a stable, real life framework. However, according to Flanagan's argument when the framework is not so stable these moral theories are of a little use. To

summarize Flanagan's argument, the nature of morality can not be revealed by moral philosophy, for there is not nature to be revealed.

It is important to clarify that this is not a call to moral anarchy, rather it is a position where the definition of morality is built by all the people involved in the situation. We can agree with Susan Wolf that an attack to a fixed morality is not "to say that moral values should not be an important, even the most important, kind of value we attend to in evaluating and improving ourselves and the world. It is to say that our values cannot be fully comprehended on the model of a hierarchical system with morality at the top." (MS 438) If we are to talk about moral values, then we need to have a moral theory. Of course this moral theory may not comprehend all possible situations. It needs to establish a dialogue with other values such as the need for self perfection in order to be help people to fulfill our human nature.

I would argue that some sectors of contemporary society already recognize that artistic and aesthetic considerations are values too. There are a good number of communities where art and cultural expressions are as valuable as material help. Zapatistas, anarchist communities, public universities, free or low price museums are just some examples that we, as a society, also value art as a good. Once we accept this principle, we can also accept that people who spend their time reading Victorian novel, playing the oboe or improving his backhand in fact meet the definition of what a desirable behavior is. Then we can safely infer that there is not tension between playing the piano and saving people form starving. They are both valuable necessary acts.

As we have seen Morality, Ethics and diversity are concepts that are closely tied in the structure of a well-rounded life. During the first part of this essay using Levinas' philosophy I have showed the ethical duty of the I, now is time to show what the other can offer to reality. In order to archive this goal allow me to turn to Antonio Caso's philosophy.



## Chapter III: Antonio Caso as the Voice of the Other

### 3.1 Antonio Caso: Against Totalization

In this chapter I will analyze the theory of the Mexican philosopher Antonio Caso<sup>12</sup> regarding the presence of the Other, as defined in Levinas' philosophy. This concept embraces the importance of diversity in order to get a better picture of the world. Although these two philosophers belonged to different generations,<sup>13</sup> they both contributed to elaborations on Husserl's phenomenology. As we know, Levinas rejected the predominance of intentionality in Husserl's philosophy while Caso embraced it as means to justify his rejection of logic and reason as the only truth-givers in our system of beliefs. However, it could be argued that given more time, Caso would also have rejected this idea of the supremacy of intentionality on the same basis Levinas did: the risk of totalization and categorization. I say this based on that both Caso and Levinas thought that a person is irreducible to a set of categories given by a system or a person. As I will show later, Caso said that human beings have infinite possibilities of expressions and these experiences must be treasured in their respective worth.

Caso<sup>14</sup> and fellow Mexican philosopher Samuel Ramos<sup>15</sup> depict key illustrations of the voice of the Other, a person who stops being a *mauvaise conscience* to become an active presence in the world. They prove that, as John Wild points out in his introduction to Totality and Infinity, "The other is not an object that must be interpreted and illuminated by an alien light. He shines forth with his own light, and speaks for himself" (TI 14). Caso and Ramos wanted Mexicans to shine on their own, so as not to become a mere reflection of what other people such as the *cientificos*<sup>16</sup>, or more powerful countries, wanted Mexicans to be. They fought for the Mexican voice to be stronger by self-recognition first and later from recognition

of the I which entails the unique characteristics that Mexicans live in. This recognition offers Mexicans a sense of pride in the acknowledgement of the richness of their culture. Caso challenged Mexicans intellectuals and people to face the I which was represented by the totalizing position that *cientificos* and economic empires of that time had held in Mexico for several decades. Caso also encouraged that proper respect be given to Mexican plurality as a valid and admirable form of life. Both Caso and Ramos wanted Mexicans to question the status-quo wherein internal and external entities had kept a good percentage of them in the shadows of ignorance and poverty. They proclaimed that the ideas of positivism and the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz had Mexicans living in conditions not only of material poverty but also devoid of identity. Within their lifetimes, Caso and Ramos fixed this situation in two ways. First, they strengthened the Mexican identity through a reconciliation of Mexicans with their uniqueness. Second, they advocated and achieved a more active participation of Mexico in the world, as opposed to the only holding perceptions of a false nationalism that would have kept Mexico isolated from the world. Both were achieved through the acknowledgement of the value of Mexican diversity and the complex formation of personhood. Even though they had some differences in the level of divergence that they accepted in their philosophies, the diversity and complexity of the Mexican identity was embraced by both of them. As Levinas and Marvin, Caso claims that taking varied experiences into consideration forms a richer and better but never full representation of the world.

In agreement with Levinas, Antonio Caso claims that a person is not a thing that can be fully understood. A human being cannot be cut in parts where he can be analyzed by sciences because he belongs to the higher hierarchical level of beings. Caso says that a “person does

not belong only to the physical world, but to the realm of organic nature” (HPTS 43). Our bodies obey the rules of nature, but our intellect and consciousness separate us from other living organisms. Our intellectual abilities make us persons, not just individuals that respond to the needs of nature. In other words, as established by Levinas, there are dimensions such as human sensations-experiences that transcend the limits of the natural world in the sense that they do not only disobey the natural world but in fact they become a causal force that modifies it. We are social beings who require more than just food and reproduction. Surviving is not enough to satisfy our desires; we need to have a well-rounded life, and this necessitates a society where we can instantiate and test our perception of reality. This encounter is made in a context of mutual need for the other, a dependence that is embraced by both Caso and Levinas.

This social function cannot be completed in a system in which the individual works for, but rather quite the opposite. Antonio Caso points out that the fulfillment of the social function is denied for both communism and individualistic capitalistic societies, as they ignore the quality and uniqueness of every human being. We cannot be subordinated to any system, no matter how well intended that system is, because that requires setting limits to the infinite possibilities of a person’s self-realization. This does not entail that a person live in a directionless<sup>17</sup> freedom whereupon everything is subject to the individual’s intentionality as individualism proposes. Similarly, it does not call for a person to live within a system in which everything is given and there is no room for innovation or personal input. A person needs a society where he can express his personality, and society needs persons, not individuals, to exist. This ideal society is “based on justice that is the moral union of men who respect value”

(HPTS 47), because humans are *creators of values* <sup>18</sup> This is to say that society is formed by the ethical encounter of different persons in justice, not by a system imposed on them by other foreign agents.

From that position it can be inferred that, as both Levinas and Caso claim, life is to be enjoyed through the ethical encounter with the other free of interferences from totalizing systems. In Caso's words, "The spirit flourishes above life, in the same way that life flourishes above physical nature" (HBTS 44). This strength comes from the overflow that we humans have because our condition makes us superior to animals. This distinction allows humans to enjoy social elements of life and not live solely to satisfy our physical needs. Since fixed structures impede the individual's self realization, both Levinas and Caso resist the idea of systematization. Just as Levinas promoted a philosophy against anti-Semitism and any other form of disregard for the other because he believed it was an ethical duty to protect those in need, Caso's mission was to *exile* Comte's positivism from early twentieth century Mexico because he thought that the social and economic consequences that this system had created was oppressing people by creating a faceless population who had no voice or identity. Caso devoted much of his philosophical work proving that intuition should also be included in Mexican philosophy alongside logic, as it takes the Mexican individuality into account. John H. Haddock<sup>19</sup> points out that Caso wanted to create a philosophy that "expresses the aspirations and ideals as well as the reality of Mexico" (PMP 581). Caso believed that Mexicans, as well as all people, must listen to the history that has shaped cultures and peoples. Furthermore, they should resist the idea of accepting systems, such as the liberal traditions where the individual

can gain access to the external world solely through reason, for such are opposite to the Mexican idiosyncrasy.

### **3.2 A Mexican National Philosophy?**

It can be argued that good ideas are not dependent upon nationality. I agree, however, that in this case the axiom may not apply because as Levinas proposes, as has been emphasized through this treatise, objective reason is not the ultimate truth giver of the world. The ethical duty of protecting other people is superior to reason. Allow me to offer an example to clarify my position. Imagine that you are in a group of people being held as hostages and the only means of gaining freedom is to put one in the group to death. Under a rational ethical system, the solution is simple; let him die, so the rest can live. This seems valid. However, I argue that there are some problems with this statement. First, why is it automatically assumed that the other is the one who has to die, so that we can live? Why do not we think I will die, so you can live? If that is the premise, would we still agree with the solution? Second, even if we are willing to randomly choose a person to die, so as to be fair to all, it may be the case that by doing so we will have lost an essence of being human: the capacity to feel compassion for another's pain as ours. In other words, if we do not protect the life of the other in the same way we would our own, we may be losing the very meaning of life, at least as Levinas proposes it.<sup>20</sup> It can be argued that in that case, a person must offer his life in order to save the others' but that would equally be a life that is sacrificed. It may be the case then that the best possible solution, not necessarily in terms of the number of lives, but as the ethical union with the other to a point where were the I and the other are one is to take the risk and either fight back or be willing to all die for the sake of solidarity with the other.

Coming back to the idea of having external systems imposed in Mexican social structure, liberal systems might have worked for other cultures but such was not the case for Mexico because these systems did not take into account the fact that spirituality plays a vital role in the Mexican conception of life. Caso supported the idea that Mexico's spirituality should be taken into account to adequately define the Mexican reality. Caso cautioned to "distrust those who want to impose on the concrete and living reality of a native country, the love of a hypothetical race; distrust, above all, those who boasting of a false humanity, propose to deny their Patria" (PMIN 78). For Caso "*la patria es primero*"<sup>21</sup> does not mean an obsessed irrational nationalism, but the natural consequence of inferring that Mexico is the immediate reality Mexicans have to deal with, so when they describe this reality they need to do it with a clear vision of what this reality is. By serving Mexico, their immediate reality, they are also serving humanity. It is important to notice that he did not advocate for a fixed idea of what it means to be Mexican, but on the contrary he wanted Mexicans to have wings as far as there is lead. In other words, he wanted Mexicans to have ideals, insomuch as they were immersed in daily reality, in the immediate reality, in Mexican reality.<sup>22</sup>

At first this idea of having the Patria as necessary may seem a point of variance between Levinas and Caso, but for Levinas dependence on other members of the community is important to fully develop our personhood. Caso shares this concept. He similarly asserted that it is only through society that a person can find her realization, but this society must be a natural reflection of the interest of the persons that make up the community. If the members of the community are forced or convinced to adopt a persona that does not correspond to their historical process they will not be able to develop their potentiality for they will be

limited by a feeling of inferiority. Caso argues that the complex of inferiority that Mexicans had, came from the logical impossibility to meet standards that do not correspond to Mexicans. These standards, among others, are the skin color, the physical constitution, and more important the vision of the cosmos. In addition to this, it was the pattern of choosing a social model and when they start to domain, a new model is imported, and the learning process has to start all over again. These conditions created an environment of frustration and sense of inferiority for they could barely reach what seems to be natural in other people. I altogether with Caso sustain, that in fact that is the problem, other countries have followed their historical process to determinate their national identity, while for Mexicans this process has been broken several times. In some occasions it has been broken by conquerors, but some other times by a national elite that in order to keep their power and dominance over the majority of the Mexican people have pushed, convinced or forced Mexicans to disbelief their identity failing in this way to their ethical duty of protecting the other. It is extremely important to notice that Caso's point is not that Mexicans are inferior, but that they feel inferior. Mexicans have as many problems as any other developing country, but also has a rich cultural identity and a promise to deliver a past and a future that needs to be reconciled in order to progress as a nation that is able to protect its people. Thus, in order to break this circle they need to enhance the knowledge of themselves.

Since Caso proposes that the basis of knowledge starts with one's immediate reality, it might seem problematic, as Levinas proposes a face to face relationship, rather than a system. However, I uphold that, as established before, in order to become a fully developed person we need to recognize, accept, and embrace our dependence with the other members of our

community. In order for this dependence to not become detrimental, we need to have knowledge of the persons whom surround us, as well as where we are coming from. We need to recognize our culture and past. A good approach to doing so is through a common effort that later gets transformed into plenty of personal expressions. If we do not reconcile ourselves with the past, we will not be able to develop our identity and without an identity we will not be able to question the I, for we will be only a reflection of its categories. The Other, in this case Mexican nationals, need first to find a common identity and later an individual visage to question the I based on the personal expectative, and no one else's. This analogous knocking on the I's door may not be to ask for bread, but rather to show him what he is losing by ignoring the Mexican reality; to question his values and notion of life based on personal contact.

This national identity does not come from an idealization of what to be a Mexican is, rather comes from the ethical interaction with the other; an interaction where people have moved from being merely an individual to a point where he has personality. Antonio Caso qualifies personality as the "world of irreducible spiritual being" (HPTS 45). It is the instantiation of the universal in a unique being that can be related to the intentionality that Husserl designated as the symbol of human superiority, which Levinas rejects for considering it an attempt to totalize the world. This risk was already apparent in 1940 when Caso cautioned against the systematization that contemporary society had been involved in. Society needs to accept the existing inequality rather than an impossible uniformity. In order to achieve this goal we need not ask the masses<sup>23</sup>, but the persons that have a unique personality capable of



conquering both society and nature by themselves. This would ideally lead to the two later joining forces in equal conditions to better shape the world.

### **3.3 Persons and Society**

Caso studies this relation between society and the individual and reaches the conclusion that there must be an equal worth for a society that tyrannizes man, forgets their humanity, forgets that they are not only biological entities, and one that recognizes it is composed of organic beings, centers of culture. Then there is the individual, who conceives himself as complete in the sense that his reality neglects the value that culture has in his existence. Doing such causes one to be reduced to the level where primary concerns consist in personal and bodily needs. We need to remember that an individual does not demonstrate his personhood through the exercise of the will in relation to other members of the community. Without culture, an individual is only a self-centered unit that in his absolute freedom does not find means to exercise the will, and is therefore lost in the sea of indeterminacy.<sup>24</sup>

For a person to actualize his freedom he needs to participate in the genesis of culture where valuable experiences are synthesized. It is important to notice that this culture is not just a mere reflection of what a particular generation upholds, but rather is an accumulation of history in a specific moment in time. History is reflected in the experiences that a person has in the world, through contact with others. Both Levinas and Caso make the point that the history we share with other human beings impels our want for a moral and physical solidarity with them. This want leads us to generate a culture that is not just inherently platonic, but that becomes part of the physical realm by being experienced for as I have stressed, ideas must have correspondence in the world.

Caso makes a good observation when he points out that the goal of solidarity is not achievable by social movements that only redistribute wealth. This is not sufficient for there is no love involved. I do not mean solely love of material wealth, but more so that which stems from establishing human ties. The love and respect for the disadvantaged other that is able to ultimately create a better world compels us to learn from the Other by engaging in an honest exchange of ideas and experiences that contributes more to the well-being of both, exclusive of material wealth. This is not to say that material possessions are not necessary because as Levinas points out one of the I's duties to the Other is to help him to be self sufficient. Rather, the problem stems from the emphasis that capitalist societies place on materialistic means as assessing the value of a person. Such appraisal cannot begin to account for the infinite possibilities of human expression.

Caso elaborates when he says, "A person is not a factum; rather he is the possible direction of a process, and at the same time a task, an eternal luminous goal that hovers above natural man. Man is rebirth" (HPTS 48). Here, Antonio Caso's thought is comparable to Levinas' idea of man's infinitude. A person is not a fixed concept, where he needs to direct all his efforts to achieve the goal of perfection that has been set for him. This cannot be as there is not such an ideal concept of perfection. The concept is rooted in what older generations have thought correct, but it is also subject to the contributions that newer generations ascribe.

Caso proposes an inward process where human beings return to themselves as an approach for salvation. However, this position must not be confused with a call for isolation. Caso recognizes that a person's actualization is only attainable in the encounter and creation of society. Subjective and therefore vague values do not make a significant contribution to

people. Caso's recommendation is a call for persons to see that "one is the work and agent of one's own will, capable of one's own substantiality" (48). It is only when a person makes an effort to instantiate his abilities that he realizes the limits individualization has imposed upon him. Thereafter he should work on the development of his own personality and find the unique characteristics that establish him as a person, and not just an individual. Each instantiation of personhood is singularly unique; it is not reducible to some other person's concepts such as science or the categories that another person wants to enforce. Now we have a strong ethical base established, we can move to hear the voice of the other.

#### Chapter IV: The Other as a Form of Resistance

In order to understand my use of the other, it is important to make a clear distinction between the non-I and the other. I will define the non-I as the person who is not the I, but does not have a significant divergence to the I in terms of culture, ideology or mind set. He is just a person different to the I. However, since they have agreed for the most part in what kind of life project they want to have there is not a large difference between them. The non-I then does not represent a questioning to the I. Allow to present an example. In a community of philosophers where all of them have concurred that philosophy is the place and language to be used in order to solve the matters that are present in life they represent not the other but the non-I to each other. Even when there are different philosophy traditions, they still have strong ties such as logic and the belief in language as a solving-problem tool. These similarities make easy to set all of them in a distinct group that could be considered the opposite to people whom do not consider that thinking things through is necessary to have a well-rounded life. This group of people is the other to the philosophers as well as philosophers is the other to the *non-reflexive* people. As we can infer, at difference of the non- I, the other represents what the I has not understood or even attempted to understand.

Even when I have claimed that otherness exists in relation to the level of similarities between one person and other, I will add that it can be said that most, if not all, societies have a system that clearly separates Is from others. It is important to notice that as we move to a global society these distinctions between cultures are being eroded, and some times plainly substituted by an exclusive society where differences are not promoted. This situation can be clearly seen in the warning that David Harrison of Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania made

when he said that "There are fewer languages than there were a month or six months ago... Human languages are literally disappearing as we speak." (HLFEC) It is in this context that the other becomes essential to maintain diversity in our lives. Allow me then to elaborate more on the idea of the other.

I am defining the other as the person who refuses to surrender his identity to mainstream culture whatever that mainstream culture is (i.e. Capitalist, Communist, Buddhist, Christian, etc). In other words, he would oppose any system that pretends to totalize him by setting him into categories that cannot fully capture his human potential or limits his right to question and express himself in a way where he is able to fully develop his identity. This identity is rich in experiences that set him in contact with an alternative reality to the one that is presented to him by mainstream culture. He actively looks to exchange ideas and experiences with people with an opposite mind set for he knows that it is the best way to learn together how to build a better community. The other is not afraid to question the status quo to point out the failures in a system that obligates people to obey it and restrains them. Neither is he afraid of establishing a conversation and collaboration with the system in the points that are of common interest for if he rejected the idea of having a conversation with the members of mainstream culture he will be doing the same mistake they do: denying the existence of other ways of thinking that may contribute with something of value to the formation of a richer human reality.

The other resists giving away his freedom to get some material assessment, even though he recognizes the value of them and does not look to be a martyr, but a person that also appreciate other activities such as art, music, or social relations. In fact, he prefers to be

actualized in his interaction with the community; a community where he considers himself at home. He rejects any superior order, whatever it is called spirit, state or corporation, because his freedom is instantiated in the interaction with other people, where there is not room for an absolute and totalized I that some systems pretend to promote. It is important to notice that even when the community is the place where his freedom is actualized, it is not given by the community itself. A community has not coercion power over the person other than its capacity to be attractive enough for him. Freedom, in other words is not given by an external entity, but is to be exercised within a community that the individual willfully wants to join and help to develop. This community is made up of the social interactions that persons, without losing their own identities, have. These interactions create an almost dialectical relation between individuals and society that helps all parties involved to achieve their goals.

I call the other to the person with courage to resist the influence of the I. The other absolutely refuses standardized societies, because he does not think that the options that mainstream society offers him will help him to actualize his freedom. For the very word standardized sounds like something that imposes limits to his freedom. They are ready to face the consequences of not being part of a system. In fact, for them, this situation is beneficial because in this way they are not obligated to be part of a system that they think is oppressive. These others are ready to form small communities where democracy is made face to face, so there is no place to hide from the community, and abuse it in subtle ways. Whatever they decide to do is made clear, for there is nothing to hide. They find their actualization in the community, in the very existence of other persons, and the other persons at the same time find their freedom in them too.

Allow me to be very clear in this point; I am not saying that community gives him an identity, for that would be an external entity. I am claiming, in agreement with Caso and Levinas, that the other is defined by the ethical encounter of the persons who build a strong community. In other words, the other has desires and projects by his own; however, he looks for a community where he can actualize his freedom. He feels free to leave the community anytime it becomes oppressive and interferes with his freedom, for as we have said before he does not depend on the community to have an identity. If for some reason a person or a group of people wants to take over the community he will defend it, but if he cannot do it, either by indifference of the community or conflict of interests, he will move away and look for another community where he can be free.

The communities that others form are not isolated from other communities; in fact they are in continuous contact between them. These communities are interconnected through the individuals that participate in different organizations, via delegates who attend congress or reunions within them and by the personal contacts that a person has with other people. These encounters are given through collaborative events they organize or in a local level in the day a day construction of a better community. These organizations, go from Zapatistas, Via Campesina, Animal rights organizations, to local collectives, etc, They respect their identities, and are not to take over power to dictate people what to do; doing that will be against their principles of personal freedom. They are able to organize themselves and learn from different forms of resistance.

## End Notes

1 In his Philosophy of Right, Hegel describes the master-slave relationship as based in a dialectical relationship where after a fight to the death, the slave is ruled by master. However, due the dependence that the master gets to have on the slave, the latter becomes the master. This cycle is repeated through history. In Levinas' conception, because his nature. In other words the other never gets to dominate the I.

2 The conflict has been documented by several national and international newspapers as "La Jornada" "Proceso" and a number of human rights organizations such as Amnesty International at a word level. To get the background of this conflict, offer support and see updates of the conflict the reader can refer to:

<http://www.alertalomasdelpoleo.blogspot.com/>

3 I thank Dr. Simon for pointing out this reference in a conversation we had, my last semester of my MA program: Spring 2009.

4 It is worth noting the difference between Ethical Relativism and Cultural Relativism that Ann Kingsolver makes in her essay "Thinking and Acting Ethically in Anthropology". She says that "[anthropologists] do not personally agree with every practice we study as anthropologists. Ethical relativism, in which a person suspends judgment on cultural practices and believes they are all equally valid, is separate from cultural relativism, in which a culture is not judged as good or bad but is understood using its own framework" (TA 80).

5 Even when the aesthetic aspect is very important to achieve a worth living life, due to the extent and nature of the present work I will focus only on the ethical dimensions of this relationship and leave the aesthetic value for a later work.



[6](#) Dr. Plotskovosky, a Physics professor at The University of Texas at El Paso, explains how it is that even with its natural limitations our brain can give us an accurate picture of the world. He says that our brain has cognitive access to some fragments of the universe, however, this is enough because it can process that information in the same way we see the pattern of a piece of wall paper and we can have a fair conception of how the pattern completes itself.

[7](#) Faber Martin is author of major works in Phenomenology as Naturalism and Subjectivism, and founder of the Philosophy and Phenomenological Society.

[8](#) At difference of the big-bang, the Popol Vuh, the creation Mayan myth says that human beings were created for the Gods so human beings can worship the Gods.

[9](#) The problems of having a naturalized Ethics are beyond the scope of this essay. However they have been largely discussed among others by James Blair.

[10](#) There are some formal systems that allow contradictions, but because their low explanation power, we will ignore them.

[11](#) In his book Against Method Paul Feyerabend makes an interesting challenge to the objectivity of Science. He says that even when the answers to the questions are obtained in an objective, methodic way; the questions are made by a person, so they are influenced by his culture.

[12](#) Antonio Caso, Samuel Ramos and José Vasconcelos met each other in the Ateneo de la juventud. Even when they had very different personalities, they fought together against the *científicos*. He also was one of the ideologists of the Mexican revolution.

[13](#) Antonio Caso died in 1946, and the peak of his philosophy was early XX century, while Levinas' *Totality and Infinity* was published in 1961.

[14](#) Antonio Caso, Samuel Ramos and José Vasconcelos met each other in *Ateneo de la juventud*. Even when they had very different personalities they fought together against the *científicos*. He also was one of the ideologists of the revolution.

[15](#) Samuel Ramos, besides partnering with Caso and Vasconcelos against the *noble dictator* Porfirio Diaz, wrote *Perfil del hombre y la cultura en Mexico*, one the first and more important attempts to understand what it is to be a Mexican, a book that inspired Octavio Paz to write *El laberinto de la soledad*. This book would give its author a Noble prize and the third one to Mexico, meeting Caso and Ramos' desire of having Mexico playing a more important role in the world.

[16](#) *Científicos* were a group of Mexican intellectuals led by Gabino Barreda who supported Porfirio Diaz and Comte's positivism.

[17](#) As it is known, also Hegel presents this idea in the first chapter of *Philosophy of Right*.

[18](#) The idea belongs to Friedrich Nietzsche of whom Caso was an admirer.

[19](#) John H. Haddox has been a professor of philosophy at the University of Texas at El Paso for more than fifty years. He introduced Latin American philosophy to American Academia. His work has been continued by Carlos Sanchez, a philosophy professor at the University of San Jose State University.

[20](#) The solution of this dilemma is far from the scope of this thesis. However, there is plenty of literature about these issues for the reader interested in this dilemma.

[21](#) Homeland comes first.

[22](#) In the early twentieth century Mexican nationals did not travel often. If a person was born in a place he would likely stay there for most of his life.

[23](#) Ortega y Gasset explores more this idea in La rebelión de las masas by saying that mass people are not persons any more for they have lost their uniqueness to become just one figure.

[24](#) This idea is developed in Hegel's Philosophy of Right.

## References Code

AIAI Admirable Immorality and Admirable Imperfection

CCL Cambridge Companion to Levinas.

EFP Ethics as First Philosophy.

HLFEC Half Language Face Extinction this Century.

HPTS The Human Person and the Totalitarian State.

IP Introduction to Phenomenology.

LH Letters to Humanism.

MS Moral Saints

OB Otherwise than Being.

PMIN El problema de México y la ideología nacional.

PMP Philosophy with a Mexican Perspective.

TI Totality and Infinity

TM Time and Being.

TNH Towards a New Humanism.

UD Unity and Diversity.

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## Curriculum Vita

Luis Rubén Díaz was born in Concepción del Oro, Zacatecas, México. The second son of Francisco Javier Diaz and Maria de Lourdes Cepeda, he graduated from CETis 86, Chihuahua Mexico, in the Spring of 1994 and entered the Instituto Tecnológico de Chihuahua in the fall to pursue a bachelor's degree in Business Administration. While he was attending business school he worked in Proyser. When he was in charge of the administration, Proyser's operations grew more than 300%. After receiving his bachelor's of Business Administration from the Instituto Tecnológico de Chihuahua in 1994, he moved to El Paso, Texas in order to get a bachelor's and a master degree in philosophy from The University of Texas at El Paso. He was a speaker in the National Congress of philosophy student in Chihuahua, Mexico in 2006, as well as in the New Mexico-West Texas Philosophical Society in Houston in 2009. He wrote his master thesis "The Ethics of the Other" based on Levinas' philosophy in 2009.

Permanent Address: C. del Tordo #4911  
Chihuahua, México.