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Love, The Other And The City: Critical Analysis Of The Ethics Of Alterity In A Capitalist Society

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LOVE, THE OTHER AND THE CITY: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ETHICS OF
ALTERITY IN A CAPITALIST SOCIETY

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LOVE, THE OTHER AND THE CITY: CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ETHICS OF
ALTERITY IN A CAPITALIST SOCIETY

by

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Abstract

Loving for Levinas is a desubjectivation. The one who loves is the one who does not resist the call of the Other. He who loves, according to Levinas, recognizes in the face of the migrant, the orphan, the widow, and the poor, as an inescapable responsibility. However, is this desubjectivation a possibility in capitalist cities? Capitalism is the consequence of a philosophical heritage founded in the totality of the same. Philosophy understood as “love of wisdom” places man in a position of control towards everything that surrounds him, the Other included. Everything belongs to the subject that knows the reality and the Other is reduced to the simplistic definition of “another-I”, diminishing its difference and infinitude; since everything can be known, which is the same of assumed [based on a Cartesian metaphysics of ‘possession’ of the material world, the *res extensa*], there is no mystery within the Other since, in that metaphysics, we only ‘have’ the possibility of revealing the sameness of the reflected subject. My argument deals with the way that our American society—and what I mean by society is American cities—were built on these unconscious presuppositions where the “I” is the emperor of an alienated reality; ethical reasons are always confused by prioritizing economic issues, and consequently responsibility for the other is displaced by the drive for economic ‘freedom’ or acquisition of capital. Capitalist cities, specifically, the border community El Paso-Ciudad Juarez was built on the gear of an industrialized lifestyle, where mass production shapes the rhythm of the daily life of local citizens. This is ‘obvious’ in how every factory at this border metropolis works through a capital production design, where each of its parts exists for that purpose; in this system, any defective part—or human as a ‘part’ of ‘human capital’—must be repaired or discarded. The fleeting rhythm that capitalism proposes to societies pushes a culture in which only a very selective group benefits from this system. In such societies, competition creates a spirit of self-affirmation against the Other. He who dares to love, that is, he who stops racing on behalf of the other gets defeated in this game of capital. It appears that in such a capitalist city, the “I” must constantly assert himself so as to not lose. The one who loves the Other becomes an anti-hero of the values of a capitalist city, the “idiot” of Dostoevsky. The radical alterity that Levinas proposes requires more than attitudes and ideals, it demands true sacrifice and genuine exile from social expectations. This work proposes a critical analysis of the socio-economic factors of a capitalist city from a framework that adopts the Levinasian philosophy to better perceive the rationale behind the lack of “Ethics of Alterity” and the possibility of developing such theory in a capitalist system.

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Section I: Origins of the Western paradigm of the I

A. The Lucidity of the I

In his work *Totality and Infinity*, Emmanuel Levinas begins by stating that everyone should be ready to agree “that it is of the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality.”¹ With this phrase, Levinas proposes to revisit and question those principles that we have taken for granted, which have shaped the way we see morality in our times. The main problem that Levinas finds is the ‘truthfulness’ with which morality is clothed, along with the epistemological lucidity with which morality assumes and promotes itself in the Western philosophical tradition. This lucidity is a concept that refers to an epistemological virtuosity embodied and performed by the ‘traditional Western philosopher’ in the exercise of knowing the world. The philosopher, the western thinker, knows what he affirms to “know”, and he/she asserts to enjoy of an indisputable elucidation: The Truth. For Levinas, it is precisely in this ‘obsession’ for lucidity based on the confidence that the Western philosophy has sustained and predicated its rationality, from which, according to Levinas, the most significant errors and atrocities of humanity have been committed, a clear example of this the Second World War. The concept of lucidity has generated a paradigm of dominance over what is known. According to Levinas, from Athens to Modernity, Western philosophy has been generating a reflection where the person who “knows” the universe does so through the ‘domestication’ of what is different from subjective parameters. The “lover of wisdom”— *φιλοσοφος*— approaches the exteriority of the world and conceptualizes it, resembling himself and his experience in front of the object, and appropriating it; the world becomes the world of “I.” The reality becomes a permanent object—a

¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 21.

mere source of knowledge— for the subject that seeks to apprehend all things to become wise according to the paradigm of the Western world; in other words, the world becomes an open field for domination, which in simultaneously, presents itself as a permanent possibility of a struggle for its appropriation. It is, in a lucid morality like that of the Western tradition, where 'love of knowledge' determines the idea of goodness. The morality inherited by the Western tradition has its basis on the rational dominance over the world that surround the subject. This tradition based on a subjective perspective of dominion is what has been described by Levinas as a paradigm of the "I." On a paradigm based on the "I," the possibility of War between subjects becomes incessant. This fascination for lucidity is based on an Ontological Metaphysics, the study of the being that understands the world as an object for the abstraction of its essential particularities.

According to Levinas, the genocide event that is war is only a phenomenal reaction that obeys the logic of the study of being: Ontology. In his words: "the visage of being that shows itself in war is fixed in the concept of totality."² By its part, Totality proceeds as a naive aspiration of omniscience by part of the subject, a longing that seeks the appropriation of the exterior to the "I." The subject performs this Totality by an epistemic movement of the subject – the I– that seeks to know object naming it and granting it an ontological sense. In other words, according to Levinas, throughout the activity of understanding the world, the "I" makes the object part of the Totality of a sameness system, and this object becomes part of the world of the "I."

The paradigm of the "I" is one that has built the desire for dominance in Society. Understanding the "I," as a principle of philosophical knowledge, can only end in the hell of

² Ibid.

"Egology." Philosophies of the I –of the Ego– carry out " Egocentric" worlds, where Otherness, that which is different to the I, is relegated.

Framed in the critique to the paradigm of the "I," this thesis represents an effort to question the Western world– and its socio-economic projects– which is increasingly presented as the kindest option for the life of societies and which, nevertheless, is a "producer"– sometimes– unconscious, of Totalitarian worlds. The French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre believed that from the seventeenth century to the twentieth century, the world of thought had been dominated mainly by different moments where the figure of a thinkers such as Kant, Hegel and Marx had dominated the collective reflection. Sartre believed that it was the task of the philosopher to understand in what temporality of thought was situated.³ From that guideline, this reflection is identifies the 21st century as a time not characterized by a figure of a specific philosopher, but by an economic project influenced primarily by the Capitalist system. When speaking of Capitalism, it is no longer just one face of liberal philosophy, nor merely an economic system, but a "System," in its broadest sense. Capitalism is the product of the Ontological tradition that proposes the "I" as the center of philosophical reflection.

B. The subject and the action-man

The origin of the philosophical thought that sustains the paradigm of the I can be traced back to the beginning of what the official –or traditional– history of philosophy has considered as modernity.

The modern period in Philosophy runs roughly from 1600 to 1800. This period could be described as the time when the debates of great philosophers caused a displacement of the

³ Sartre, *Search for a Method*, 7.

substance by the subject.⁴ In general, modernity could be understood as an effort that led to positioning the subject as the priority and starting point of any reflection. The empowerment of the subject as the beginning of all knowledge was obviously a process of discussions that led to the construction of concepts and theories that ended up describing said subject as the unquestionable and first certainty of knowledge. According to sociologist Sebastian Botichelli - following the contribution of Mario Heler - modernity configured a revolution that brought about a transmigration of the values that gave meaning to the pillars that had built the medieval world.⁵ Through a process of secularization, morality ceased to have as its sole objective the search for the means of saving the soul, thus considering the earthly as a goodness that should be taken into account not only as a means but an end in itself. In this way, "personal ambitions were encouraged and the search for economic enrichment was enabled."⁶ The political vision, on the other hand, is marked by the postulates of freedom and equality, leading to the quasi-divinization of individual wills; which permanently crossed the way of creating society by creating the modern state. Simultaneously, epistemology took a positivist hue, giving birth to scientific revolutions which changed the way in which the relationship between human and world was perceived. Botticelli adds: "The subject of knowledge ceased to be a passive and speculative entity claiming for itself an active role in shaping knowledge."⁷

Hence, with this way of thinking, Modernity solidly establishes what is known as humanism. In this humanism, man gradually gets rid of a debt to the other of himself, mainly from God. Now it is within the subject itself where everything can be established without

⁴ Botticelli, *Capitalismo y subjetividad: el sujeto como trabajador en el discurso filosófico de la Modernidad Europea*, 99

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

resorting to exteriority. Modern man owes himself to no one but himself. To achieve this epistemological supremacy, it was necessary to rethink the thinking, and that is where the subject appears as the only means to understand reality.

Descartes is the philosopher who proposes the definitive basis for subjectivism that is grounded in modernism. Descartes presents the idea of the subject who, stripping the reality of certainty, takes it to clothe himself with it. The understanding of the Descartes *cogito* founds a centralism that dictates the true meaning of the world. Descartes founds existence in himself without needing anything outside of him. Its existence has a purely intellectual dimension (*Je suis une chose qui pense*), materiality is nothing but a source of confusion. The senses deceive him, reality is more an illusion, for an evil genius may have produced all that so that he believes that it exists and yet not be real. Descartes then proposes that if he had thought he had subject, and therefore truthfulness: his famous *Cogito Ergo Sum*. Descartes uses his consciousness: I doubt it, I think, if I think I exist. The cogito sits on the *dubito*. Here is the foundation of Cartesian thought about himself and reality. It is only the act of affirmation of the cogito that creates others as human beings. In other words, the otherness is constituted from the same and not vice versa.

It is this thinking of Descartes that translates to the mere fact of an action. To think is to act and if it is based on an action, existence is totally forced to act indeterminately. However, as Sebastian Botticelli explains, this action is not typical of a potential nature but of a mere act.

I am — I exist: this is certain; but how often? As often as I think; for perhaps it would even happen, if I should wholly cease to think, that I should at the same time altogether cease to be. (...) But what, then, am I? A thinking thing, it has been said. But what is a thinking thing? It is a thing that doubts, understands, [conceives], affirms, denies, wills, refuses; that imagines also, and perceives.”⁸

⁸ Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 5

The person for Descartes is the one who is by virtue of his thinking, to the point of wondering if he could disappear when he stopped the action of reason; in other words, a "human-action." However, this action is no longer one where a power precedes it, but a pure act. The Cogito is not the prelude to being, but the very condition of existence. "This action can only take place in act, as a form of existence for which the predicate of 'acting' is not only a particularity, but also its condition of possibility."⁹ This statement that identifies the act of thinking with the very essence of the subject, establishes a problem that in the future will condemn the person to chains that will require perpetual action to reaffirm their existence.

Some years later, Kant will propose a philosophy of transcendental subjectivity. Kant dismisses the elements of appearance and essence, putting in place what appears and the conditions in what the phenomenon does it. The peculiarity in this philosophy is that Kant gives a radical interpretation to the cartesian epistemology of "I think". This premise for Kant, "is founded on a supreme principle, the synthetic unity of apperception or self-awareness [...] as pure thinking, independent of experience."¹⁰ In other words, proposes a philosophy where the phenomenon and its categories of knowledge are contemplated by a rational perceptivity beyond the senses. Given these conditions of knowledge, Kant's transcendental subject creates a regulated synthesis of all the perceptions of the subject before the phenomenon. In other words, there is an independence of the entity and the perception of this one in the rationality of the subject; which is interpreted by the conditions or categories that the subject imposes to the entity. In other words, "in Kantian thought it is the action of the subject of knowledge that

⁹ Botticelli, *Capitalismo y subjetividad: el sujeto como trabajador en el discurso filosófico de la Modernidad Europea*, 100

¹⁰ Düsing, *La subjetividad en la filosofía clásica alemana de Kant a Hegel*, 100

make up the cognitive world.”¹¹ The world can be adapted to the [constructive] acts of [the systemizing] knowledge of the subject (constructivism). The Cartesian conception of a new subject is completed, the human-action, the one who acts (thinks), gives meaning to the world he knows. This human is the maker of himself, his knowledge and his world. Botticelli expresses the idea in this way:

But the acting condition of the modern subject does not end on this plane. The passage of the substance to the subject can also be understood as the reconceptualization of the role of man in the universe, of his possibilities of transforming the surrounding world, of his way of relating to his past and, especially, to his future. Action man is the maker of his knowledge, but also of his society, his environment and himself; He is as owner of his achievements as responsible for his failures and shortcomings.¹²

C. Individual-man and work

After the contribution that Kant will make to modern thought and indirectly to the constitution of Capitalism will come a tendency in modern philosophy to rethink the subject in society and the type of organization in which it operates. Without leaving behind the idea of human-action - and which will appear again towards the end of this historical journey - we will jump into the famine of political philosophy that was developed in modernity. The language in the writing will change from referring to the person as subject, to now conceive it - in the way that the philosophers we will deal with do so - as an individual.

Just as Descartes considers himself the father of modernism, in particular the philosopher Thomas Hobbes is considered the father of modern political thought. Hobbes' work is especially relevant in the process of modernization given to his political theory that uproots the authority of the theocentric position and supports a proposal based on a secular reason. Hobbes' philosophy

¹¹ Botticelli, *Capitalismo y subjetividad: el sujeto como trabajador en el discurso filosófico de la Modernidad Europea*, 101

¹² Ibid.

totally breaks with the Aristotelian tradition that taught that humanity was sociable by nature, thus proposing the human being as a mere individual, detached from the rest. At the center of Hobbsian theory is a human being who is not a harmonious part of a group of people. According to Hobbes, the human being is by nature aggressive towards the presence of the Other, who poses a threat to his well-being. "Man to Man is an errant Wolfe"¹³ is the famous statement made by Hobbes and the basis for an ideology where being alone becomes a wiser thought than working with others. In this way, the Hobbesian reflection ends being the philosophy that relegates the idea of societies to simply be a set of individuals that are separated but live together only for survival purposes. For Hobbes, the Others are, in the best of the cases, a type of 'necessary evil' that serves the individual for purposes of protection against the onslaught of nature. However, in this philosophy the individual never sees others as part of his group or feels himself as part of a natural community. The individual seeks his well-being, and in order to achieve that goal he uses all means that surrounds him; he seeks his goal even if this means to go over the neighbor's well-being. From this perspective, life becomes a battle bonnet where one individual meet another in a competition for survival.¹⁴

Hobbes presents an anthropology where man presents himself in search of individual interest. He believes that such nature is the condition that drives humanity to create war and pain in the world. Hobbes proposes a totalitarian State – the Leviathan – to enforce a universal law and create a Society where everybody respects the other's interests alleviating the human condition of war. Individuals surrender their will to the State in exchange for protecting their individual assets, and thus a civil society is born as a pact for peace and prosperity. For Hobbes it is only through this Leviathan, that life, culture and civilization will be possible.

¹³ Hobbes, *De Cive*, 24

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 11

This Hobbsian conception that reduces people to mere incapacitated individuals of natural harmonic sociability that Botticelli calls the "human-individual"¹⁵; and it is for Hobbes that the radicalized conception of the individual is gestated, and which will lead to capitalist anthropology.

In response to Hobbes, John Locke will build an argument to take stock of the areas of freedom of the individual and the powers of authority of the State. Locke builds his political philosophy on the basis of a much more optimistic perspective than Hobbes on the nature of the human being -- who, although he remains an individualized being, his rationality tends toward goodness and through it reaffirms his ability to act benevolently. For Locke it is important to reaffirm the freedom of the individual over the power of the State, and to achieve this task, he uses a reconceptualization of the idea of work. At work, according to Locke, man finds the most obvious manifestation of his essential capacities, which are rationality and freedom, since this activity provides him with goods that allow him to subsist independently. In other words, human freedom, whose causality is found in reason, finds its closest end in the transformation of nature for its private use and individual subsistence.

This statement presents two qualities that are worth denoting for this reflection: first, that the creation of goods through work reaffirms human individuality; and second, the direct relationship of work with the rationality of the individual. In the same way, Locke considers that work is the means by which the private appropriation of nature's resources is legitimized. Locke understands that the product of work, being the result of the reason used in physical effort, becomes an extension of the individual's particular creativity and therefore belongs to him unquestionably, And since if the human being is naturally separated from the rest, the result of

¹⁵ Botticelli, *Capitalismo y subjetividad: el sujeto como trabajador en el discurso filosófico de la Modernidad Europea*, 101

the effort in his work is in the same way of an individual nature. Locke explains this idea by saying that “labour marked those things off from the rest of the world’s contents; it added something to them beyond what they had been given by nature, the common mother of all; and so, they became his private right.”¹⁶

It should be noted that, for Locke, everything that is used for the transformation of the material world for the generation of goods is considered as property. Thus, the body as a work tool, in Locke, will be the first private property since it naturally belongs to himself and not to society.¹⁷ In this way a very powerful concept appears that will remain alive until our times: property. Locke's philosophy had shaped an anthropological proposal essentially linked to the economy. In his proposal, the work of each individual gave to the same worker a natural right over what was produced by his own effort; that product becomes its property because that piece of a natural resource, which has been transformed, have now a personal stamp printed. This is how Locke first postulates a merger of the individual - the subject - and the object, stemming from the action of work.

According to Locke, property is an absolute and inalienable right of the person. Therefore, the State in the Lockean civil society must have within its main objectives the promotion and protection of the right of private property, since this is essential for the person in his state of nature.¹⁸ For Locke, the notion of work in unity with the protection of private property engenders the concept of value. That is, now the fruit of all work will have a value that equals the effort that has been taken to produce them, and this value must be protected at all costs.

¹⁶ Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 11

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 2

The natural resources of the world are for Locke what God left so that humanity, through work and effort, create products to fulfill their needs. In the Lockean vision, a better life situation comes on the base of private property: the more products transformed and own, the better life.¹⁹ Locke understands that the activity of transforming the world is the natural use of the human rationality. Locke believes that the more one has, the more one demonstrates a rational capacity.

Since productivity, in the Lockean philosophy, is related to the natural activity of human nature, commerce has an essential role in the construction of a Civil Society where owning products is the path to a happy life. According to Locke, commerce is important to achieve this goal because it raises the number of objects in the hands of individuals. The growth of trade would bring improvements in cultivation methods, greater productivity, and with all this an improvement in the lives of individuals.²⁰

The importance of Locke for this historical journey is its economic proposal where the work is essentially linked to anthropology. The individual for Locke is not simply someone who can produce, but it is precisely his economic production nature what defines his very capacity to be an individual. This essential productivity is what qualifies the individual as capable subject of a freedom also linked to her humanity.

One of the French philosophers who contributed to the creation of the elements of Capitalism was Montesquieu. He sought to establish "commercial virtues" that help the Republic to achieve subsistence and progress. For Montesquieu, fortunes did not represent any problem for the republic as long as the "spirit of commerce" remained limited by these virtues. One of these virtues, and which concerns us in this work, is that of love of work, which for Montesquieu

¹⁹ Ibid., 3

²⁰ Locke, *Ensayos sobre la ley natural*, 81-83.

was the primary and definitive source of progress.²¹ Montesquieu was convinced that when the person was motivated by love for work, the production of goods would inspire him, not the wealth itself. A person who loved to work, would not stop producing even if he had enough production for himself, even if the result of his work was not for his benefit but for the benefit of the Republic. With this love for work, people will provide benefit on behalf of the commonwealth of any type of government.

For his part, in England, David Hume added new ideas to the notion and nature of work. Hume, believed that labor was the means by which the individual passed from his ancient animal nature, where basic needs dominated him, to the creation of a second nature superior to the first: civilization.²²

However, one of the most important advances in the conception of labor was provided by Jeremy Bentham. For this philosopher, labor is defined as an ethical attitude based on a natural inclination to avoid pain and to seek for pleasure.²³ Bentham specifies that this search for pleasure is similarly characterized by the creation of methods where the individual requires less effort to achieve greater benefit. In other words, Bentham argued that the person is naturally inclined to find means to obtain more wealth through minimal work. However, Bentham believed that even work involved pain –a kind of necessary evil– to achieve the good of pleasure. Therefore, according to Bentham, in this search to avoid pain, the individual is called to a "rational" attitude where he gets others to work in his place to provide that benefit.²⁴

²¹ Montesquieu, *The Spirit of Laws*, 64

²² McGee, *The Economic Thought of David Hume*, 185

²³ Bentham, *Principles of Morals and Legislation*, 25

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 41

Section II: I, Infinity and the Totality of the Ego

A. Alterity: exteriority and the Ego

For me, capitalism is not the fundamental issue; rather, it is the metaphysical and epistemological foundations of our Western philosophy that *grounds* the conditions of capitalism. Thus, in this chapter I will proceed with a radical form of *anarchism* with the help of Levinas in analyzing the modern philosophy of the I – its individuality– and an introduction of the metaphysics of ethical exteriority and the Other.

The most crucial reflection for Levinas is that on intersubjectivity. For that reason, the Other is at the core of his philosophy. For Levinas, the Other manifests himself to the "I" in the concrete and naked face, which calls him and asks him in his misery; in the face of the poor, orphan, widow, stranger, to whom the "I" is responsible. The Other for Levinas is who is totally different from the "I", and whose presence is beyond the intentional conceptualizing of the Ego. The manifestation of the Other, as object, questions the adequacy of the object to the consciousness of the subject. The Other never measures up to the conceptual categories of the "I;" he is always absolutely Other of the "I".²⁵ This quality of being inadequate of exceeding conceptual categories, and that goes beyond subjective reasonings and its theorizations, Levinas understands designates as Infinity. The Other is Infinite, she is transcendental to knowledge and irreducible to the sameness of the "Ego."

However, Levinas argues that the Other has been forgotten in the thought of Western Philosophy. For Levinas, Western reflection reduced the understanding of the world to the sameness of the Ego, eliminating difference, and creating a Totality of the "Ego." Levinas

²⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 41

affirms that Western philosophy encompasses the knowledge of the world –what is strange to the I- in a self-understanding of the Ego. The Ego knows the world and defines it through the reduction of its objectivity into its subjective categories. Otherness is understood as *res extensa* of the *res cogitans* –the I–, eliminating the Other *as* other, and elevating the I as the measure of all things. Levinas calls this the Totality of the I. The human being, in this perspective, according to Levinas, knows by absorbing the different –otherness– into himself, thus denying the Other and reducing it to other-I. This for Levinas, presupposes a violence that is normalized by the ontological paradigm, where the Ego, by means of the use of subjective reasonings, consumes everything exterior into the sameness of the “I.” According to this logic, the subject enjoys an inscrutable understanding of reality. ²⁶

Levinas finds in the “I” the origin of the problem that gives birth to the father of Capitalism: Liberalism. The imposition of individualism from the paradigm of the Ego –the Unique– in the modus operandi of the ideology of Capitalism, appears in Levinas’s philosophy with the concept of Totality. The way in which Western philosophy believes a human being *knows* is confused with the way in which he is related to the Other--as an object (of Being) that is absolutely and fully knowable; therefore, reducing everything to a subject-object’s dynamic of the ‘knowing’ subject. The Other is subsumed under the ‘knowing’ authority of the I. The subject who reasons controls the truth of everything, even and most (importantly) the “truth” of the Other. Therefore, for a Levinasian logic the question about current social structures, such as those associated with capitalism, cannot simply be reduced to breaking down the phenomenon of capitalism into superficial ‘economic’ categories; rather it is necessary to seek for the fundamental issue. In other words, criticizing capitalism not only requires disarming liberalism,

²⁶ Ibid., 40-48

but its criticism must go to the deepest roots that gave birth to it. For Levinas, getting to these deeper roots requires, first of all, questioning all that the Western philosophical tradition understands about the "oneself"; in other words, we have to start by putting the "I" under the lens of doubt.²⁷ In contrast to the long tradition of Western philosophy, "putting the 'I' under the lens of doubt" is precisely what Levinas calls Ethics as First Philosophy. For my thesis I will explore how this is similar to what I consider to be the foundations of Marx's critique of Capitalism: the *Totality of the Being* – the I.²⁸

In Levinas' thought, intersubjectivity is possible based on a reflection on exteriority. In the first section of his essay on exteriority, *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas provocatively opens his reflection in this manner: " 'The true life is absent.' But we are in the world. Metaphysics arises and is maintained in this alibi. It is turned toward the 'elsewhere' and the 'otherwise' and the 'other' ".²⁹ With these words, Levinas questions the foundations of Western philosophy based on a metaphysics of the understanding of "existence," of "good living" and of the knowledge of "exteriority," which, he claims, are based on a profound *desire* that 'seeks' what is beyond *oneself*. That is, according to Levinas, the *metaphysical desire* in the person is directed "toward an alien outside-of-oneself," which is the Other.³⁰ However, Levinas believes that the manner in which the realm of the *outside-of-oneself* has been understood by Western philosophy, has failed to comprehend what *otherness* truly is and, at the same time, what this *metaphysical desire* is precisely directed to; which for Levinas is "the absolute Other".³¹

²⁷ Ibid., 81

²⁸ Levinas, *From existence to ethics*, 34

²⁹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 33

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

According to the traditional understanding of the phenomenon of desire, people yearn for things because there is a *need* to recover something that has been lost, and the absence of this ‘something’ generates nostalgia for the return of that which "complements" us. According to Levinas, for the Western world, Desire, is rooted in this idea of necessity. However, Levinas believes this understanding does not reach the comprehension of both *metaphysical desire* and the yearning for the *Other*. On the other hand, for Levinas, *metaphysical desire* does not wait for anything, and cannot be satisfied. The desires that can be satisfied, Levinas affirms, are only resemblances of the *metaphysical desire*, which is the deepest and the only one that is truly pure. Nevertheless, *metaphysical desire* goes *beyond* what we normally think about desire such as the pleasures that achieve momentary satisfaction or those which are associated with the realm of "voluptuousness." None of those kinds of desires are able to fulfill the aspiration for *what is beyond*, which always surpasses the capacities of the person to understand, comprehend, or assimilate. For Levinas, this unattainable desire, which does not expect satisfaction, is the *metaphysical desire* for the *absolutely different*, the one that understands [entend] the alterity of the "Most-High": the Other .³²

In the metaphysical desire for the Other, the irreducibility of exteriority is affirmed. What is desired is beyond –outside–; therefore, Levinas understands that Metaphysics cannot be such without the movement of transcendence. For Levinas Metaphysics is unlike the familiar tradition of metaphysics in Western philosophy because it entails the disinterested desire of the Other. In other words, by a desire that leads the "I" to exteriority. However, for this metaphysical desire to be understood as a yearning for the beyond, it is necessary that some kind of distance exists between the one that desires, and what is desired. Only by separating the subject and the Other,

³² Ibid., 34

by realizing that there is a gap, is it possible to desire. Therefore, in this metaphysical desire, what separates the I from the otherness, is an interval "unlike all distances"—an indelible and inviolable gap. However, Western philosophy understands exteriority—this separation—precisely as what "is" foreign but potentially "understandable"; the exterior - the object - can be assumed, understood, and thereby rationally dominated—in other words, normalized. The strange is normalized by deciphering its identity; by finding its "essential" quality of subjective use. In this process of assimilation of the exterior, the subject expresses his needs and his desires by forcing the 'exterior' and 'other' into the categories of its understanding/comprehension. Then that which is 'other' and 'exterior' becomes an object that satisfies the subject through the subordination of that other to the subject's epistemological "rules." This attitude is explained by Levinas as a self-affirmation or self-discovery that extends to self-knowledge through the external world: "it is the primordial work of identification".³³ What this means, is that in the Western traditions of epistemology that Levinas criticizes is that the "I" *represents* itself on the outside and is thereby Universalized which results in "the universal thought [that] is the 'I think'".³⁴

In this traditional metaphysics of the "I think," there is no transcendence but only self-absorption that ends in *Totality*. The subject in his effort to identify himself as an "I," and finding nothing else in the world but the reflection of his desires, produces a "monotonous tautology: [understanding itself as] I am I".³⁵ Here, the "I" is not open to the other but finds himself in everything.

³³ Ibid. 36

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 37

However, this search for the Self in Levinas is understood in the first instance as a positive attitude for the understanding of otherness. The I - the Ego - in Levinas, as explained by the philosopher Roger Burggraeve, can be understood from the union of the concepts of "conatus essendi" and "effort of being".³⁶ The Ego seeks to persist in existence, and therefore it has primarily an egoist attitude that allows him to subsist. Levinas understands this as a natural expression and as the *first ontological experience* of all beings, including the person. This first ontological experience or "self-love is an egoism that founds the being and that constitutes the first ontological experience." It is the essence of things, what "supports all beings".³⁷ However, the *essence* –nature– in Levinas is not understood as *eidos* or *quidditas* but as *nomen actionis*, thus differentiating itself from the conception of the traditional Ego. The essence of the Ego is a *dynamic event* - process–, an *actus essendi*, "being" in the verbal sense. However, this being is also not understood as a simple existence but rather "is the self-contained and self-propelling act of being"³⁸, which is expressed in a more similar way in the "qualitative-dynamic" *Wesen* from his teacher Heidegger.

The Ego for Levinas lives a drama of *self-becoming*, and in it, he seeks subsistence and autonomy, in other words, to proclaim its existence; thus faces the totality of *nothingness* where everything is reduced to "no one" and "nothing." In order to achieve autonomy, the "being" must be also "self-sufficient" and for this reason the Ego seeks to go beyond the simple fact of "being there" – being thrown into reality without control over his existence. Therefore the Ego finds the way to take possession of itself and establish itself as a "here and now" autonomous. In other words, "the ego emerges in its being in resistance to what destroys it", and with this to any type

³⁶ Burggraeve, *The Wisdom of Love in the Service of Love*, 42

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 43

³⁸ *Ibid.*

of control.³⁹ The Ego becomes the *arche* of himself and begins an *exodus* towards himself, towards the self-determination of "one-self." In this way, the Ego is separated from a totality that suppresses it.

Nevertheless, for Levinas, this aspect of separation is necessary for the understanding of the *otherness* and finds, in Descartes's cogito, the reference to that separation. Despite the fact that up to this point in this reflection, the Cartesian Ego has been continually criticized, for Levinas Descartes's philosophy of the cogito contains a positive and essential side for the metaphysical desire that enables otherness. The Cartesian doubt, which self-references the cogito, and which simultaneously refers to the existence of the Ego, also generates a detachment of the I from totality. Once the world is questioned, the "I" ends up isolated from any external relationship that is attached to its being. In this way, the idea of participation is eliminated, and the Ego is separated from everything, giving autonomy to its being.⁴⁰ If the metaphysical desire is longing for that "totally different" from the self, it is necessary to establish the existence of a separation of the self from the whole.

However, in this same questioning about the existence of things, Descartes leaves the existence of God free from doubt. In fact, the existence of this same God has a decisive role in the self-reaffirmation of the Cogito. God, for Descartes, is the one who gives the Ego the possibility of distinguishing between the true and the false: he is the guarantor of the truth. Therefore, God is also the one that provides certainty to the conception of "truth" and to the affirmation of the I. The existence of God in Descartes is proved from the contingency of the Ego: the idea of an infinite being in the mind of a finite being, is only possible because God –the infinite Being– has provided it. In this way, in the affirmation of this Infinite Being, is also where

³⁹ Ibid., 47

⁴⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 93

the Cogito - the "I" - is self-affirmed too. This self-affirmation, distinguishes the I not only *from* the ontological realm but also, potentially, *with* God. However, the existence of a God in Descartes does not produce an impossibility of individuality, on the contrary, the breach with a God conceived as Infinity, reaffirms the ontological separation of Ego, conceived as finite, from the whole:

The ambiguity of Descartes's first evidence, revealing the I and God in turn without merging them, revealing as two distinct moments of evidence mutually founding one another, characterizes the very meaning of separation. The separation of the I is thus affirmed to be non-contingent, non-provisional. The distance between me and God, radical and necessary, is produced in being itself.⁴¹

Levinas understands that this relationship between the Ego and God does not break, but on the contrary, affirms the conditions that a "relationship" presupposes; that is, a dialogue of "one" with "another". In this way, the Ego is not absorbed into a whole but remains in a relation. In fact, for Levinas, this relationship that "the 'I think' maintains with the Infinite it can nowise contain and from which it is separated, a relation called 'idea of infinity'".⁴²

This eliminates the traditional idea of participation of that being called 'Ego' with which Descartes occurs with a doubting of the world where the Ego distinguishes itself from God on the basis of the Ego as finite 'holding' the idea of God as Infinity, which results in the elimination of any essential connection with Totality. From resolving the problem of the ontological participation of Ego with God – the finite with the Infinite– is where the metaphysical desire for that "totally other" is explained as "desire": a longing for what is "beyond" the "self." It is in this reaffirmation of the Ego as "self", not in *participation* but in separation, where individuality "ironically" opens a free path to what is *different*.

⁴¹ Ibid., 48

⁴² Ibid.

As mentioned before, this separation opens the possibility of apprehending what Levinas understands as Infinity. The Infinite in the Cartesian philosophy is transcendent; in other words, it goes "beyond" the understanding of the Ego. For Descartes, the Ego understands the idea of God; however, this *idea* is incomplete. This incomplete understanding about the idea of God is for Descartes called the *ideatum* which refers to the incomplete understanding of a substance. For Descartes, an idea is incomplete, when its representation has as its object an individual capable of supporting himself: a "substantial item," that is, a "substantial whole" or "substance" which cannot be described by the theorization of its properties.⁴³ For Descartes, since God is an Infinite substance - *res infinita*- we are left with an impossibility of "abstraction and description."⁴⁴ It is impossible for the Cogito to grasp and understand the totality or the Infinity of God.

The distance between *ideatum* and *idea* in Descartes helps us to understand the Infinity of the Other in Levinas: "Infinity is characteristic of a transcendent being as transcendent; the infinite is absolutely other. The transcendent is the sole ideatum of which there can be only an idea in us; it is infinitely removed from its idea, that is, exterior because it is infinite".⁴⁵ The Other in its infinity goes beyond the understanding of the I; therefore, the "I" cannot understand the Other. However, for Levinas, it is necessary to distinguish the distance between the Cogito - the mental act - and the Object, from the transcendental distance that exists between the Self and the "absolute Other," and which is the one that Levinas seeks to imply when he talks about *distance*. Levinas explains that the subject-object distance "does not exclude, and in reality implies the possession of the object, that is, the suspension of its being".⁴⁶ In other words, to refer

⁴³ Glouberman, *Descartes: The Probable and the Certain*, 145

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 49

⁴⁶ Ibid.

to the relation of possession and alterity, Levinas makes a distinction between objectivity and transcendence. Since the Other, as absolutely different, is always 'infinitely' separated from and beyond the Ego, its presence remains unattachable to the I –that is, it cannot be possessed like this or that material object. The Infinite presence of the Other is always beyond the "domains" of the I. The relation between the I and the Other is understood in terms of transcendental distance, free from any objectivization; a relationship based, in other words, as *Alterity*.

Nevertheless, Levinas sees in Western philosophy a deviation in the reflection of the I. Levinas affirms that Western thought gives prominence to the subjective, thus universalizing its acts and subsuming everything into the totalization of the I; an attitude that could be understood as an "obsession" for the Ego, which leads Levinas to affirm that "[Western] philosophy is an egology."⁴⁷ The distance between the I and the Other in Western philosophy remains in the field of the objective distance. The Other, confused within the objective realm, rests only as potential property. With his philosophy, Levinas seeks to unveil this fundamental –and contradictory– issue that constitutes the paradigm of totalization that prevails in the thought of the Western world. For Levinas, there is no room for Infinity within the parameters of Totality. The longing for the transcendental –what is beyond the I– by its quality of separation generates an impossibility of assimilation –integration– of what is desired. Which means that this egology, developed by the Western Philosophy, fosters a false hope of [Cartesian] perfection – totalization–; the "other" remains infinitely "beyond" the subject who longs for it. In words of Levinas: "If Totality can not be constituted it is because Infinity does not permit itself to be integrated. It is not the insufficiency of the I that prevents totalization, but the Infinity of the Other".⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Ibid., 44

⁴⁸ Ibid., 80

As mentioned before, Levinas explains that this separation of the I with the Infinite in the Cartesian metaphysics also refers to the fact that the former has a relationship with that which is separated. This relationship does not remove the intervals between the "I" and the Other since a relationship occurs with that which cannot be absorbed or understood. For Levinas, the relationship with the Infinite, with the Other, is an intrinsically ethical relationship, which contains the most intimate secret of the person, "the ultimate structure."⁴⁹

Having said all this, Alterity can be understood as the relationship of the Other with the "I." Just as Descartes discovers the Cogito from the Infinity that God presents to the Ego, Levinas finds in this relation between the Ego and the Infinite the conception of Alterity. However, alterity is not a movement that starts from the Ego and leads to the Other, which is the way of proceeding of traditional epistemology, but on the contrary, it comes from the Infinite which occurs in the productive life of the Ego. The Infinite--as the Other--presents itself as Face which offers the possibility for the Ego to meet; there is no capacity in the Ego that can supply the appearance of Otherness to its ownness. Alterity is the revelation of the Other. This Levinasian perspective of the Other and the I represents an inversion of the classical metaphysics; it expresses a new type of understanding in the relationship of I and Other, where the Ego responds to the presence of the Other, instead of acting as dominator of the Otherness by the use of reason. The Other is welcomed but not manipulated, not violated, but rather loved: this is Alterity. The relationship of Alterity is, in other words, an Ethical relationship which is asymmetric. In the logic of Alterity, the Other occupy a higher place, his presence comes first as the main priority of the relationship. The Infinite is the authority.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 81

B. The appearance of the Before.

The tradition of Western philosophy centers its efforts on knowledge; the "I" understands the world and finds the meaning of things through methods of a critical nature that the same philosophy provides. This knowledge, as determined by the traditional history of philosophy as "love of wisdom," is based on the primacy of the subjective, the "I." Instead, as mentioned above, Levinas considers the traditional understanding of knowledge as a Totalizing reflection, since in it the Other is absorbed in the very Self. In response to this way of acting by part of the Western tradition, Levinas displaces the I from its leading role in the philosophical reflection and positions the Other at the center of his philosophy. Levinas argues that the task of philosophy is not to produce "knowledge" but to produce a "response" to the presence of the Other. Levinas does not understand philosophy's objective as "knowing," but as an "answer" to the metaphysical desire for Infinity; in other words, an answer given to the presence of the Other. Above all, philosophy for Levinas is not considered as "love of wisdom," but as "wisdom of love," as Ethics.⁵¹

The Levinasian position that expresses that the Other appears to the "I" represents a logical difficulty to the reasoning of Western philosophy. Traditional logic comprises the order of "cause and effect" in a linear "temporal" continuity. In Descartes, as we have already explained, the Infinite –God– who, from a Platonic and Aristotelian epistemology, is the cause of the Ego, 'appears' to the cogito not as a priori, but as a posteriori. The *cause* is presented to the I, in the "logical" place of the *effect*; however, not fulfilling the logical role of the *effect*, but remaining the *cause*. Levinas understands from this relationship of the Ego with the Infinite in Descartes, that there can be a difference between "logical" and "chronological" progress. The

⁵¹ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 162

Other, for Levinas, appears in an order that is beyond the 'logical' one; the Other –the Infinite– appears to the "I" in the chronological place of the 'after' but even 'before' the existence of the Self. This appearance is expressed for Levinas as "the posteriority of the anterior".⁵² This 'later' appearance of the *cause*, which is absurd in terms of traditional logic, is the very experience of Ethics as first philosophy, which is not based on the metaphysical systems of the West, such as those that understand philosophy as producing knowledge, but on an alternative way that understands it as an answer to the appearing of the Other--the breakthrough of the Infinite in the life of the I. It is "the After or the Effect [that] conditions the Before or the Cause: the Before appears and is only welcomed".⁵³ The appearing of the Infinite, of that which was before, is the Revelation of Otherness. The Other is before the "I," and in its Infinity, the existence of the "I" is clarified.

This Infinity that we have incessantly manifested as the "absolutely Other", in Levinas, escapes to conceptualizations. Infinity is not any kind of idealization but is grounded in the concreteness of the Face. The Other in his Infinity is Revealed with a Face that bursts into the very Self, and that challenges its existence. The Face is the exteriority with which the subject finds itself thrown beyond its sameness. Moreover, the Face of Otherness refers to a specific Other; it is the Face of that one in suffering: of the orphan, the widow, the immigrant, the hungry, the poor, the needy. This Face that erupts forth, like Infinity, is irrepressible to subjective knowledge; this Face, although concrete, is always transcendent, it is a Mystery for the reasoning Self.⁵⁴ Regarding to this difficult idea of the Other as Mystery, it will be better explained when we address the idea of love.

⁵² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 54

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 260

The Face as exteriority manifests sensitivity to the Ego, and the Ego receives it because of an intrigue that inaugurates the Infinite. We have already described this intrigue as “metaphysical desire.” Throughout Section III of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas makes a typology of the sensible through which he explains how this “welcoming” of the Face works. First, it distinguishes between two sensitivities: one that refers to a “cognitive” - knowledge- aspect and the other to one of “joy”.⁵⁵ Cognitive sensitivity reduces sensations to the content of consciousness, that is, it decreases sensitivity to a cognitive process and it is associated with the conceptual articulations of language which prioritizes the sense of sight and touch as sources of an objective description of reality. The sensitivity that refers to joy is explained as that which understands sensations as experienced events - [as introducing pre-existing social relations]. This sensitivity understands that experiences cannot always be reduced to contents of consciousness but refers to what perceives an affective and sensorial voluptuousness.

However, for Levinas, these types of sensitivity do not explain the ethical intrigue inaugurated by the Face of the Other. Cognitive sensitivity, on the one hand, cannot explain this since the Other cannot be reduced to conceptualizations of consciousness. On the other hand, the sensitivity of joy does not understand the importance in the presence of the Infinite; that is, joy as a contingent/ephemeral event –finite– that passes into forgetfulness. In such a “joyful” momentary experience, the I please himself in the finite without concern for the Infinite.⁵⁶

Levinas believes that the Infinite--as transcendence--is the face whose revelation is speech. therefore, he finds in the “linguistic” capacity of the human being a third way: the “sensitivity of the face.” Levinas does not expressly speak of “a third way”, however, denying

⁵⁵ Ibid., 187-247

⁵⁶ Ibid., 198

the possibility of the two previous ways to understand the sensitivity that intrigues the Ego, he refers to a modality beyond cognitive and joy. In this way, Levinas affirms that:

If the transcendence cuts across sensibility, if it is openness preeminently, if its vision is the vision of every openness of being, it cuts across the vision of forms and can be stated neither in terms of contemplation nor in terms of practice. It is the face; its revelation is speech. The relation with the Other alone introduces a dimension of transcendence, and leads us to a relation totally different from the experience in the sensible sense of the term, relative and egoist.⁵⁷

In other words, the relationship with the Other goes beyond the cognitive and sensitive; it is an intrinsically ethical relationship. The sensitivity of the Face refers to the overflow to the meaning that concerns the consciousness and the sensory experience. This other way is a dynamic of reception to the overflowing presence of the Face as speech and discourse which orders responsibility to the Self. Presence as speech contains an Infinite message, it speaks to the Self, therefore it refers to an immeasurable Revelation and, as already explained, overflowing, which irrupts forth and calls. The presence of the Face is Epiphany.⁵⁸ It calls forth responsibility.

C. Violence

The obsession with the "I" was adopted in the general consciousness of intellectuals from the Western world and became the paradigm of a great part of Europe and the conquered American continent. Through the reflections of all these intellectuals, this paradigm was developed in such a manner that it gave form to the foundation of our social structures. As previously explained, in order for the I to get knowledge from the world, as understood by the Modern paradigm, the Ego replicates its desires with the exteriority assimilating the 'difference' of the exterior world with his subjective understanding of reality. The act of understanding "is

⁵⁷ Ibid., 193

⁵⁸ Ibid., 194

not something applied like a form of magic to the 'impotent spirituality' of thinking, nor is it the guarantee of certain psycho-physiological conditions, but rather belongs to that unit of knowledge in which *Auffassen* (understanding) is also, and always has been, a *Fassen* (gripping)".⁵⁹ This epistemological attitude seeks to subsume the exteriority within the subject itself; the paradigm of I understands the difference, which is the exterior world, simply as an objective world, transforming the perception of the exterior world into an object of use and appropriation for the subject. In this same way, the Other, which is different to the I, is understood as an object of knowledge of the Ego. The Ego affirms himself in the attempt to understand the Other, in other words, appropriate him, and use him. This act that tries to know the Other is translated into an endeavor to denude Infinity from its transcendence. To achieve this goal –of conquest– a “simulation” that seeks to despoil the Other of his incomprehensibility is carried out, and its transcendence is "ignored." Now, the perception that remains there of the Other, which was produced by the I, is not of Infinity but finitude and therefore, it is now "comprehensible" for the Ego; there is no longer transcendentality, but rather it is objectively assimilable. In this way, through an act of knowledge, the Other is unified in the sameness of the Self; that is, it is Totalized. This process of knowledge imposed over the Other that seeks totalization is what Levinas understands as *violence*.⁶⁰

In the same manner as the Other appears embodied by the Face in the philosophy of Levinas, Violence also is materialized through epistemological attitudes that create scientific, social, political, and economic realities where the Other is subsumed by the I. The tradition of Western philosophy gave birth to the sciences that are currently dominant in the world. This philosophical tradition bases its wisdom on the study of Ontology: the study of the being of

⁵⁹ Levinas, *Ethics as First Philosophy*, 76

⁶⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 170

things. Thus, the sciences that were conceived from the paradigm of the West which was dominated from the beginning by a paradigm of epistemology based on subjectivity. This domain of the Self in traditional philosophy, previously discussed, is nothing less than a vision built from a study of things with the lenses of ontology. The traditional epistemology that understands the subject and object relationship as the binomial that enables knowledge does not take into account the presence of the Other as a totally Other within its parameters of wisdom generation.

Previously, we dealt with the process of the self-affirmation of the Ego, a process which eliminates the concept of participation and by which the separation of the Ego from the Other is also generated. However, contrary to what Levinas found in his interpretation of the philosophy of Descartes, the logic of self-affirmation in traditional philosophy is perpetuated in an unconscious search for a Totality that consumes the difference of the Other in the Ego. In other words, that separation of the Self from the world ends up becoming domination perpetrated by a subjectivity that tends to become universal with the use of the means of violence. Burggraeve identifies two main types of Totalization in Levinas' thought, one that is done by means of Practical Violence and another with the use of Noetic violence.⁶¹

D. Practical Violence

The self-affirming Ego quickly realizes that the external world to which it is exposed does not obey its desires, so it seeks to establish itself as the master of everything around it in order to destroy the insecurity that the external world causes to its identity. The search for control of what is external to the Ego, leads it to seek a world that is an extension of its identity.⁶²

⁶¹ Burggraeve, *The wisdom of love in the service of love*, 50-54

⁶² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 143-151

"In this way, its effort of being evolves into a grasping and digesting of being."⁶³ This practical Totalization consists of the Ego striving to extend its existence to the point of introducing the external world into its identity. This Totalization is only possible if the Other -the different- is reduced into "oneself" and by establishing the Self as the measure of all things.⁶⁴ The modalities of this Practical Totalization, according to Levinas, are expressed in the realities of dwelling, labor, and possession. The Ego seeks to extend its dwelling to eliminate the externality that represents a threat to its "being there." Extending its dwelling, the Ego understands the concept of possession. Possessing, extending territory and goods, means expanding the identity of the Self. "Acquisition and possession tend to put to rest the uncertainty of the world".⁶⁵ Then, together with these two conceptions, the Ego understands that one cannot access possessions or the construction of a dwelling without labor. The extension of the Ego through the ownership of goods cannot be achieved without the transformation of the external world. It is necessary that the Ego impose its presence on the world and possess it and assimilate it to its subjectivity. In this way, the Ego expands itself to the extent that all externality –otherness– is appropriated into an extended economy of the Ego, which only seeks its own benefit.

E. Noetic Totalization

The "comprehensive knowledge", according to Levinas, is one of the essential elements for the construction of an egocentric Totality. "Lacking any 'worldly knowledge,' practical totalization feels amateurish and thus still too much the pawn of chance and fate. The Ego, therefore, looks for better means to solidify its position".⁶⁶ In the act of knowledge, the Ego seeks to undo the savage objectivity by "assimilating" the exteriority of the world through the

⁶³ Burggraeve, *The wisdom of love in the service of love*, 51

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 52

⁶⁶ Ibid., 53

"in-sight" that comprises things. This noetic effort seeks to transform "the strange" of the world into something similar to the subject. This activity is translated into efforts of categorization, conceptualization, thematization, systematization, and representation. When achieving this objective of "comprehending" what is foreign to the subject, which is the same as the act of "apprehending", in other words, to trap or make part of oneself dominion, it seeks to eliminate the difference of the Other. This violence is exerted through the use of language, writing, and discourses, which, little by little, normalize the Other's disappearance by generalizing the other in groups of people. Levinas explains that "comprehensive knowing is therefore far from neutral and innocent; to the contrary, it is a phenomenon of violence and power. It is a disrespectful and merciless determination of the other by the same, without the same being determined by the other."⁶⁷

F. Violence in an Egocentric world

Both modes of violence are embodied in the reality of the social structures that Western philosophy has generated. The practical and ethical violence that the Western tradition engender in the general paradigm of societies was gradually forging the construction of Egocentric societies. This type of paradigm based on the subjectivity of the "I" constructs socio-political realities where Otherness is relegated to the interests of an autonomous Ego. "This leads to a self-interested, or egocentric model of society, grounded in the 'economic, totalizing will to freedom' of the autonomous ego".⁶⁸ Within this type of society, the Ego relates to the Other through an exercise in practical and noetic reductionism. In this Egocentric society, the Other appears as a "functional" medium in the subjective plan of the Ego. In other words, this

⁶⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 154

⁶⁸ Burggraave, *The wisdom of love in the service of love*, 57

egocentric paradigm exerts a power over the Other that works through "consumption" - an act of cannibalism - to the existence and well-being of Otherness. Everything outside of the Ego is translated in terms of "use" to reach the Totalization of oneself .⁶⁹ Within this form of use that the subject gives to exteriority, it is worth highlighting the efficiency of money to extend the identity of the "I" and that allows him to ensure his autonomy: "money permits the Ego to accumulate possessions and become rich, this also consolidating and expanding its independence."⁷⁰

The external world, which is not in control of the subject, is conceived of as a prey to dominate for the Ego. In an egocentric society the "I" seeks to "order" the chaos that Otherness represents to his reason. Everything that is not like the "I" represents disorder. Therefore, the Ego, seeks to conceptualize the Otherness, organizing the Other's presence in well-identified social groups. The other goes from being an individual out of the Ego's order, to become part of a generality where his 'difference' is lost in idealizations that claim to understand his existence.⁷¹ This attempt to organize the Other in "logical" groups is the which represents a noetic violence that is the cause of issues such as racism, castes, social classes, among others.

The violence that is generated through the egocentric paradigm is the cause of not only epistemological deformations but also the suffering of the person in its concreteness. When Levinas speaks of violence exerted on the Other, he does not refer to an abstraction that neglects people's philosophical reality, but speaks to us of the intellectual structures that materialize in the degradation of others to mere means to achieve selfish ends. That is why Levinas spoke to us about the reality of war and murder as the most radical expressions of the egocentric paradigm.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 58

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid., 59

The Other is being killed little by little, through such subtle means as language and ontology, until leading to the destruction of his existence, until one reaches the atrocious act of taking his life.

Section III: Capitalism as the materialized paradigm of the I

A. Capitalism

From Levinas's thought, we can produce a critique of Capitalism understood as a system of violence that totalizes the Ego. Philosophers like Marx and Levinas had distinguished in Capitalism a promotion for an extreme individualism and the creation of egocentric structures. Therefore, to understand the operation of the violence that this system exercises, we will analyze it from Marx's criticism of said economic model. To understand the ideological functioning of Capitalism, we will go to the study of its philosophical roots to understand the elements of thought that compose it. This chapter aims to present elements of violence that sustain the building of the Capitalist system. In order for us to achieve this goal, in this first section we will first identify what Adam Smith, father of capitalism, proposes in his economic model. Then we will dissect the parts that are considered essential to understand the philosophical foundations of Adam Smith's proposal, as well as the problem of love in a capitalist society. Four elements will be presented that, according to Botticelli, defined the modern tradition as constituted by a capitalist paradigm. The anthropological elements that capitalism assumes - not always consciously - are those that are primarily dedicated to understanding human being as: subjectivity; man-action; human-individual; and subject of work. From the discussion of these elements we can address the anthropological perspective of Capitalism known as *homo-economicus*. Finally, this first section will present certain specific arguments of Marx's criticism of the Capitalist System which are needed for the development of my thesis.

The dissection of the philosophical elements that Capitalism inherited, will help us to understand the peculiarities of the reality of the border of Ciudad Juarez and El Paso as a capitalist society. However, the task of evaluating the elements that constitute Capitalism brings

up an issue of perspective, which is demarcated by delimitations of a particular space and time of a specific capitalist environment (in this case the one of this border). To reach that goal we will try to recreate the history of the elements that compose the Capitalist thought in order to bring light to the present strings that move this economical system at these two specific cities. Thus working in a Foucauldian and Weberian ways, we will do a genealogy of the philosophical spirit of Capitalism. Comparing the general theory of capitalism is to how that Capitalism is expressed in a particular time and place.

It is important to denote that this genealogical inquiry of capitalism focuses on its strictly philosophical origins. In the same way, this study will be delimited to study these roots from the most important aspects for this study, indicating that greater emphasis will be placed on the most relevant moments for the creation of Capitalism itself.

In the year of 1876, at the age of 53, the Scottish philosopher Adam Smith published his most famous work "The Wealth of Nations" where he manifests his Capitalist market theory based on an economic-anthropological conception of human being that entails he is essentially self-serving which, for him is a good thing. Adam Smith would take an extensive tradition of philosophical theories, that I present later in this chapter, and logically synthesize them to form the modern paradigm of political liberalism, thus becoming not only the father of Capitalism, but of modern economic theory. Individualism and freedom understood through the elements inherited from the liberal philosophy, are for Adam Smith, the most fundamental components of human action. Smith postulates that the main tendency of every living being is no other than the love for oneself and the conscious search for his own well-being. No human being naturally seeks a good for the community. Adam Smith expresses these previous ideas in this way:

It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we can expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities but of their advantages.⁷²

Smith says that when the human provides a good in the realm of the common, it is not an action that is at first directed towards society, but only a side effect of an individual's search for the means that will best serve herself and only indirectly society. This indirect good, is what Smith described as the invisible hand that is a beneficial effect in the common sphere caused by the law of supply and demand. Smith justifies his position that when the search for individual interest is greater - when the individual seeks greater wealth for her own benefit - public welfare will increase naturally.

Capitalism positions the individual's economic interests above the same State. For a true freedom to exist, according to Adam Smith, the State should limit its governance in the field of economy, thus reducing its interference only to create and provide the necessary elements for citizens to produce and trade. In words of Adam Smith:

According to the system of natural liberty, the sovereign [the State] has only three duties to attend to; three duties of great importance, indeed, but plain and intelligible to common understandings: first, the duty of protecting the society from the violence and invasion of other independent societies; secondly, the duty of protecting, as far as possible, every member of the society from the injustice or oppression of every other member of it, or the duty of establishing an exact administration of justice; and, thirdly, the duty of erecting and maintaining certain public works, and certain public institutions, which it can never be for the interest of any individual, or small number of individuals to erect and maintain; because the profit could never repay the expence to any individual, or small number of individuals, though it may frequently do much more than repay it to a great society.⁷³

In other words, the State would only be there to ensure the commercial flow and protect the private good of each person, but not to regulate the production and sale of the capital. "Let do, let pass" (*Laissez faire, laissez passer*) is the motto of capitalism and it portrays the seeking

⁷² Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 30

⁷³*Ibid.*, 914

for freedom in the economical field: free market, free manufacturing, low or no taxes, free labor market, and minimal government intervention.

Capitalism, following the extensive study of Alfonso Barcena Gomez, is the economic environment in which generally: a) There is private ownership of the means of production; b) the objective of the companies is focused on the accumulation of capital through the maximization of benefits for its reinvestment; c) there is a free market for the sale of products and labor power based on the idea of competition, as well as the freedom of the worker to offer his services to the market.⁷⁴ Adam Smith synthesizes in the proposal of Capitalism several philosophical elements that preceded his thought, mainly those from the tradition of Liberalism. The spirit of a strong modern philosophy resides at the bottom of the building of Capitalism which centers its reflection on the basis of a particular understanding of the person; such conception of human is in which the capitalist paradigm justifies a complete paradigm of a “homo-economicus” – as will be understand later in the thought of John Stuart Mill.⁷⁵ The homo-economicus, is a human characterized by an individualistic and possessive conception, fruit of the tradition of Anglo-Saxon and French thought. Adam Smith's work would consist of a reaffirmation of a homo-economicus. In other words, the human is understood as an individual-producer of private goods; primarily, its rationality aims to concentrate its forces and resources towards the goal of creating wealth. Understanding women and men as beings of wealth production was an idea that was soon installed in the depths of the paradigm of European society in such a way that a subject who did not seek those goals would be considered insane.

Before Adam Smith appeared on the scene of thought, Western philosophy had already laid the groundwork for configuring the capitalist economic system that Smith would propose.

⁷⁴ Barcena, *Macrofilosofía del Capitalismo*, 17

⁷⁵ Mill, *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy*, 94

According to Botticelli, the philosophies of which Smith drinks to build capitalism, determine two paradigms in the anthropological vision that this economic system possesses. Botticelli argues that, on the one hand, the Cartesian tradition that places subjectivity at the center of real knowledge of the world constitutes a conception of the person as a "human-action" which constitutes his being when thinking - acting - and thereby extending his reasoning to reality.⁷⁶ Simultaneously, the modern reflection of politics - especially Hobbes, Locke, leading to the same Smith - will establish the reduction of the person to mere "human-individual" tended to isolation, but in social pact by virtue of a production interest and market.⁷⁷

B. Homo-economicus in the Capitalist paradigm

At this point we can understand how Capitalism, has been nourished from the philosophical tradition of modernism, which has provided for it the conception of Homo-economicus; a term that understands humans primarily as disconnected individuals, and engaged in perpetual action.

As I have shown above the Anthropology of Liberalism there is even a kind of fetish in using the concept of homo-economicus when talking about economics and politics. For Liberalism, this expression designates a conceptual abstraction made by economic science as a perfectly rational model of human behavior used to predict future behavior, which is defined by three basic characteristics: the "homo economicus" is presented as a "maximizer" of his options, rational in his decisions and selfish in his behavior. Thus, the rationality of modern economic theory rests on identifying the existence of these three virtues in individuals and calculating how individuals function in a hyper-rational ways when choosing between the various possibilities

⁷⁶ Botticelli, *Capitalismo y subjetividad: el sujeto como trabajador en el discurso filosófico de la Modernidad Europea*, 101

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 102

that depend on these virtues. The origin of the concept of homo-economicus can be found in book II of *The Wealth of The Nations*:

In all countries where there is tolerable security, every man of common understanding will endeavour to employ whatever stock he can command in procuring either present enjoyment or future profit. If it is employed in procuring present enjoyment, it is a stock reserved for immediate consumption. If it is employed in procuring future profit, it must procure this profit either by staying with him, or by going from him. In the one case it is a fixed, in the other it is a circulating capital. A man must be perfectly crazy who, where there is tolerable security, does not employ all the stock which he commands, whether it be his own or borrowed of other people, in some one or other of those three ways.⁷⁸

For Capitalism, homo-economicus cannot be free without understanding himself as independent of any other agent that limits his will. Therefore, capitalism is informed by a Hobbsian-Lockean individuality found in the proposal of Social Contract, where the human is established as a rational individual; one in competition for their own interests with the rest of individuals. For my perspective, as I argued this conception of the rational individual could not have been adopted by Smith, Hobbes, and Locke had it not been for the influence of Descartes's cogito and Kant's subjectivity. Capitalism assumes that this free individual is the starting point for understanding the world. His reason gives meaning to what he knows and provides the adequate purpose and use according to the laws of the subject he knows. Capitalism adopts this attitude of rational domination and permeates its economic model, which, over the years, would lead to an evolution of itself that will end in alignment with the phenomenon of Imperialism. This phenomenon of imperialism will be driven by a search for control of what surrounds the individual, who prioritizes the fulfillment of his own interests. However, we will deal with this issue more deeply later. In Capitalism the essence of the human is reduced to a self-serving isolated entity and producer-consumer of goods. Therefore, the production and consumption of private property in the Capitalist system are established by a concept of autonomy and free action of the rational

⁷⁸ Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, 372

human "nature." Therefore, in my short summary of the formation of Capitalism, the modern liberal individual can be best understood to rephrasing the of Descartes's famous phrase "I produce, therefore I am."

This interest in existential self-affirmation pursued by homo-economicus impacts the rest of society due to a new relationship between individual and State. In the paradigm of the Homo-economicus, the individual becomes the subject who should not be touched –by the State and others– and must be allowed to act in total –economic– freedom. The homo-economicus in Capitalism is thus the subject capable of achieving any goal; therefore, nothing should stop him. The homo-economicus owns his body and workforce and therefore already owns capital as the first step for his enrichment. The homo-economicus does not go to the State to seek security and protection of his rights, now he becomes the competence of the sovereign and its limit. Foucault, who explores and critiques in depth the nature of homo-economicus, expresses it in the following way:

He [the homo-economicus] also tells the sovereign [the State]: You must not. But why must he not? You must not because you cannot. And you cannot in the sense that “you are powerless.” And why are you powerless, why can’t you? You cannot because you do not know, and you do not know because you cannot know.⁷⁹

In the Capitalist paradigm, who knows is the individual; or in other words, the only capable to reason is the human being that affirms its existence, his individuality, from the world and society. This affirmation creates a return to the Cartesian conception, –complemented with the Kantian subjectivity–, where the subject –which is now, the liberal individual– is who knows, he is the measure of knowledge. The way that Capitalism adopts and transforms the idea of a social pact is through the co-conception of work itself. A social contract that supports a constitution and the government is no longer sought, but rather the labor force and the production

⁷⁹ Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 283

of goods in exchange will enable a new civilized society with innate individual rights in direction towards the elements of the Market. According to Botticelli, in the anthropological perspective of Capitalism created by Smith "work will be the threshold that the modern subject must cross to enter into a social relationship."⁸⁰

C. Marxist Critique of Capitalism: *The German Ideology* and the Ego

The general imaginary of today's society accepts the ways western civilization presents the political and economic reality as truths that exist since the beginning of the existence of the "homo sapiens," and even as an intrinsic expression of human nature. The provenance of these conceptions is seldom questioned, creating a naive cosmology that identifies the natural – the given– with the conventional –the agreed. In the first section of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, Marx quickly begins his reflection making reference to this problem of non-questioning "the given truths" saying that the "political economy proceeds from the fact of private property, but it does not explain it to us."⁸¹ However, it seems not to be important for the society of his times –and ours – to explain how and why the societal system is constructed; how Capitalism, and ideas, such as private property, are also given as facts –and interconnected– given by a kind of "politic-economic natural law." Marx adds:

[Political economy] expresses in general, abstract formulae the material process through which private property actually passes, and these formulae it then takes for laws. It does not comprehend these laws—i.e., it does not demonstrate how they arise from the very nature of private property. Political economy does not disclose the division between labour and capital, and between capital and land.⁸²

This naivete of accepting the Western –Capitalist– model as the "natural" or "normal" rule to follow, without having questioned it to reaffirm or correct said conceptions, is what Marx

⁸⁰ Botticelli, *Capitalismo y subjetividad: el sujeto como trabajador en el discurso filosófico de la Modernidad Europea*, 105

⁸¹ Marx, *Economic Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 69

⁸² *Ibid.*, 69-70

criticized by giving to it the label of ideology. In the preface to his work, *The German Ideology*, Marx denounces Capitalism to be the bearer of philosophies that led the European society to a fetishization of capital. Therefore, leaving aside the true human nature, and establishing over it an ideology based on an absolute trust to the production of goods as private property and the individualization of the human being.

As we have previously explained, both Hobbes and Locke presented an individualized human nature that focused on the search for the satisfaction of their individual needs. Capitalism assumed this philosophy of individuality as one of its primary columns for the construction of stable economies with growth potential, thereby achieving individual goods permeate the consciences of Western society, causing an understanding of the human being as an individual detached from society and in competition with others. Marx sharply criticizes this position and opposes to this individualism, a conception of a human being not only linked to society but as a product and creator of it. This conception is what Karl Marx understands as "species-being" – the human nature that rises from the collectivity of his society.

The term "Species-being" that Marx adopts from Feuerbach is a return to the connection of man and woman as inherently social beings. However, in Marx, social nature has a more radical connotation that is not limited to the gendered relationship but is rooted in the sense of essential identity. In the *Grundrisse* Marx affirms that the ideology that understands human nature as individuality is a product of history –the bourgeois revolution– and not the original state of the essence of the human being.⁸³ According to Marx, "[the human] appears originally as a species-being [Gattungswesen], clan being, herd animal –although in no way whatever as a ζῷον πολιτικόν in the political sense."⁸⁴

⁸³ Marx, *Grundrisse*, 177.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 420.

For Marx, "species-being" refers to the nature of both the individual human and of humanity as a whole. This double application that Marx gives to "species-being" builds on the essential understanding of human being's nature as co-existence between the human and his community. Also, in the VI thesis on Feuerbach, disregarding the conception of human nature as an individual, Marx argues that human nature is created by "the ensemble of social relations".⁸⁵ The species-being is always determined in a specific social and historical formation, with some aspects stemming from the biological –the natural.⁸⁶ In the words of Marx:

Thus the social character is the general character of the whole movement: just as society itself produces man as man, so is society produced by him (...) the human essence of nature first exists only for social man; for only here does nature exist for him as a bond with man –as his existence for the other and the other's existence for him –as the life-element of the human world; only here does nature exist as the foundation of his own human existence.⁸⁷

For Marx, the human being cannot be understood without the socio-historical structure that shapes his nature. In this way, individualism and even more so, the idea of competition and the search for "natural" destruction among human beings that modernism and capitalism present as truths, are, for Marx, simply ideologizations of the true human nature. However, the construction of economic and political proposals based on such anthropology of individualization can only be directed towards the creation of societies that damage the very nature of the "species-being." As Marx puts it in his essay "On the Jewish Question":

[Man] lives in the political community, where he regard himself as a communal being and in Civil society [liberal society] where he acts simply as a private individual, treats other men as means, degrades himself to the role of a means, and becomes the plaything of alien powers (...) Man, in his most intimate reality, in civil society, is profane being. Here, where he appears both to himself and to others as a real individual, he is an illusory phenomenon.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, 573.

⁸⁶ Marx, *The German Ideology*, 48-49.

⁸⁷ Marx, *Economic Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 104.

⁸⁸ Marx, "On the Jewish Question," Marxist Internet Archive, 2009, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1844/jewish-question/>

However, following the historical reflection previously presented, the conception of individuality that modern political philosophy reflected was possible thanks to the previous philosophy of the Cartesian Ego. Once the "I" is identified as the departure point for the knowledge of the universe, it is possible to conceive a plurality of egos with their respective wills, which are translated into individualized searches for their particular ends. These individual searches are what Hobbes and Locke find problematic as they end up colliding and creating problems that only a social contract can overcome.

However, for Marx, the ego is also an ideological problem since it is the product of philosophical abstractions and not of the nature of the species-being:

Along with the historical construction of the "ego", the "ego" itself also collapses. This "ego", the end of the historical construction, is no "corporeal" ego, carnally procreated by man and woman, which needs no construction in order to exist; it is an "ego" spiritually created by two categories, "idealism" and "realism," a merely conceptual existence.⁸⁹

Marx opposes the modern proposal of the Ego when he affirms that "man is affirmed in the objective world not only in the fact of thinking but with all his senses."⁹⁰ Indeed, since, for Descartes, all materiality is at the mercy of methodical doubt, the Ego –the I– exists beyond human corporality –and therefore his senses. Consequently, materiality has no meaning in the construction of the existence of the "I" that thinks, but on the contrary, it is its thought that justifies the existence of any exteriority. The Ego, which for Marx, is the product of abstractions such as idealism and realism, is thus itself an abstraction. However, for Marx, this construction of an abstract ego goes against the real nature of the human being. When Marx states that 'this ego [is not] carnally procreated by man and woman,' this is his criticism of an ideology of the

⁸⁹ Marx, *The German Ideology*, 257

⁹⁰ Marx, *Economic Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 108

nature of human consciousness since, for Marx, consciousness cannot be produced in any other way than as a product of existing 'natural' Society. In Marxist philosophy, the human being, understood as a totality, comes from mere carnal –material– causes; the "species being" is created from social and historical elements of a woman and a man who enter into intimate relationships and conceive new members of the Society. The human being –not the Ego– is a product of the community, and as such, is made up of the same elements as the Society: the "species-being" - his thought and his natural construction– for Marx, is fully material and historical.

Following the reading of *The German Ideology*, we find Marx's criticism of Stirner's thought. However, by carefully analyzing this Marxist critique, it is possible to glimpse a more in-depth analysis that goes beyond Stirner's thought: The Ego and its ideological consequences on subjectivity. Marx takes Stirner's thought, trying to demonstrate how his explanations of the person and his property are presented throughout the ideological speech of Modernity. In his work, *The Unique and Its Property*, Stirner presents an individualized, egoist-human being, who only finds meaning and freedom in the understanding and acceptance of his own - subjective - universe. In his reflection, Stirner will try to justify Egoism by giving it a spiritualized – idealized– origin; this nature becomes an essential characteristic of humankind; therefore, to resist the natural desires of this Egoism becomes an "immoral" act. According to Stirner, the human being is "holy" when he selflessly accepts his given Egoist nature; it is to this subject that Marx ironically described as "selfless Egoist" and which, according to Stirner, was differentiated from an "impure egoist," what Marx refers to as an "ordinary egoist" :

Thus, self-denial is common to the holy along with the unholy, the pure and the impure. The impure person denies all 'better feelings;' all shame, even natural timidity, and follows only the desire that rules him. The pure person denies his natural relationship to the world ("denies the world") and follows only the "aspiration" that rules him. Driven by the thirst for money, the greedy person denies all warnings of the conscience, all feelings of honor, all gentleness and all compassion: he puts every consideration out of sight: the desire carries him away. The holy person desires in the same way. He makes himself the "laughing-stock of the world;" is hard-hearted and "strictly righteous"; because the aspiration carries him away.⁹¹

The "Selfless Egoist" accepts his nature and sacrifices himself adhering to the Spiritual – divinized– ideal, thus reaching his ultimate goal of being one with the ideal-law of his nature, thus being what he should be: The Unique. For Stirner, the I - the Ego - is irreducible and cannot be expressed through words. Stirner describes the Self as unique, which means that it possesses qualities that are its own, that cannot be found in others and that is beyond language, cannot be enclosed in concepts. The Ego is sovereign in itself and does not allow itself to be caught by impersonal words and abstractions. This Ego is for Stirner the opposite of the Hegelian Absolute Spirit, since it is totally material, in the Self, the One, the ideal that materializes and totalizes itself in its individuality. The nature of the "I" is to mature by accepting its Egoism, unifying itself with the materialized ideal in the individuality of the Unique, which is the totalized "Ego".

I likewise base my affair on myself, this I who just like God am the nothing of all others, this I who am my all, this I who am the Unique (...) I am not nothing in the sense of emptiness, but am the creative nothing, the nothing out of which I myself create everything as creator.⁹²

Consistently, the Unique is harassed by ideas and entities that are external to him, among which religion and the State are the principal possibilities. In consequence, "the human being is supposed to recognize the independence of all these and countless other things."⁹³ For this

⁹¹ Max Stirner, *The Unique and Its Property*, 76

⁹² *Ibid.*, 27

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 104

reason, Stirner lashes out against any obstacle that supposes a decrease in the freedom and development of the personality of the Unique because, according to Marx's criticism, this is no longer a matter of a simple will of a created being, but of the Spirit's Divine Will of which the "Selfless Egoist" is part now. The pure Egoist must ensure that the Individual will prevail over all general causes; the Divine Will of the Unique - the Creator - should be obeyed over the interests of the general - the created entities.⁹⁴

In Marx's criticism of Stirner, he indirectly analyzes the course of Modern philosophy that is based on the theory of the Cartesian Ego and its conceptual evolution in Kantian subjectivity, which becomes the theoretical possibilities of what Marx would identify as the ideology of "human nature as individuality" that appears in Stirner's ideas as well as that of capitalism, as I have been developing that analysis in my thesis thus far. The understanding of this "natural Ego-ism" in the human is precisely the product of Cartesian philosophy where "what exists" is defined by the capacity of human reason, that is, the Ego, or the mind.

Stirner analyzes natural Egoism using the stages of human intellectual development as a reference, stating that firstly, in childhood, the individual is in a state of constant discovery of things. According to Stirner, the boy seeks to know what is "behind things" and finds himself continuously in a battle to assert his developing ego over against the nature and strangeness of the world around him. In Marx's critique, "Stirner's child," is a subject driven by a struggle against the world, who seeks to find the "weaknesses" of everything - that is Other -, in order to feel confident since there is an "unavoidable" battle of "self-assertion" between exteriority and the mind.⁹⁵ Once we know "what is behind things" Stirner adds that, "we know ourselves with confidence; when we discover, for example, that the rod is too weak against our defiance, we no

⁹⁴ Marx, *The German Ideology*, 286

⁹⁵ Max Stirner, *The Unique and Its Property*, 30

longer fear it, we have outgrown it.”⁹⁶ However, as explained before, this statement is not, as it might seem, the inheritance of his teacher Hegel and should not be confused with it. Stirner does not see the world as a not fully actualized "incarnation" of Being, but in reality, it is--as Marx notes in his critique of Stirner--material potentiality for the *property* of an "incarnate" subject in a deified-totalized individuality.

This Subject - the Ego - as the supreme being and *owner* of exteriority, is further explained when Stirner speaks of the child's maturing into his youth and adulthood:

Mind is the name of the first self-discovery, the first banishment of God from the divine; that is, from the uncanny, the phantasms, the "powers above." Our fresh feeling of youth, this feeling of self, is no longer impressed by anything; the world is explained to its discredit, because we are above it, we are mind (...) Everything "earthly" steps back to a contemptible distance beneath this high standpoint, since this standpoint is-the heavenly.⁹⁷

This Egoist "nature," in its drive to maturity relinquishes ‘normal’ ideas of the self and instead seeks to unify itself with the ideal of the Unique. In the Unique, everything makes sense as his property since He discovers it and reaffirms its "ultimate cause" in how it contributes to forming his Individuality. It is in the Unique’s Spirit that the world contains its meaning and towards which the individual seeks to "perfect himself"⁹⁸ The world is there to be *appropriated* - subsumed - by the Spirit of the Unique, "the spirit strives to become all in all."⁹⁹

Up to this point, everything mentioned about Marx's criticism of Modernity and Capitalism was directed to the analysis of the "Ego," in which the understanding of the I resides in an extreme subjectivism perspective from which the meaning of all things proceeds. This subjectivity, in Hobbes, is understood as an individuality that is not only isolated from the others

⁹⁶ Ibid., 31

⁹⁷ Ibid., 32-33

⁹⁸ Marx, *The German Ideology*, 134-135

⁹⁹ Ibid., 135

but is "Ego-ist," and that is naturally directed to compete and destroy the others in order to achieve its ends. Now, as regards any novelty that is particular to him in Stirner's critique, Marx adds an element that contributes a special quality about the conception of the "I" and the modus operandi of Capitalism: the conception of the Unique. For Marx, the paradigm of Capitalism depends on this peculiar production, or conceptualization, of an "I" that is unconsciously evolved through an interpretation of the world as something naturally related to the appropriating self-understanding of the Ego. As Marx carries out his critique, this epistemological procedure transformed Ego-as-self-consciousness into the idea of the Unique, which resulted in producing a kind of radical individuality in modernity. It is 'radical' in the sense that this idea of the Unique absorbs the existence of everything into the "Totality" of the "I"--as its property. Therefore, as mentioned before, the entire world is only there with the sole objective of being discovered as a potentiality of property for the "I," for the Unique.

This idea of property that Marx developed with his critique of Stirner, opens the door, for me, for a glimpse of an indirect criticism of the theories of private property and work, already mentioned in the first section. Returning briefly to that earlier discussion, private property is the production of the individual's mind which, according to Locke, belongs to him because, throughout the rational process of creation, his nature is imprinted on it. Now, in order to reach his finished state in the spirit of the Unique, the human being has to go through the natural stage of self-recognition *vis a vis* the objects that surround him. In this way, all things become part of his individuality, his Ego. Therefore, the entire exteriority is reduced into mental "facts" of the Unique. Ultimately, what surrounds the One, is there to be appropriated by a recognition of the "I" in things.

In the Liberalist vision of Stirner, the world is the product of the divine—which is the “I”—, and in it is its essence. Therefore, everything outside the "I" is the property of the self, of the Unique. This isolated I, the individual, is the human being, and everything else "is" only within his nature.¹⁰⁰ Marx pointing to this "dialectic of property" comments on a quote from Stirner as follows:

‘How I find myself’ (it should read: ‘how the youth finds himself’) ‘behind the things, and indeed as spirit, so subsequently, too, I must find myself’ (it should read: ‘the man must find himself’) ‘behind the thoughts, i.e., as their creator and owner. In the period of spirits, thoughts outgrew me’ (the youth), ‘although they were the offspring of my brain; like delirious fantasies they floated around me and agitated me greatly, a dreadful power. The thoughts became themselves corporeal [...] by destroying their corporeality, I take them back into my own corporeality and announce: I alone am corporeal. And now I take the world as it is for me, as my world, as my property: I relate everything to myself.’¹⁰¹

The Self takes the world as its own, "as he is compelled to take it"; the world is "property" –private– of the "I". The Ego is the supreme Capitalist, the private owner of everything. It is the only one. The I relate himself to everything and only to that extent, the I, relate everything to himself.¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 137

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 136-137

¹⁰² Ibid., 138

Section IV: Love and the City

A. Love for the Other

The desire for Infinity, explained as the desire for the Other, demands a response from the I. The Face of the Other erupts into the existence of the Ego demanding the I to take charge of its weakness. In this weakness shown in the Face of the orphan, the widow, the immigrant, and the poor, Levinas argues that a "temptation to murder" it is also produced to the subject. The nakedness of the needy and the weak presents the possibility for the I to exercise power over the other's vulnerability. However, the Face of the Other commands a mandate of resistance and separation to the totality of the Ego. In his Face, the Other expresses the dialectical negativity to the power of the I. In the Face of the Other, a prohibition is expressed, the command above any command "you shall not kill!"¹⁰³ The response required by the revelation of the Infinite is an ethical response, which involves dispossession, a renunciation to the "power to do" towards the Other and become "respons-able" for the Other. In other words, the response that commands the Face is an answer that implies not domination, but rather, disinterest, care, respect, and dedication to seeking the well-being of that Other who is vulnerable. This is to be responsible for the other: to respond, to Love. According to Emmanuel Levinas, what is essentially human is the intersubjective relationship of one with the Other. Levinas explains that human actions are do ethical responses, which is expressed in love: "I will say this quite plainly, what truly human is - and don't be afraid of this word- love. And I mean it even with everything that burdens love or, I could say it better, responsibility is actually love."¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 199

¹⁰⁴ Levinas, *Is It Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, 143

In *Otherwise Than Being*, Levinas states: "The word I means here I am, answering for everything and for everyone."¹⁰⁵ According to Levinas, this is a command without a commander; it is a primordial obligation that is not grounded on any reasoning. This command, without a commander, is an ethical command. However, it is not reciprocal but infinite. It is something one feels or intuits rather than rationalizes. Also, it has no contractual dimension. The relation that exists between the I and the Other is never ontological, but ethical; the relation does not intend to name and control the Other but to love him.

In contrast to the Western world that was forged through the paradigm of the I, Levinas is not afraid to expose in his thought the imperative of the Face that commands to love. In a world like the contemporary one, where the Face continually calls the I to the duty of love, the responsibility for the Other requires leaving the paradigm of the "I" and taking care of one's neighbor. Levinas proposes an ethical perspective of philosophy, where responsibility dethrones the epistemological duty of the Western thinker.¹⁰⁶ Western philosophy seeks to understand the reality, while Levinasian philosophy aims to accept the responsibility to take care of the Other: to love her.¹⁰⁷

The Face disarms the authority of the I. However, this disarmament does not result from violence imposed on the I by the Other. Nor does it mean that the Other imposes its freedom on the Ego because this would position him as a rival and that would mean that sooner or later there would be a confrontation of freedoms, a war. The Other disarms the Self precisely because he is the opposite of a contestant; he disarms it because of his humility that is expressed in its weakness and nakedness. The prohibition of the Face is from this sense a mandate that rests on

¹⁰⁵ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 114

¹⁰⁶ Burggraeve, *The Wisdom of Love in the Service of Love*, 190

¹⁰⁷ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 162

the weakness of the Other and therefore is none other than an Ethical Imperative. Thus, "as irreducible and obtrusive strangeness, the face does indeed 'command' the Ego's recognition and hospitality".¹⁰⁸ However, the Other does not take by force the will of the Ego and snatches it employing physical force or moral persuasion, since the weakness of the Face cannot compete against the power of the Ego that can kill him. The face "asks" the Ego for help to end his misery.

The powerlessness of her face renders an absolute command as the "please" of supplication. In his characteristically evocative, almost poetic style, Levinas speaks of the "timidity" of a face that "does not dare to dare." As first word, as word before all words, the face is a "request" not yet brutal enough to request anything, not yet courageous enough to "solicit" recognition and hospitality. It is a "beggar's request" that with bowed head and downcast eyes is uttered almost inaudibly, out of fear that it will be refused.¹⁰⁹

The Other's mandate is Ethical since it is a call for help. The epiphany of the Other calls for responsibility, and it is no longer possible to continue without questioning the egocentric paradigm: "is being just? Do I not kill by being? Do I truly have the right to be? Throughout my being in the world, do I not take the place of someone else? Do I not suppress the Other in my being and my thoughtless attempt to establish my effort to be?"¹¹⁰

After the appearance of the Face, the "I" submits to an accusation. The nominative "I" changes to the accusative "me", and the Ego is no longer the principle -arche- that measures the Other, but rather the responsibility of the "I" is measured in the Face of the misery of the Face. This responsibility is assigned to the I through the revelation of the Other, even though it is not perceived or accepted. To respond, on the other hand, is to put the Other in front of oneself and to assume this responsibility is to love her. The mandate 'thou shalt not kill' for Levinas, is this very responsibility that is materialized by the seek of Justice. Justice is the attitude of openness

¹⁰⁸ Burggraeve, *The Wisdom of Love in the Service of Love*, 97

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 98

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 99

for the Other and the essential condition for the dissolution of the paradigm of the "I" in the transformation of the reality of the world. Justice makes fertility –"procreation" – of the paradigm of the Other possible; it is to put the Other and its wellbeing as the primordial objective of the relationships in our thought and social constructions. To love is to seek justice for the Other: "his concern is my concern (...) I offer myself as guarantee for the Other."¹¹¹ In this change of understanding of the Ego, from "I" to "me" is the responsibility of the one who understands that in order to be responsible, he must go beyond himself. For that "I," understanding oneself as "me, [that is] here I am for the others [means] to lose his place radically, or his shelter in being."¹¹² It means announcing oneself as responsible, and venturing beyond the comfort of the "cogito ergo sum."

Therefore, as explained before, Loving for Levinas is a desubjectivation.¹¹³ The one who loves, is the one who does not resist the call of the Other but recognizes in the Face of the migrant, the orphan, the widow, and the poor, an inescapable responsibility. The lover is constantly on his way to the Other; he is always beyond the "self" to where the unknowable remains. Consequently, the lover demands to let go of himself to deal with the suffering of the Other. The one who loves gives up thyself to alleviate the suffering of the Other by meeting his concrete needs. Understanding this is his fundamental responsibility. The Ego is the only one responsible, and in its de-subjectivation becomes responsible even for the responsibility of the Other; "I am responsible for the Other without being permitted to make claims on her responsibility for me."¹¹⁴ Love in other words, for Levinas is disinterested, non-reciprocal, but characterized by a 'metaphysical desire' that does not seek for any agreement, it is not

¹¹¹ Levinas, *The Pact*, 25-26

¹¹² Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 185

¹¹³ Lozano, *El Amor: Una De-Subjetivación del Sí Mismo desde la Perspectiva de Emmanuel Lévinas*, 211

¹¹⁴ Burggraeve, *The Wisdom of Love in the Service of Love*, 106

contractual. Therefore, this love does not seek rights for the protection of the Lover, rather in contradiction to Modernity, presents the Other as the higher priority in the development of social constructions where the I is not the priority. The Levinasian love looks for wellbeing of the Other.

Responsibility is for Levinas a "radical *Diakonia*."¹¹⁵ The catastrophe that transforms the paradigm of the Subject that lives for himself, into a life of "one-for-the-Other"; self-denial, self-sacrifice to the point of dying for the Other. This new paradigm is illogical and foolishness for the paradigm of the I. Loving, translates into becoming the living image of Dostoevsky's Idiot, an "irrational animal"¹¹⁶; he who responds to the face of the Other, and loves, even immersed in the rationality of the egocentric world. Levinas calls this "otherwise than [selfish] being."

However, this responsibility - loving - is also understood as proximity. "The-one-for-the-other" is proximity, being responsible for the concreteness of the person who commands help. In making the face welcome, the one who loves accounts for the suffering and is impelled to alleviate it within the circumstances of society (or reality): feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, giving a home for the immigrant, etc.; "All eternity and all the money in the world can not heal the revilement done to a person. For this is a wound that bleeds forever as if equal suffering is necessary to stop this eternal flow."¹¹⁷ In other words, proposals for the future are not enough while the suffering remains. The lover seeks to give justice to the situation of the Other, that is, to replace –to substitute– violence done to the Other with peace. This substitution is possible through the "the-one-for-the-Other" movement, in the Face to Face relationship which happens in proximity.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 107

¹¹⁶ Andrade, *La Figura del Idiota de Dostoyevski y sus Reescrituras Literarias y Cinematográficas*, 134

¹¹⁷ Burggraave, *The Wisdom of Love in the Service of Love*, 158.

¹¹⁸ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being*, 100.

Levinas explains that in the close relationship of Face to Face when listening to the pain of the Other, I realize that there are other Others around me: "a Third". The Other and the Third is revealed to the I in the same way and with the same command. The loving I is responsible for this third party as well: "in the proximity of the Other, all the Others than the Other obsess me."¹¹⁹ Here Levinas opens the door of the political, where the structures of violence in society are glimpsed. Through the Third, the Ego becomes aware that its responsibility for the Other is extended to a mission that seeks to transform the concreteness of violations caused by the injustice of social, political, and economic systems based on paradigms of the I, that not only hurt "an Other" but "all Others." The awareness of the Third leads "I" to the necessity of performing just actions that could help in the establishment of social structures that could eliminate concrete issues such as inequality, racism, sexism, ageism, immigration, poverty, exploitation, etc. In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas explains, in regards to the Third, that "the epiphany of the face qua face opens up humanity (...) (The presence of the face, the infinity of the Other, is a destituteness, a presence of the third) that is, of the whole of humanity which looks at us."¹²⁰ The epiphany of the Other opens up the consciousness for a social responsibility with all Others.

B. The City as a Capitalist society

In the year of 1933, Diego Rivera finished his famous work named *Industry Murals*, which are at the Detroit Institute of Arts. The amazing fresco depicts the entire process of car manufacturing, from the extraction of raw materials, to the complete assembly and the exit of new cars to the factory yards. The murals present the entire automotive production process in

¹¹⁹Ibid., 158.

¹²⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 213

four walls. With the use of significant figures, and marvelous combinations of colors, Rivera not only symbolizes the origin of the industry in Michigan, but he also expresses the origin and nature of all contemporary capitalist cities. The power of industrialization especially gave the North American region an enormous potential to grow and to develop modern modes of life in the American continent. In his mural, Diego Rivera narrates these events to signify not only the transformation of Ford's company as one of the most important corporations in the country but also for their transcendental meaning. The events in Detroit can be seen as key moments in the consolidation of the country as a liberal and capitalist society and also in how Detroit provided an industrialized process that allowed the evolution of the city to become the paradigm for a modern capitalist city.

An important part of my thesis is that Detroit may have led the way, but the time of the capitalist city had arrived. According to Salvador Jury, professor of Human Settlements and Urban Planning at UNAM, not only Detroit but also all cities had the same capitalist origin. Jury argues that capitalism was materialized through the transformation of existing urban places and traditional patterns of living together to become industrialized centers of capital production. Capitalism needed to have the factory at the core of the new model of the market society and so it had to reassemble all of the areas of the old feudal city--and of social patterns--in order to make the urban center rotate to the rhythm of a mass production plan. Jury's point is that urban environments were not *originally* made with the idea of creating habitats for people centered around mass production. Traditionally, at the center of the city or town or village was a church or synagogue or a mosque, and a government complex. However, the modern capitalist society organizes people around their workplace, the factory.¹²¹ In fact, for Marx, in the city where the

¹²¹ Salvador Jury, "La ciudad capitalista", *Nexos*, October 1, 1980, <https://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=3706>

divisions of labor are implemented, which lead to maximum efficiency, the creation of products, and capitalist retribution.¹²² The city as a factory promotes the rhythm of capitalist production based on the division of labor developed and mediated by exchanging goods. From an interpretation of Marx's words, the city can be described as the structure that gives fundamental an environment of production for the citizens.

The fresco of Diego Rivera allows the spectator to experience a double effect when one looks at the artwork in two different manners. If one sees the mural without the intention of noticing details, from a distance, the people in the image appear overcrowded, their bodies and movements are confused with the structures of the machines. It is difficult to tell where the factory ends and when the person begins. The other way to see it is by coming closer and observing what is going on inside of the factory. Doing so, what the spectator is able to see are the faces of the workers, also the details of their mouths, eyes, nose, the color of their skins, etc. A strange fact is that when observing the people that Rivera painted, one can notice that everyone's expressions show a countenance of effort and discomfort.

Analogously, the capitalist cities also have this double effect. On one hand, in the daily life of the citizens, the hurried life they have does not allow them to see more than shadows surrounding them when they travel around the city to accomplish their productive activities during the day. In the capitalist design, since time is meant to create money, taking a moment to observe one's immediate surroundings has no importance; therefore, people only pass next to each other, not even noticing their existence. Similarly to the mural of Diego Rivera, people end up being blended with the structures of the city. The person becomes part of a series of gears that assembles the large factory that we call the city, and the faces of the Other are not perceived--

¹²² Marx, *El Capital I*, 409-418

their suffering, their concerns, their joys, their histories. The economic system that is reflected in the mode of life of the city individualizes the person and replaces any command for the love of the other for the single and dominating mandate for production. Now the only possibility that exists is the accomplishment of an economic duty.

On the other hand, there is a second possible way to live in the city. This alternative manner is the life that can pay attention to the Other that appears lying on the sidewalk and is found begging for help: the Levinasian manner of living in the city. In this way of living, the person is decentralized, and with this, he opens his senses, allowing him to observe the people around him. Consequently, the faces of the others light up revealing themselves and communicate the truly human mandate: to love the other.

As mentioned in the last subsection, Levinas considers love as the true identity of a human being. Consequently, if the very nature of humanity is love, then societies should be based on the needs of the people and respond to their specific attributes. However, the unilateral perspective of Capitalism that perceives "human essence" as only "economic beings" —Homo-Economicus— destroys the possibilities to see in it what the person really is. As explained before, Capitalism blinds the person and alters his conscience, reducing the conception of himself as a monadic subject of control and production. This capitalist perspective of the world is the consequence of a philosophical heritage founded in the Totality of the same. Philosophy, understood as "love of wisdom," places man in a position of control towards everything that surrounds him, the Other included. Then the blurred world that surrounds the homo-economicus (structure, nature, and people) becomes only a means to achieve his objectives of production.

The philosopher Byung-Chul Han, following the reflections of both Marx and Levinas, states that capitalist society thrives on the imperatives of accumulating, consuming, and

performing. For Han, these imperatives threaten the survival of love –*eros*– since it exposes everything to consumption and turns everything into merchandise. Han understands that this problem is rooted in a social paradigm of production that serves only for the development of an extreme narcissism of the Ego, which causes the erosion and fading of the Other. In a capitalist society, the world turns into the search for the construction of the Ego and its possibilities: the more possibilities to do that someone has, the more the person is. However, in our modern cities, these possibilities are only achieved through work that creates power over some capital. The irony that Han emphasizes in his reflection is that in Capitalism, "in a world of unlimited possibilities, love itself represents an impossibility."¹²³ For Han, in today's society, there is a wear and tear on the idea of the Other that ends up summed up into idealizations that return to oneself. Love persists, idealized and tending to self-pleasure, for which the fulfillment of expectations for the Self, and not for the Other, is desired. In a society of extreme narcissism of the Ego, everything tends towards its sameness - its Totality. The Other has no place in this society because this is the "hell of the same."¹²⁴ The presence of the Other requires the existence of difference and negativity that contradicts the Ego's attempt of power over the Other. However, Han explains that capitalist society has been transforming everything into positivity for the Self; that is to say, the positive in Capitalism is that which can be consumed by the Ego, a product that serves the Ego for the construction of its self-love and that gives it a sense of well-being.¹²⁵ The Other in capitalist society becomes a means to the end of the Totality of the Ego which results in the Other disappearing thanks to a "transparency" effect that capitalist society exercises over the difference of the Other.¹²⁶

¹²³ Han, *The Agony of Eros*, 1

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 6

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 41

An essential analysis that Han makes of current urban societies and the disappearance of love is the paradigmatic evolution of disciplinary production based on the idea of I "should" to I "can" model of production. The first model, built on the bases of external agents that push the person to give a more considerable effort in the production of capital, becomes a paradigm where the agents of productive drive come from the inside of the worker who is now understood as solely responsible for its successes and failures; both, success or failure, are only the responsibility of the capitalist subject. Therefore, the person of a capitalist society will seek by all possible means to succeed, since he does not depend on anything or anyone but only on himself. If exploitation was understood in the last century only as of the use of external factors to the worker, now, with the evolution of a false idea of ownership of one's life, exploitation comes mainly from the motivation of the worker who longs to develop -love for oneself- under capitalist parameters:

After a certain point of productivity, should reaches a limit. To increase productivity, it is replaced by can. The call for motivation, initiative, and projects exploits more effectively than whips and commands (...) However, the subject is still not really free because he or she now engages in self-exploitation— and does so of his or her own free will. The exploiter is the exploited. The achievement-subject is perpetrator and victim in one. Auto-exploitation proves much more efficient than allo-exploitation because it is accompanied by a feeling of liberty. This makes possible exploitation without domination.¹²⁷

This parameter of productive life is that of the paradigm of person as a Homo-economicus. For Homo-economicus, the only way to become free in Capitalist society is through production of good; [exploitation of himself]. This is what Byung-Chul Han calls a society based on the effort of people who act as “autistic-performance-machines.”¹²⁸ The person of a capitalist society self-exploits to the point of exhaustion. Capitalist cities are places not only of exploitation of the employer to the worker, but also, and increasingly, of self-exploitation. What governs the citizen's psyche is the logic of performance, which is why the capitalist city becomes “the burnout

¹²⁷ Ibid., 9

¹²⁸ Han, *Burnout Society*, 23

society.”¹²⁹ The negativity presented in the master-slave dialectic in Hegel is transformed by positivity where the slave is his own master. Work becomes the new religion of the capitalist citizen, a religion where performance and labor make up the path to the capitalist narcissism of the I.¹³⁰

The logic of performance is also present in love. Love, being currently a consumer product for the narcissism of the Ego, is confused with pleasure. The body as a means of production, and in this case, of production of pleasure for the Ego, becomes a commodity. Simultaneously, pleasure is expressed through sexual activity, and love ends up being constantly measured by sexual performance. Eros is replaced by mercantile sexuality, or in the words of Han: "pornography."¹³¹ Pornography eliminates Eros and therefore human sexuality:

It wholly lacks the negativity of the otherness that occupies the “Two scene.” Pornography reinforces habituation, for it erases otherness altogether. Its consumer does not even have a sexual counterpart. As such, it occupies the One scene. The pornographic image emanates no resistance of the Other or the Real. It is neither upstanding nor distanced. What is pornographic is precisely the lack of contact and encounter with the Other. Instead, autoerotic contact and auto-affection protect the ego from being touched or seized by the Other. Consequently, pornography intensifies narcissification. In contrast, love as an event—as a “Two scene”—is dehabitualizing and denarcissifying. It generates a “rupture,” a “hole” in the order of the Habitual and the Same.¹³²

The object of sexuality is the Other as a means for the "I" to find itself. This happens because Eros is understood as a love of oneself. Byung-Chul Han explains that the capitalist society that eliminates negativity has domesticated love,¹³³ has turned it into a consumer good, eliminating with it risks, lack of control, and insanity; This type of domesticated love seeks to dispense with

¹²⁹ Ibid., 7

¹³⁰ Ibid., 11

¹³¹ Han, *The Agony of Eros*, 44

¹³² Ibid., 45-46

¹³³ Ibid., 18

pain and suffering. With this, love loses its importance, settling in the comfort of the same. That is, happiness is sought in the narcissism of the Self.

Health simultaneously becomes a critical path to narcissistic happiness in today's capitalist society. In the past, the search for health was presented among the game of the life-death dialectic; however, currently, Han affirms, under capitalist positivity, only the idea of life - "bare life" - is contemplated through the search for health: a life freed from death. Eros as excess and transgression in the capitalist vision cannot be part of the plan to achieve the "bare life," love for the Other denies this type of search. This prevents at all costs an irruption of the Other, where the I de-subjectivizes and is willing to give of itself for the life of Others since I cannot love without dying to myself:

The negativity of death is essential to erotic experience: 'If love exists at all it is ... like death ... within us.' Above all, death concerns the ego, the I. Erotic life-impulses overwhelm and dissolve its narcissistic and imaginary identity. Because of their negativity, they express themselves as death-impulses.¹³⁴

However, in a capitalist city, life cannot be understood without the idea of survival. One always seeks to live, and one survives only by possessing information. For this reason, capitalist society is inundated with information that Homo-economicus uses to compete and win: to live. The information opens the doors to the multiplicity of options that give an illusion of free choice—possibilities. Certainty, introduced by Descartes as the modern philosophical agenda, in this capitalist paradigm, certainty is based on gaining information and in the life of the city it is an implicit mandate to be attained. Therefore, realities such as fantasy have no place in this modern urban capitalist paradigm. Han understands fantasy as opposition to information, it is the incapability of possession, and unreachability of data certainty. The fantasy "inhabits space that is

¹³⁴ Ibid., 25

undefined",¹³⁵ it is a lack of data and impossibility of idealization. For Byung-Chul Han, fantasy corresponds to desire for the Other, since it cannot be impossible to fill the Other with meanings and data. The phenomenon of information in Capitalist society for Han corresponds to a rationalization of desire. Capitalist society suffers from a lack of desire for the Other since it has left the imagination out, which requires the space of the uncertain. The life of a capitalist city works through the mere calculation of possibilities that provides higher chances of progress. The Homo-economicus takes refuge in the security of calculated certainties.¹³⁶

For Han, politics, in its noblest sense, is an activity that gives itself to the commitment for the Other. In this framework, noble politics eliminate narcissism since it privileges the Other. However, the current policy is a mere search for life -survival- which translates into work and profit and, therefore, into a "neoliberal" trend towards depoliticization. For this reason, Han insists on the re-eroticization of politics.¹³⁷

Aligned with a similar concern, Marx argues that love does not appear in any way as a priority or as an interest for the capitalist model. For Marx love is fundamentally an attribute of man,¹³⁸ it does not exist outside of the person. In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Marx argues that feelings and passions constitute an "ontological affirmation of being."¹³⁹ Therefore, also love is an aspect of the nature of man. Love in the Marxist perspective is a quality, an attribute of every man and woman, which is expressed in concrete actions like every other faculty of the human being. However, according to Marx, Capitalism alienates the consciousness and faculties of the human, causing the alteration of his capability to love. A

¹³⁵ Ibid., 38

¹³⁶ Ibid., 43

¹³⁷ Ibid., 43-46

¹³⁸ Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, 108

¹³⁹ Ibid., 135

general thesis of Marx is that man in his extreme relationship with capital and production, ends up becoming merchandise. Marx calls this “process objectification” (reification), that is, the loss of his qualities as a subject.

Consequently, love, in capitalist relations, is driven and oriented by money and merchandise. Man exists as a money holder and thanks to this almighty material he is capable of having love, but this love is an alienated love, therefore it is an inverted love, a non-love, a reified love. Therefore, the love that is offered in Capitalism is money dressed in love, an alienated love.

C. Ciudad Juarez - El Paso: Capitalist cities

Many locals from the Border define both Ciudad Juarez and El Paso as one metropolis since, in the past, they were only one city. The two are divided by the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo, yet Ciudad Juarez and El Paso share a single heart and the same spirit. It is generally well-known that El Paso del Norte, as these two cities were previously known, was divided out of greed after the U.S.--Mexico War of 1846 and political bribes.¹⁴⁰ However, this border was initially a place of "passage," which is the English translation of "paso", and where people used to rest, commercialize, and then leave. However, the region began to grow after the injection of foreign capital. But it was not until the maquiladora (factory) industry was established in the border that it became the big metropolis that it is today.

The history of this metropolis dates back to before the time of the Spanish conquest, when different semi-nomadic indigenous communities were attracted by the vegetation that grew because of the Rio Grande. However, these indigenous communities did not settle permanently until the arrival of the Christian evangelization of the Spanish.¹⁴¹ In 1530, Spaniards, who came

¹⁴⁰ “Guerra de Estados Unidos-México”, LHistoria, Julio 4, 2018, <https://www.lhistoria.com/america/guerra-mexico-estadounidense>

¹⁴¹ Martinez, *Ciudad Juárez: Saga of a Legendary Border City*, 10

from central Mexico, reached what would become the border of Ciudad Juárez and El Paso over the years, and met with the indigenous communities of the Mansos and Indios Sumas. Three decades later, Fray Garcia de San Francisco y Zuñiga founded the mission of Nuestra Señora de Guadalupe de los Mansos del Paso del Norte, which caused the sedentarization of the indigenous people of the region.¹⁴²

In 1680, after the revolt in the New Mexico area by the "Pueblo Indians" against Spain, some Spaniards escaped to the south to take refuge and ended up founding the communities of Ysleta, Senecu, and Socorro. To protect the refugees and the mission, Spain founded a fort in the area of what was already beginning to be called by the name of Paso del Norte. The natural wealth of the area, together with the security of the fort and the various missions that were founded around the Guadalupe mission, caused the passage and settlement of European Americans, as well as multiple indigenous communities such as the Piro, Suma, and Tigua.¹⁴³

After the independence with Spain, in 1821, Paso del Norte was unified with the area of New Mexico to a trading plan with the United States using the Santa Fe-Chihuahua Trail pass. Paso del Norte soon became an unavoidable transit point for all those who traded north and south of the Rio Grande.¹⁴⁴

Seeing the prolific economic growth of the area, the Mexican government ordered the payment of taxes and many regulations to regulate trade throughout the region. Both Chihuahua and Texas faced government regulations that translated into legal looting. These acts on the part of the Mexican government began with “the notorious smuggling syndrome at Paso del Norte, a

¹⁴² Enríquez, *Apuntes para la historia de la diócesis de Ciudad Juárez*, 19

¹⁴³ Martínez, *Ciudad Juárez: Saga of a Legendary Border City*, 10

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

phenomenon that has characterized border areas that align with the US. -Mexico divide throughout their History .”¹⁴⁵

In 1836 Texas rebelled against the Mexican government, which created a separation of the region from Mexico. Texas called itself the "Republic of Texas" in the year of 1845, as a result of the defeat of Mexico in its war against the United States, and Texas ended up being annexed to the American territory. After some political altercations, the border between the United States and Mexico divided Paso del Norte in half, mainly using the Río Grande as a dividing line.¹⁴⁶ However, the political division never really separated both sides of the border since the community retained its cultural unity which was, however, closely tied up with the coercion of that politically forced division. Over time, the economic relationship of both countries came to depend on that very border, especially on the Paso del Norte side, which is currently the second most important border for the United States in economic terms. “Converted into a full-fledged border town, Paso del Norte would from that time forward find itself at the doorstep of the powerful economy of the United States. Dependency would become a way of life.”¹⁴⁷ In 1852 the north side of Paso del Norte transformed its name to El Paso, and in 1888 the south side was named Ciudad Juárez in honor of the Mexican president, Benito Juárez. Both sides of the river, which were always a single city, went on to become a binational region.

The capitalization of the region has multiple matrices. However, the decisive change in the capitalization of the region that transformed this border into the big metropolis that is today in 2020, is the trilateral North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), signed by Canada, the United States, and Mexico, which became effective in 1994. The treaty sought to create an

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 11

¹⁴⁶ Guerra de Estados Unidos-México”, LHistoria, Julio 4, 2018, <https://www.lhistoria.com/america/guerra-mexico-estadounidense>

¹⁴⁷ Martinez, *Ciudad Juárez: Saga of a Legendary Border City*, 13

economic relationship between the three countries, based on the capitalist paradigm of mass production and free trade. This treaty brought the installation of multiple foreign "maquiladoras" to El Paso, but mainly to Ciudad Juarez since Mexico offered a cheaper labor force than the United States. For all of Mexico, and especially for places like Ciudad Juárez, this resulted in a disruption of the region's livelihoods that were traditionally based on subsistence farming.¹⁴⁸

According to the analysis made by Jules Simon, NAFTA transformed the lives of citizens on the border by building social structures through institutions that shaped social coexistence in a decisive way to the capitalist model. The plan signed by former presidents Bill Clinton, Carlos Salinas de Gortari and the Canadian Prime Minister Jean Chrétien "is overseen by a number of institutions including appointees to the Free Trade Commission, Coordinators, Working Groups, Official Committees, and a Secretariat to ensure the proper interpretation and smooth implementation of the Agreement's provisions."¹⁴⁹ The new treaty meant eliminating tariff and non-tariff barriers between the three countries and establishing a safe framework for capital investment and liberal ideals. According to Simon:

If we are already talking about investment and trade liberalization, we are already talking from the context of existing global markets and international globalization, the end goal of which is to create large enough economic entities of sufficient scale so that the members of that block would not only compete but dominate other countries and blocks of economic power. One of the novelties of the agreement was to set up a jointly administered, bi-national panel system for settling trade disputes, such as complaints about dumping and other forms of economic injury, but which also has resulted in what can best be described as the privatization of the justice system. In fact, foreign investor lawsuits entered into against Mexico and Canada have resulted in the taxpayers of those two countries having to pay out hundreds of millions of dollars in judgments of unfair NAFTA-defined trade practices.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Simon, "The Institutionalizing of NAFTA: 20 Years of Violence and 'Other' Injustices", *Inter-American Journal of Philosophy*, Volume 9, Issue 1 (Spring 2018): http://ijp.tamu.edu/blog/?page_id=892

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

The power of institutions is decisive in establishing ideological change; institutions "structure social interaction by establishing and embedding 'structures' or rules that provide stability and durability, and a framework that provides form and consistency to the expectations that we have for the behavior of others."¹⁵¹ In other words, the institutionalization of capitalism on the border promotes a specific way of feeling, thinking, and believing deeply structured from an ideology based on the search for capital. The objective of institutions is to build structures in which the citizen alienates himself in the established paradigm. In the words of Simon: "institutions can arise spontaneously and in undesigned ways by structuring the aggregated actions of individual agents through self-organization, a position that flies in the face of conventional, liberal economic theory."¹⁵² Marx's critique of Capitalist ideology, as I note above in Section III, where citizens' thinking superimpose individuality and the search for individualist benefits over the collective good, materializes in NAFTA through the normalization of the treaty through its institutions.

In this case, for Mexico, the NAFTA agreement definitively established a liberal pattern of production and trade. It is logical to think that an international agreement with countries that share a border, would establish significant changes in their border regions that should be decisive. Twenty-six years have passed since the implementation of NAFTA, and this border, as a border, has become a defining place where capitalist values are lived more aggressively and where, in the same way, the capitalist vision is intensified, since both benefits and injustices are seen as "part of the same economic game," that is to say as something healthy. This is because the power of institutionalization is concentrated precisely on the normalization of a paradigm in which the subject perceives things as common and even useful.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

In this binational city, on the Mexican side of it, at Ciudad Juárez, the typical Mexican folklore of celebration, joy, and sarcasm is lived in a climate of the anguish of social decomposition; a bittersweet life that is sustained by joyfully engaging in traditions and multiple excuses to celebrate, while simultaneously fearing that they will not be able to meet basic their needs to merely survive. In Ciudad Juarez, many of the citizens wake up very early, around 4 or 5 AM, and do not finish with their activities until after sunset. According to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI by its name in Spanish), approximately three hundred thousand Juarenses work in the operations area at the maquiladora industry.¹⁵³ The minimum salary that they earn is about 185.56 Mexican pesos (8.16 dollars approximately) per day.¹⁵⁴ Even though most workers work from 6 AM to 6 PM, they all wish to work extra hours because their wages are so low that they cannot satisfy their basic needs with a standard work schedule. According to the article presented by the newspaper El Heraldo de Juarez, in Ciudad Juarez a person needs approximately 3,176.95 pesos (139.09 US) per month to supply themselves with food and essential services in a dignified manner; 12, 707.80 pesos (556.35 US) would be required in a four-person house. However, a Juarense's minimum wage reaches only 5,566.8 (243.72 US) pesos per month, making it impossible to achieve a decent standard of living in the city if you have a family. This reality pushes people to extend their work hours to more than 12 hours.¹⁵⁵

The development of a capitalist economic plan on the border established the maquiladora as the primary source of income for Ciudad Juarez, “unfortunately, this model of economic

¹⁵³ “Estadística Manufacturera y Maquiladora de Exportación”, INEGI, last modified May 2020, <https://www.inegi.org.mx/temas/manufacturasexp/>

¹⁵⁴ The exchange rate on June 24, 2020: “Convertir Pesos Mexicanos (MXN) a Dólares Estadounidenses (USD)”, Exchange-Rates.org, June, 24, 2020, <https://es.exchange-rates.org/Rate/MXN/USD>

¹⁵⁵ Paola Gamboa, “Canasta básica aumentó 24.5% en Juárez en cinco años”, *El Heraldo de Juarez*, February 17, 2020, <https://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=3706>

growth which is very beneficial to the owners of the maquilas, was developed without taking into account the human capital that allowed them to obtain significant profits with their cheap and demanding labor force .”¹⁵⁶ To cover the minimum expenses for a family, the father and mother must work long shifts, leaving the children alone at home. The change in life on the border undergoes a dramatic transformation in the way of life of its citizens, worryingly affecting family life. This resounding change caused a culture shock that put men and women on the same level of economic responsibility more out of necessity than pleasure. The existence of the maquiladora in Ciudad Juarez had a decisive influence on families living together less and with children growing up far from their parents. On the other hand, there was a competition for economic authority in the home, creating a rivalry between couples.¹⁵⁷ The maquiladora brought growth to the city's economy, but also problems of family disintegration and, with it, multiple factors of social deficiencies.

Although the maquiladoras in Ciudad Juarez have advanced in the care of workers through the years, the economic situation of the city continues to present a mostly insane environment within the work of the maquiladora in many ways. Workers are reduced to just fighting for daily survival in often brutal physical and psychological conditions, such as those who "only have 10 minutes to go to the bathroom, if the speed of the production line allows it, and those who do not earn enough even to satisfy their most basic needs and must travel long stretches to and from their workplaces."¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁶ Katya Salazar, “Asesinatos de mujeres en Ciudad Juárez”, *Nürnberger Menschenrechtszentrum*, December 12, 2004, <https://www.menschenrechte.org/es/2004/12/12/asesinatos-de-mujeres-en-ciudad-juarez/>

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Sandra Rodríguez, “El infierno de los salarios de miseria en Ciudad Juárez”, *SinEmbargo*, January 11, 2016, <https://www.sinembargo.mx/11-01-2016/1591896>

One interesting issue also in this kind of job is the one of being a mother. A female worker cannot dream about this easily since motherhood does not align with the demands of working at the maquiladora, since physical work is required and there is no 'leave' for giving birth or taking care of children.¹⁵⁹

In Juarez, a city transformed for the exercise of brutal capitalism, the excessive search for personal gain has no measure; By earning a little money, some people are capable of taking even the life of the Other. In Ciudad Juarez, an average of 137 people per month have been assassinated in just five months of 2020.¹⁶⁰

Along these same lines is the lamentable world-famous phenomenon of the murder of women in Ciudad Juarez. Only for April of this year 2020, the number of murdered women was 43, which is the 26.6% of the total figure reached in the year 2019, which were 180 cases.¹⁶¹

The limits to obtaining money and power do not seem to exist in this fight to survive in the capitalist world. Capitalism enhances the value of the economy over anything else in society; money governs the will of the people to the point of creating criminal companies to achieve it. According to the Italian criminologist Letizia Paoli, the activity and economic objective of organized crime, since its historical gestation several centuries ago, cannot be understood without the development and international expansion of the capitalist economic system.¹⁶² The capitalist values that are experienced in the city do not promote respect for the life of the Other, but rather the endless increase in the well-being and economic power of the Self. The dream of

¹⁵⁹ Fernández, "Las maquiladoras y las mujeres en Ciudad Juárez, paradojas de la industrialización bajo el capitalismo integral," 135.

¹⁶⁰ "Homicidios Dolosos 20202," FICOSEC, last modified June 11, 2020, <https://ficosec.org/homicidios-dolosos-2020/>.

¹⁶¹ Hector Tovar, "Fueron asesinadas 48 mujeres en lo que va de 2020", *El Herald de Juarez*, April 17, 2020, <https://www.elheraldodejuarez.com.mx/local/fueron-asesinadas-48-mujeres-en-lo-que-va-de-2020-5113795.html>

¹⁶² Fernandez, *Delincuencia, finanzas y globalización*, 139.

"free competition" and less political power over economic affairs reinforces a culture of crime.¹⁶³ Ciudad Juárez is one of the largest regions concerning organized crime problems since "63% percent of homicides linked to organized crime [this year] in the state [of Chihuahua] has been registered in this city."¹⁶⁴ The organized crime that exists today in Ciudad Juárez is understood only from a capital production perspective; that is, the capitalist dream that nurtures this border's criminal activities.

Other jobs on the Mexican side do not have much difference with the maquiladora's reality. People wake up early to go out and find the money that will allow them to survive the rest of the month since it is difficult to find the kind of decent jobs that give what is necessary to live with dignity. According to the study by the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL by its name in Spanish), in Juarez, there are 396,882 poor people, which is 26.4% of the total population, in other words, 1 in 4 Juarenses suffers poverty. The figure of poverty in the city is ironic if it is contemplated that:

Of every 100 pesos that Mexico exports, not counting oil, 13 are produced here. In 2016, Mexico exported merchandise for \$ 295 billion, of which \$ 250 billion comes from the maquiladora industry. Chihuahua is the primary exporting state with exports for 40 thousand 284 mp in products of the manufacturing industry, and about 80% of those products are manufactured and exported from Ciudad Juárez, which places it as the main exporting municipality in the country.¹⁶⁵

In 2015, the maquiladora industry in Ciudad Juarez generated 26 million pesos in wages for its workers. However, this amount, which seems significant, is actually very little compared

¹⁶³ Mariano Ciafardini, "Capitalismo y criminalidad," *Voces en el Fenix*, August 1, 2020, <https://www.vocesenelfenix.com/content/capitalismo-y-criminalidad>.

¹⁶⁴ Miguel Silerio, "Acumula Juárez casi 70% de homicidios vinculados al crimen organizado en el estado," *Yo Ciudadano*, January 10, 2020, <https://yociudadano.com.mx/noticias/acumula-juarez-casi-70-de-homicidios-vinculados-al-crimen-organizado-en-el-estado/>.

¹⁶⁵ Benjamin Carrera, "Ciudad Juarez: Una ciudad rica llena de pobres," *Juarez a Diario*, January 1, 2018, <https://www.juarezadiario.com/plumas/ciudad-juarez-una-ciudad-rica-llena-pobres/>.

to the profits of each of the companies.¹⁶⁶ For example, only the Bosch company, one of the largest companies in the city, invested in 2013, 150 million dollars for its expansion within Ciudad Juarez.¹⁶⁷

It is evident that something is happening in the city, on the one hand, billions of pesos are generated here and on the other a quarter of its population is poor, this is undoubtedly a palpable sample of the lacerating exploitation of the worker and of inequality and inequity that exists in Ciudad Juárez.¹⁶⁸

In Ciudad Juárez, the capitalist paradigm carries out its capital production project perfectly. Here, people live and die looking to produce goods, striving to create wealth, or to grow in the world of work, leaving aside what is not essential, what is not capital -- the person that is next to them, the Other.

On the other side of the river, in El Paso, Texas, there is not much difference between schedules or family sacrifice than in Juarez. Living on the American side gives one comfort that is unlikely to have on the Mexican side: air conditioners, newer structures, street safety, luxury cars, technology, and modern transportation. However, life tends to be more structured than in Ciudad Juarez; here, there is no room for financial mistakes, the rhythm of the day catches the citizen between its teeth and spits him out years later, when he or she has turned already old. Credit plans and the demands of the first world kill the soul and the yearning to celebrate. To work is the first mandate in the city, because in a capitalist city to produce is the main goal. Distractions, as well as celebrations are partially established by the same calendar: a birthday, Christmas, 4th of July, the Super Bowl, and even "5 de Mayo". In El Paso, Texas, people have a

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Berenice Gaytan, "Se expande Bosch aquí," *El Diario mx*, February 19, 2015, https://diario.mx/Economia/2015-02-19_8e6dd025/se-expande-bosch-aqui/.

¹⁶⁸ Benjamin Carrera, "Ciudad Juarez: Una ciudad rica llena de pobres," *Juarez a Diario*, January 1, 2018, <https://www.juarezadiario.com/plumas/ciudad-juarez-una-ciudad-rica-llena-pobres/>.

good understanding of financial responsibility in terms of capitalist ideology: work comes first, people later. Both citizens who live in El Paso since birth, and those who at some point manage to cross to live in this city (especially in the case of Mexicans), see the economic benefit provided by the American city as a priority. In other words, social justice takes second place when work can be kept safe. Nicole Torres explains it in her book *Walls of Indifference: Immigration and the Militarization of the Us-Mexico Border*, when she talks about the wall that divides the two cities and which is a symbol of repudiation of the unity of the border metropolis. Reinforced with a 2.5-kilometer iron wall of length and 5.5 meters high, the wall that separates United States of America and Mexico, divides a community that used to be one; on one side one can find the benefits of living on the American territory, while on Mexican side, people fight against the torments of the extreme poverty. Torres affirms that the wall "enables individuals to contract their awareness of the broader social and environmental problems the others face";¹⁶⁹ Although the wall displeases most citizens, keeping the dangerous Juárez far from El Paso it is something that must be done at all costs.

In El Paso, despite the comfort that the first world offers, working hours do not diverge much from those of its sister border. However, wages are enough for a better way of life, although poverty continues to exist. The minimum wage in El Paso is 7.25 dollars per hour,¹⁷⁰ which is an annual rate of approximately \$ 15,080. According to the level of spending that the city requires, a single person needs a salary of \$ 10.40 per hour to live with dignity in El Paso, that is to say approximately \$ 21,632 annually. However, the average salary that exists in El Paso

¹⁶⁹ Torres, *Walls of Indifference: Immigration and the Militarization of the Us-Mexico Border*, 78

¹⁷⁰ "Living Wage Calculation for El Paso County, Texas," Living Wage, last modified December 30, 2018, <https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/48141>.

is 20,050 a year,¹⁷¹ and according to *Data USA*, the poverty rate in El Paso is 20.3%, which means that in this American city, 1 in 5 people live in circumstances of poverty.¹⁷² These statistics show us that, compared to its neighboring city, the economic quality of El Paso Texas, is superior. However, the rhythm of life that El Paso offers creates an environment where citizens stay focused on maintaining that state of living with comforts. However, even when generally an average ‘Pasoan’ has several items of comfort in their homes, commonly most of these articles, or possessions, do not truly belong to him. In 2015, the *Debt.org* page showed that Texans had an average personal debt of \$ 38,000. In the same way, this source affirmed that in Texas, its citizens owed an average of \$ 26,250 in student loans, and 22,500 in mortgages.¹⁷³

From this information, it can be affirmed that although El Paso indeed lives better, it is also true that it is not easy to own one's own education. The yearning to buy a house when the citizen is a recent college graduate is a goal that is faced continuously between continuing to study to get a better job –which implies getting more debt– or getting some work to start paying other debts. The reality is that commonly a normal job in the city will not meet the professional expectations of the citizen. However sometimes, it will give him the possibility to save money and to get a credit card in order to demonstrate that he can get into debt and be responsible of that; in other words, that this citizen is a capable of living in a capitalist society. On this American side of the Border, people live a culture of debt, and even when most of the citizens work hard to grow in the game of this system, not so many find the way to achieve essential possessions as a home of their own.

¹⁷¹ “Economy in El Paso, Texas,” Best Place, last modified, June 12, 2020, https://www.bestplaces.net/health/city/texas/el_paso

¹⁷² “El Paso, TX,” Data USA, last modified, June 12, 2020, <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/el-paso-tx/#:~:text=In%202018%2C%20El%20Paso%2C%20TX,%2445%2C031%2C%20a%200.619%25%20increase.>

¹⁷³ Bill Fay, “Consumer Debt in Texas,” *Debt.org*, <https://www.debt.org/faqs/americans-in-debt/consumer-texas/#:~:text=In%202015%2C%20Texans%20had%20an,the%20national%20average%20of%20%2428%2C950.>

Data USA, shows that in El Paso, 58.3% of people live in their own homes –or pay for a home–, the rest, almost half of the population, rent. Even so, most households have two cars on average, a fact that suggests two main reasons in my opinion: first, that the city focuses on acquiring means to achieve labor efficiency. It seeks to have two cars so that the different members of a house can go to work or study independently. This statement is based on statistics that show that the commute time in the city is generally 22.2 minutes, with 82.4% of citizens claiming to use their cars and drive alone to their jobs. Put another way, it is likely to be challenging to accommodate times within the family to use fewer cars; The second way of looking at this information could suggest that, on the other hand, the capitalist culture of the city tends to encourage citizens to go into debt with more material goods than necessary, since statistics show that only 9.33% travel carpooled. This statement is also based on the fact that, as stated by dallasfed.org: “as of 2017, an estimated 93 percent of households in El Paso County have at least one vehicle, a figure that is similar across Texas. Many of these are likely financed.”¹⁷⁴ This conveys the idea that the goods that would be sought to be acquired by necessity to meet the realities of a city in a developing country, in a developed city, such as that of El Paso Tx, having two or more cars is not a matter of necessity but mainly a desire for luxury. In other words, the El Paso situation results in people taking on long-term debt that is probably unnecessary. As we have already presented in the analysis of liberal philosophy, this taking on of debt is because of the belief that the more you have in a capitalist society, the more you are.

In El Paso, the Capitalist dream of luxury goods and comforts is experienced as an illusion, since everything much of what the citizen has does not belong to him. The stress of

¹⁷⁴ “El Paso, TX,” *Data USA*, last modified, June 12, 2020, <https://datausa.io/profile/geo/el-paso-tx/#:~:text=In%202018%2C%20El%20Paso%2C%20TX,%2445%2C031%2C%20a%200.619%25%20increase.>

staying current on payments, and the compulsion to keep going into debt becomes more than a vice, but it becomes a curse of the United States capitalist system. If you do not demonstrate that you have known how to get into debt and have a responsible payment history, you are not someone worthy of acquiring greater debts; for example, like owning a house or like something even more indispensable –especially in the United States– owning a car.

On both sides of the Rio Bravo/ Rio Grande, there is a different face of capitalism. On the Mexican side, there is a constant struggle against poverty. Most people look for ways to stay on a medium level and try to economize on certain luxuries. Contrary to the American side, where people struggle to pay debts necessary to grow in the system. In both realities, people seek to work more and earn more money, some of them to sustain luxuries, and others to achieve them.

D. El Paso- Ciudad Juárez: culture of exploitation and self-exploitation

There is indeed a suffocating sensation of stress, economic problems, debts, intense work schedules, family neglect, and disinterest for others, at the Border. In this bi-national metropolis, everything is moving fast, and it seems that the system provides a way to live a life of perfect production as if the person was a machine and nothing else. At the Maquiladoras, hospitals, offices, and even schools, people have to work more than 40 hours a week if they want to have a decent salary to not only sustain themselves but, because we live in a capitalist society, to pay accumulated debts. Taking a break in the capitalist city means no payment; nevertheless, people do it, not because they feel free to do it –economically speaking– but because their nature begs for it at some moment.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁵ Roger Caillois, explains the human necessity of resting and celebrating as an activity that purifies and recreates the vigor of the person and the community. Caillois, *El Hombre y lo Sagrado*, 114-115

Celebration seems to be an element that escapes the capitalist culture since this is drunkenness that does not fit into the production schedule for which order is required. For Nietzsche, the party was an activity freed from the dialectic between the gods Dionysus and Apollo, since celebrating was a Dionysian activity, and belonged to the field of artistic creation.¹⁷⁶ Capitalism, for its part, suppresses intoxication that is born of the most natural yearning of the human being: the animal vigor that humans naturally possess according to Nietzsche.¹⁷⁷ Religions as Judaism and Christianity tell us in their shared Old Testament that on the seventh day God rested.¹⁷⁸ That is the day destined for men for leisure, relaxation, and honor and communication with God. Celebration was the event in which human beings could relate to Infinity.

Octavio Paz reflected on the way it is celebrated in both the United States and Mexico. For Mexicans, partying is a reality that must undoubtedly happen during their week. The capitalist way of living leaves little strength for it, and yet, in Mexico, citizens insist on celebrating, even when money is not enough; However, in the United States, a country founded and developed on liberal and capitalist ideals, combined with puritanism, the holiday has been an element that has been exchanged for the search for production and purity. Octavio Paz's words well understand the elements that make up what would eventually constitute the modern ideological axes that gave way to the creation of Capitalism, that is, an idea of religious puritanism coupled with the understanding of a duty of production in response to the love of a divinity that understood the holiday – the rest – as a negative attitude in comparison with working:

¹⁷⁶ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 14-15.

¹⁷⁷ Nietzsche, *Fragmentos Postumos*, 266

¹⁷⁸ Gen. 2:2-3 (New Jerusalem Bible)

The United States has not really known the art of the festival, except in the last few years, with the triumph of hedonism over the old Protestant ethic. This is natural. A society that so energetically affirmed the redemptive value of work could not help chastising as depraved the cult of the festival and the passion for spending. The Protestant rejection was inspired by religion rather than economics. The Puritan conscience could not see that the value of the festival was actually a religious value: communion.¹⁷⁹

Communion, as an element that is produced from the existence of the community,¹⁸⁰ it is only possible if there is Other than the “I”; the festival gives way to the opening of Otherness and the encounter with Infinity. However, modernity, as the period that determines the conception of Capitalism, was not only marked by Cartesian philosophy and all its ideological effect based on subjectivity. Instead, Max Weber explains in his work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* this economic system was also born through the effects of the Christian earthquake caused by Martin Luther and his search for a religious purity that rejected the errors of Catholicism of his time. Nevertheless, although Luther is not sympathetic to current Capitalism, the teachings of the Reform set the tone for creating such an economic system, especially by Calvinism.¹⁸¹ Capitalism was then the product of a combination of individualistic, puritanical ideologies and ideals of production, which over the years convinced the western world of a religiosity that joined the capitalist economic ideal, where celebration, together with idea Infinity of the Other, they were left as an element without priority in comparison with the idea work.

On the Border, one lives under the regime of producing. Production and efficiency appear as the priority of life in this binational city. However, this production schedule, which generally lasts more than eight hours a day, has a different nuance between business owners and workers. The vast majority of citizens who are employees work period of times that are difficult for them

¹⁷⁹ Paz, *Mexico and the United States*, 364-365

¹⁸⁰ Caillouis, *El Hombre y lo Sagrado*, 111-120

¹⁸¹ Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 59-70

to endure. This work rhythm prohibits them from spending enough time to do essential things as taking care of their family, or the simple fact of having free time for recreation. However, on the other hand, unlike the platonic idea of being an entrepreneur and building your own business to be "free," the reality is that the company manager usually ends up imposing themselves on extreme hours of work to achieve success. The platonic goal presented by Capitalism is the that of becoming a citizen that embodies the ideals of enjoyment from the "luxuries" of the system; in other words, to be the "perfect image of the capitalist goal", the owner of your life by having enough richness to be free. However, even when capitalism presents an "ideal" economic world for the person, in reality this system, being part of the nature of history, as Marx explains, works through a dialectic movements based on the production of capital where creating richness for one, generates the impoverishment of others; creating a distinction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.¹⁸² It is a system of competence, where the owner and the employee need to be working constantly and for long periods of time to diminish the possibilities to be impoverished by someone else or by the same economic system. On the one hand, the worker is exploited, and on the other, the owner is self-exploiting, as we have already seen in Byung-Chul Han's analysis of capitalist society.

The biggest problem is that the citizens of this border, of both countries, maintain this rhythm of life that is rarely efficient, and they do so thanks to an ideology of economic 'capitalist' meritocracy. To believe in such a 'capitalist' meritocracy is to support the reasoning that the one who strives the most is the one who manages to grow and be rich. That is, everyone who has more money is because they have earned it by their own work with their own bodies, which is an extension of their own property, as Locke teaches us. However, multiple specialists

¹⁸² Marx, *Economic Philosophic Manuscripts or 1844*, 234.

on the subject maintain that this capitalist meritocracy as a general rule is an unsustainable lie. Joe Stiglitz, Nobel Laureate economist, in his book *The Price of Inequality*, criticizes the idea of meritocracy stating that wealth does not generally depend on the merit of people but that there is usually already a prior advantage in their finances. That is, “for the most part, not only should we not blame the poor for their plight but also that the claim of those at the top, that they earned their money‘ on their own, ‘doesn’t have much merit.’”¹⁸³ On the contrary, commonly rich people form part of families with inherited Capital and Political power (that they ‘buy’ with their wealth) that make possible higher financial growth compared to the rest of the people. The lie of meritocracy makes economic justice impossible but it also creates a society convinced that the rich are the ones who work and struggle for their richness; and the poor are the ones who are lazy and are not economically rational as the good capitalist. This makes impossible to seek equity and better conditions of opportunities. This lie not only creates an absurd idealism held by the contemporary society who thinks themselves as people that should seek to be better by economical means. To have money is interpreted as a sign of maturity, responsibility and brilliance. In this economic paradigm, the figure of the Other disappears. There is no room for ethical responsibility and love where that place is been occupy by the responsibility for the production of Capital.

E. The eclipse of the Other

The reality of exploitation that it is lived in a capitalist society such as this one of the US-Mexico border leaves, in the collective consciousness, a reduced space for the Other. In the culture of aggressive capitalism that is lived in this binational city, thinking about helping the Other is a reality that feels mostly superficial. You do not help the Other, if it is for a primarily

¹⁸³ Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality*, 313.

for a religious or ethical conviction, but not because the rhythm of life really proposes you to do so. In reality, only by breaking the rhythm of the capitalist city life, one can start to consider the necessities of others. In order to help others, the capitalist citizen of these border cities must deny the individualistic and extreme meritocratic conception of success, which requires him to seek higher material goods and economic opportunities. The liberalism experienced in Ciudad Juárez and El Paso teaches the citizens from an early age that one must get into the rhythm of mass production to have a place in society and become someone. This capitalist production rhythm will not only be there during the working time but will flood the entire day of the citizen, thus leading to a materialistic and consumerist ideology: I am because I have property.

The irony in this situation of overworking is that most citizens earn less even if their effort is higher than others; a condition that increases the self-destructive desire to work overtime in their jobs, since the less you have, the less value you have in the city. As we explained in the first part of this reflection, liberalism affirmed that having material goods provides greater freedom to individuals. That is the reason why, in Ciudad Juárez and El Paso, from that philosophical perspective, the rich are always perceived as a fulfilled person, free, and even a bearer of wisdom.

In his article "Reflections on Philosophy of Hitlerism," Levinas raises the following reflection: "We must ask ourselves if liberalism satisfies the authentic dignity of the human subject."¹⁸⁴ This question does not mean that it is necessary to "add something" to liberalism. On the contrary, it aims to call into question the possibility of an overlap between human dignity and liberalism.

¹⁸⁴ Levinas, *Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism*, 63.

Through "the light of reason," according to Levinas, the autonomous subject —the I— must try to exorcise the "physical, psychological and social matter" that seems to question his harmonic individualist empire; and the mode of resistance of reason is characterized by the spread of the "idea of freedom." Levinas argues that the idea of freedom must be propagated to reach all men and overcome obstacles that impede their authentic realization; in other words, self-realization. In liberalism, following Levinas' critique, the Other is conceived as an irrational and alien force that hinders the rational process of self-equalization of the individual-subject; in other words, the Other becomes an obstacle for the rationality of liberalism that seeks to dominate and be self-sufficient.

In the article *Freedom and Command* of 1953, Levinas describes how in order to guarantee its own freedom, the subject must institute an order of reason outside himself. The ideal of peace and sufficiency, of the rational and autonomous subject, leads him to alienation within the general will and the establishment of a state that avoids proof of the tyranny of the plurality —the Otherness—. In this way, he remains under the control of the institution's impersonal reason, as long it protects him from any threat to his integrity and promotes the expansion of his freedom. For the liberal individual, the search for security also becomes an instinct of possession.¹⁸⁵

For Capitalism, the individual is free because he owns his body, force of labor, and the product of his work. And as explained before, according to this philosophy with much more property, there is greater freedom.¹⁸⁶ The liberal person would prefer the certainty of his capabilities than a relationship with the Other. Levinas calls this individual a mediocre materialistic:

¹⁸⁵ Levinas, *Freedom and Command*, 16

¹⁸⁶ Marx, *El Capital I*, 62-63

He prefers the certainty of tomorrow to today's enjoyments. He demands guarantees in the present against the future, which introduces unknowns into those solved problems from which he lives. What he possesses becomes capital, carrying interest or insurance against risks, and his future, thus tamed, is integrated in this way with his past.¹⁸⁷

Emmanuel Levinas also argues that the "materialism" of the bourgeoisie –the capitalist– is based on the time of the economy: it is the struggle of being to prolong its existence, which is translated as efficiency and productivity. Levinas conceives bourgeois materialism as the result of an "ontological-economic" order that imposes on humans a model of existence. The social order based on this model would promote the total functionalization of life, to preserve the most precious asset of the free subject: its vital integrity. This ontological-economic model of being that seeks to "persevere the being" would be the product of the ideal of sufficiency that is an essential element for the production of capital. For Levinas, the reduction of things to mere material, eat to live or work to survive, can only arise in a "struggle for existence," a world of famine, misery, and deprivation.¹⁸⁸ Capitalist idealism, instead of questioning the ontological-economic ideal, accepts it as a constitutive part of man.

This ideal constitutes the truth in a society ruled by the capitalist ideology; therefore, caring for the neighbor as Levinas proposes, that is, by loving him, is an attitude that distracts the worker of the city from its primary "purpose": to be an efficient producer. Repairing this worker's distraction entails an inescapable return to the capital production by the person alienating him from love.

"Where is your brother?" is the crucial question made to Cain in the Torah's first book; however, the original answer "I do not know... am I my brother's keeper?" becomes excusable in

¹⁸⁷ Levinas, *On Escape*, 50

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 54-56

today's capitalist society when the rhythm of life changes the paradigm of social struggles;
therefore, nowadays, the only answer that a citizen can offer is: "I do not know, I am working."

Section V: Love as First Philosophy

A. Marx's Revolution

For Marx, capitalism represents a superior mode of production compared to previous regimes and that this advance was achieved thanks to the action of a bourgeoisie that acted as a progressive force against the old production relations that, at a particular moment, hindered material development. However, for Marx, capitalism was also in charge of perpetuating a more accentuated inequality between capitalists and workers. He also believed that inequality would tend to grow until the new progressive class capable of bringing about change through the revolution that socialism brings.

Marx's philosophical work, ambiguous and revealing at the same time, has been for millions of people a doctrine of life and hope. In his philosophy Marx, just like a biblical prophet, announced the end of capitalism due to a social catastrophe: The Proletarian Revolution.¹⁸⁹

The materialistic philosophy of Marx understands the class struggle as the very meaning of history; a dialectical movement that reinterprets the development of the Absolute Spirit of his teacher Hegel, and for which Marx affirmed that the Socialist Revolution, the event that would bring about the end of the bourgeois class, was the inescapable future of humanity.¹⁹⁰ However, Marx asserted that there were certain aspects that society had to achieve before Socialism dethroned Capitalism. On the one hand, Capitalism had to evolve as an economic system that necessarily leads to an insurmountable contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of production. On the other, the proletariat must become aware of its situation and act to

¹⁸⁹ Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 220

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

reverse it. Therefore, it is a historical dialectic by which Capitalism pushes the proletariat into action, and the proletariat, for its part, acts as expected of it from a rational perspective to respond against bourgeois oppression. In other words, Capitalism itself will lead to its destruction, to the Revolution that will free humanity from exploitation.

However, the revolution is not just a change of government or political regime (for example, from dictatorship to democracy). Otherwise, we would have had thousands of revolutions in history. Nor can just any uprising be called a "revolution." It is always necessary to see the content of the events, their protagonists, and their potential, that is, to observe what they aim to transform and what historical epoch. An uprising of medieval peasants who did not want to pay a tribute was not a revolution. Nevertheless, the French Revolution was led by the bourgeoisie for the sake of the creation of capitalism.

Revolution supposes an integral transformation of society. Moreover, as we know, the fundamental pillar of societies is found in the relationships established by classes to produce wealth. We live in capitalism, and as we explained previously, in the Marxist vision, it is a mode of production based on the exploitation of those who only have their "labor power" (workers), by those who have the property and the means of production (bourgeoisie). Therefore, according to Marxism, a revolution in our historical era requires removing these social relations and changing them for others, in the same way, that the bourgeoisie built capitalism on the tomb of feudalism between the 17th and 19th centuries. Therefore, for Marx, such a revolution is necessary to destroy injustice.

This revolutionary thought presented by Marx and Engels, known as the "Socialist Revolution" - or proletarian revolution - seeks the overthrow of the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and the implantation of the "dictatorship of the proletariat." According to Marx, this

could occur both peacefully and violently, and goes as far as to affirm that "insurrection would be madness where peaceful agitation would more swiftly and surely do the work."¹⁹¹

According to Marx, what sustains the revolution of the proletariat is philosophy itself. Marx affirms that "as philosophy finds its material weapon in the proletariat, so the proletariat finds its spiritual weapon in philosophy (...) The emancipation of the German is the emancipation of man. The head of this emancipation is philosophy, its heart the proletariat."¹⁹² Philosophy as Marx understands it, will inform the proletariat movement with the theoretical principles that will allow the oppressed humanity to take the course of its exploitative situation in their hands. According to Marx, the proletariat will find the manner to snatch the capitalist economy's axis from the hands of the wealthy; in other words they will take the control of the means of production.¹⁹³

For Marx, it was not possible to change, that is, it was not possible for the proletariat to seize the means of production without a revolution that had a political –governmental– objective. He believed that the necessary change for the arrival of communism was to overthrow the established politico-socio-economic order. However, to achieve this, the proletariat needs appropriate political power: "the first step in the revolution of the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of the ruling class to win the battle for democracy."¹⁹⁴ Once the workers have conquered political power, they will be forced to undertake a program of "despotic [transgression] on property rights and on the conditions of bourgeois production."¹⁹⁵ Naturally, since the bourgeois political infrastructure is that of the nation-state, "the proletariat of each

¹⁹¹ Landor, "Interview with Karl Marx," *Marxist Internet Archive*, https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/bio/media/marx/71_07_18.htm.

¹⁹² Marx, Introduction to a contribution to the critique of Hegel's philosophy, 9.

¹⁹³ Marx, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 214.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 230.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

country must, of course, first resolve matters with its own bourgeoisie."¹⁹⁶ However, this is the "form" and not the "content" of the proletarian revolution. Through the generalization of the proletarian revolution, the global productive forces developed by capitalism should be placed under social possession and control: "In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."¹⁹⁷

The Proletarian Revolution is the path that Marx envisioned to end Capitalism, and it is probably the most important proposal, and for many, the only one. However, in this reflection, we have widely stated that Capitalism is the fruit of a broader and older philosophical tradition: the philosophy of the "I." This implies that treating the problem of Capitalism is attacking the causes that shaped it. For Levinas and for the reflection of this thesis, we have reiterated that Capitalism as the fruit of Modern Liberalism, is the logical effect of the violence exerted by a search for the totalitarianism of the Ego. The philosophy that makes this paradigm of the Self visible and supports it is the philosophy of Levinasian Alterity: the philosophical paradigm of the Other.

B. Ethical Revolution

Levinas is more than a philosopher that is subscribed as a protestor against the tradition of Western philosophy. Levinas is not a reformer of the philosophic reflection, but an *eucatastrophe*¹⁹⁸ to the paradigm that gives sustenance to the Western World. The Levinasian reflection is not motivated by the "love of wisdom" –*φιλοσοφία*– developed by the Western tradition, but by the inquiry that born in the philosophy of alterity, where Ontological paradigms

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 221.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 231.

¹⁹⁸ Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories*, 75.

do not occupy the center of reflection, but Ethical. Who is at the center of the philosophical reflection of Levinas, is not the "I" but the Other; this philosophy is proposed as an anarchical philosophy, that challenges, not only the political establishment, or any present government, instead, it confronts the totality of our Western world. The paradigm that Levinas proposes is based on a redefined understanding of *philosophy*, where it is not conceptualized as a 'love of wisdom' but as the "wisdom of love." Philosophy changes from being an epistemological activity, to an ethical responsibility towards the Other.

Levinas indeed believes the "Other" is partially considered in the Marxist's project of the revolution. He explains that there is no conquest in Marxism, but there is recognition of the "Other". He argues, "we can save the other if himself, demands his due. Marxism invites humanity to demand what is my duty to give it... it took the other seriously."¹⁹⁹ Indeed, as previously analyzed, Marx had already pointed out the problem of a selfish philosophy on the part of Capitalism, as well as the denunciation of an individualistic ideology, before which he postponed his theory about being human as species-being; that is, the person as an open being and part of society. Although Marx's theory attends to certain aspects that are important for a philosophy of otherness, in this reflection, Levinasian philosophy is considered to be carrying a more profound and broader objective than Marxism. Even so, this understanding needs to be further developed since, although for Marx, society is essential, the Other –in a Marxist understanding of society– ends up being depersonalized in the revolutionary massification of socialism.

Furthermore, and related to the problem of the depersonalization of the Other, Marx does not attempt to eliminate the root of modern thought that gave way to Capitalism because he

¹⁹⁹ Levinas, *Entre nous: Thinking of the Other*, 102-103.

believes that this economic system is necessary for the correct process of human history and its passage to Communism. Along with this, Marx believes in the methods that the bourgeois revolution had used against feudalism. That is, although Marx seeks a society where the good of the community is the axis of the paradigm, he does not skimp on the methods to be used in order to achieve his objectives; on the contrary, Marx can consider the murder of the Other in order to achieve the triumph of the revolution.

Far from opposing the so-called excesses – instances of popular vengeance against hated individuals or against public buildings with which hateful memories are associated – the workers' party must not only tolerate these actions but must even give them direction (...) Under no pretext should arms and ammunition be surrendered; any attempt to disarm the workers must be frustrated, by force if necessary. The destruction of the bourgeois democrats' influence over the workers, and the enforcement of conditions which will compromise the rule of bourgeois democracy, which is for the moment inevitable, and make it as difficult as possible – these are the main points which the proletariat and therefore the League must keep in mind during and after the approaching uprising.²⁰⁰

Marxist thought falls into a reaction on the same level as that of his enemy, Capitalism. Marxist action is, in other words, a return to the values of violence and domination of the Other by the Self. In other words, the Marxist revolution ends up resulting in an ontological response to the problem of ontological Totality that leaves out the Infinity of the Other and where the law of "an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" dominates.

Although Marx's proposal has benefits of great value for our thesis, such as his analysis of Capitalist behavior and its structures of injustice, the way of measuring from ontological violence positions him as belonging to the same paradigm as the West Tradition. What I mean by that is that the structure of western rationality upon Marxism was built, continues to be that of the exclusion of "Otherness." This is so because alterity calls for the welcoming of Infinity, an

²⁰⁰ Marx, "Address of the Central Committee to the Communist League," Marxists Internet Archive, 2006, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1847/communist-league/1850-ad1.htm>.

aspect that disappears in the realm of the Proletariat Revolution. The capitalist in the Marxist project is not recognized as Other but as the enemy.

Nevertheless, Capitalism and the Paradigm of the I is still an issue for our world. The last decades of political changes have led our countries to create laws that do not respond to the needs of people, but to the needs of the economy. This way of doing politics leads to extreme cruelty where coexistence is truncated by the small and big unjust actions translated into social and individual desperation that demands a revolution. However, this needed revolution should essentially aim to create a catastrophe not in the realm of politics, as past revolutions intended to do it, but in the realm of what has been left by the philosophy of the I: metaphysical ethics. The needed action is to create an ethical revolution.

In his article *Politics After!*, Levinas asserts that Ethics must take precedence over the political action. Nevertheless, politics is not erased from the map of an ethical change for Levinas, rather he sees in politics a necessary activity for the love of the Other. However, the difference for Levinas to other thinkers is that in order to achieve a profound revolutionary change, politics must be informed by a paradigm where the Other is welcomed and loved; politics needs to be based on the ethics of alterity such as the one proposed by Levinas. the former should be sustained by an ethics of alterity. In the article *Yes to the State*, Levinas, affirms that “political actions of each passing day begin in an eternal midnight, they derive from a nocturnal contact with the Absolute [–the Infinite].”²⁰¹ Political actions such as Marxism could be necessary but not as the ultimate objective. On the contrary, it may appear that in Levinas’s perspective the Socialist Revolution is only an economic-political part of a much larger plan that

²⁰¹ Levinas, *Yes to the State*, 271.

is a Levinasian-Ethical Revolution; where the recognition of the “Other’s” Infinitude prevails beyond the subject, and where the person is accepted as alterity.²⁰²

According to Levinas, ethics is what prevents tyranny, as it places the Other first. However, one also perceives that the political solution has a valid dimension that must be taken into account in the struggle against tyranny. Therefore, Levinas always held that for a new order to come about, “institutions and politics will be necessary: indeed, the entire framework of the State.”²⁰³ However, the Levinasian appeal to ethics, to the recognition of the “Other” in his or her absolute “Otherness,” is the philosophical formulation that nourishes itself in the alterity, allowing any restructuring of the political dimension of society to be ethically based before being ontologically based. This openness to the “Other” by Levinasian philosophy is what can bring a radical revolution against the individualism that defines Capitalism. Changing the egoistic paradigm that rules the structures of our contemporary world into an ethical perspective could bring change to societies. Relationships with people is what lies at the bottom of all political revolution. However, recognizing the Infinitude of the Other is what can allow us to think of an entirely new world. recognizing that infinitude begins with and continues to be motivated by loving the other.

²⁰² Levinas, *Politics After!* 283.

²⁰³ Levinas, *Outside the subject*, 251.

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Vita

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