

Module 6-0 Ethics with a Human Face Initial Reading Notes

Ethics with a Human Face

Violence is the order of the day

- Violence on individual, interpersonal, and social levels
- Violence is a datum of experience

connatus essendi -> every being desires to remain, to conserve itself, to persevere in being, self-preservation

Dasein -> being itself authentically, authentic self-being

Levinas thinks that it betrays a "centripetal movement"

First Point: Centripetal Movement and I

In this centripetal movement: there is an "allergy" towards the what is not *ako*

Different forms: fear, insecurity, aggressivity

An allergy towards The Other, our "natural attitude" (from Husserl)

The radical goal of our activities is enjoyment

Levinas does not say if it is "good" or "bad", simply what we experience, what happens

We are enjoying ourselves

Also in possession (i.e. the postponement of enjoyment)

Orientation is towards the "I"

Even applies with work (a general term to transform matter, see Module 5)

In this one confronts with the Other, yet matter is transformed according to one's own image and likeness

The Other will be in function of certain goals

Even in thinking/knowing, there is immanence

The Other becomes "in me", immanent

Rendering whether the Other is immanent, the same, what is not me is ultimately me
e.g. eating spaghetti, when it is digested it becomes part of us (and what does not is eliminated), the spaghetti is made into I; this applies to all experiences of enjoyment, possession, work, thinking

Second Point: Breaking Loose from Allergy

Conversation is an experience that breaks away from ingestion/allergy

"The speech situation" has three elements: pinag-uusapan, kumakausap, at kinakausap

Levinas focuses on the kinakausap

When you speak to someone, you face someone

Face-to-face relation: vocative situation

At this point the Other is the other (it is not reduced or transformed into an object, or I)

To see one in their face, the part substitutes for the whole (e.g. "thirty sails set out" instead of "thirty ships set out"; sail stands for totality of ship)

metonymy (part substituted for whole)

The face acts as metonymy of the whole person, the loob

Loob itself acts as a metonymy of the totality of a person

Encounter of face -> epiphany (to manifest, suddenly)

e.g. abstract painting: you cannot understand when first looking at it but it suddenly makes sense

We only encounter the Other as they would fit into certain categories we prepared

Fellow jeepney passenger: first you only see their objective facial features, an Other as an object; they stare at you, you are embarrassed, and they become a new center

The perception of the face is also a moral experience, that is summarized in "You shall not kill!" (also a metonymy)

The moral experience begins in the face of the Other

Regardless of whatever moral norms one follows, it is rooted here

The Other has a height (kataas-taasan) yet also a humility -> ambiguity

e.g. Having to refuse to give a money to a beggar, one asks for forgiveness (patawad po!)

Third Point: Responsibility

Levinas does not define the responsibility, but does give two indications:

"Me voici!" -> Narito ako! -> Here I am!

e.g. One's mother is dying, you say "Here I am" even if you do not have the solution

"Après vous" -> Ikaw muna.

Politeness, the Other is always ahead

Renders sacrifice possible; reciprocity is not ultimate, else sacrifice is absurd

Responsibility is opening one's home, pocket, palms, etc.

The two indications are economic in nature

The responsibility for the other is infinite, without end

One's response will always be inadequate

e.g. utang na loob; can never be repaid (from Brother's Karamazov: each one is responsible for all and before all, and I more than any other)

Fourth Point: The Third Party

Unfortunately, underdeveloped

Past three points are about "ako at ikaw"

Horizontal Aspect:

There are other Others, each related to one another

"Hindi lang ako at ikaw meron ding siya. Meron ding sila."

But because we are not alone, there are also others, then I also have to take care of myself because I have to take care of others

We try to organize life in society where we try to compare the uniqueness of each person (incomparable); we are weighing *loob*

Paradoxical

The third party sort of corrects the asymmetry of the face-to-face

Vertical Aspect:

In the relationship with the Other as other it also relates to the Infinite (God)

God would always be a trace

The notion of God is the ultimate horizon, but can never be objectified, always beyond us (kinda reminds me of THEO 11)

"Laging yun na nga, hindi na yun"

Respects the transcendence of God (otherwise we idolize God)

Totality and Infinity

Emmanuel Levinas's *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority* (1969) describes how subjectivity arises from the idea of infinity, and how infinity is produced in the relationship of the self with the other.

Levinas says that ontology enacts a relation with being which reduces the other to the same. Instead, Levinas takes an approach which does not reduce the other to the same, but which views the separation between the same and the other as inherent to the relation with Being.

Levinas explains that exteriority is how the finite individual transcends being merged into infinity. Exteriority is how the individual transcends being merged into a totality. Exteriority is a relation whereby the self is separated from the Other. Exteriority is a relation whereby the being of self and Other cannot be totalized or merged into infinity because it is absolutely separated.

Exteriority is produced by interiority. Interiority is a subjective relation in which a being refers to itself. Subjectivity allows the self to view itself as separate from the Other. Exteriority is a state of being in which the self cannot be merged into a totality.

The separation of the self from the Other is a form of non-participation by the self in the being of the Other. When the self is separated from the Other, the self no longer derives its

being from the way in which it refers to the Other. The self that no longer participates in the being of the Other derives its being from itself.

The self must be separated from the Other in order to have the idea of infinity. The idea of infinity is itself a form of transcendence of the relation to the Other. Exteriority is achieved by having the idea of infinity.

Levinas says that the idea of infinity is not a representation of infinity.¹ Infinity overflows the idea of infinity. The idea of infinity is an overflowing of finite thought by infinite content. Infinity is produced by the overflowing of the intellect.

The production of infinity cannot be separated from the idea of infinity. The idea of infinity is the mode of being of infinity.²

Infinity is produced as a revelation to the self of the idea of infinity. The idea of infinity does not proceed from the self, but is revealed to the self. Infinity is revealed as the infinite being of the absolutely other.

To have the idea of infinity is to be aware of the infinity of the Other. Thus, the idea of infinity maintains the exteriority of the Other.

The Other is absolutely other than the same. The Other is everything other than the self. The Other is infinite being which overflows the idea of infinity. The Other is an infinitely transcendent reality.

Levinas says that the idea of infinity requires the separation of the same from the Other. This separation is a fall of the same and Other from totality. The level of separation is a level of fallenness. But this fall from totality produces infinity.

The idea of infinity is moral in that it is an idea of what the finite being lacks in relation to infinity. Thus, the self can transcend this relation by a welcoming of the Other. Indeed, to have the idea of infinity is to have already welcomed the Other.³ The welcoming of the Other is the beginning of moral consciousness.⁴

Exteriority is a form of subjectivity, but is not a selfish protest against totality. Subjectivity is a welcoming of the Other.

Levinas distinguishes between the idea of totality and the idea of infinity. The idea of totality seeks to integrate the other and the same into a totality, but the idea of infinity maintains the separation between the other and the same. According to Levinas, the idea of totality is theoretical, but the idea of infinity is moral.⁵

Multiple beings can exist in a totality, but Being itself is exterior to totality. The truth of Being is a being situated in a subjective field of exteriority.⁶

The face of the Other overflows the idea which the self has of the Other. The face of the Other transcends the distinction between form and content, because it reveals the idea of

infinity to the separated being. The revelation of the face of the Other to the self is necessary for separation.

The face of the Other is the way in which the Other is revealed to the self. The face of the Other is the exteriority of its Being.

The face to face relation of the self to the Other is an ultimate situation. The face to face is an ethical relation, and calls the freedom of the self to responsibility.

The face to face relation of the self to the Other does not integrate the self and Other into a totality. Nor does the face to face relation integrate the self and Other into each other. The self and Other are transcendent to their face to face relation.

Levinas explains that the face of the Other speaks to the self. Language begins with the presence of the face, with expression. Language is a system of interaction whereby meaning is derived from the face of the Other.

Signification requires the presence of exteriority. Signification arises from the way in which the face of the Other is revealed to the separated being. Signification does not arise merely from the need or desire of the self for exteriority, or because the self is lacking something. Signification is derived from the signs which the Other reveals in speaking about the world.

The Other is the signifier, manifested in language by the production of signs which propose objective reality or which thematize the world.⁷ The Other itself cannot be thematized. Thematization cannot make an object of the Other.

Truth is a modality of the relation between the same and the other. Truth is the modality in which the same speaks to the other, though they are separated. Truth emerges from a dimension of exteriority.

The face which the absolutely other presents to the self is not a negation of the self. The presence of the Other does not contradict the freedom of the self. The presence of the Other endows the self with a responsible freedom.

The mode of being for the Other is not a negation of the self. Being for the Other does not mean that the self disappears in a totality. Being for the Other is a state of exteriority. Being as goodness is being for the Other. Goodness brings transcendence of the face to face relation, in that the being of the self affirms the being of the Other.

Levinas admits that the assertion that a separated being derives its being from itself is a form of atheism. The independence of the separated being also introduces the problem of causality. The problem to be solved is how cause-and-effect relations can exist between separated beings, and how absolute separation can explain objective reality.

Totality and Infinity is a profound and challenging work of philosophy. Levinas provides an interesting viewpoint on the problem of modern alienation in that he explains how separation can be understood as a basic condition of Being.