Reproducción asistida

Emmanuel Levinas: Implications of the relational paradigm for bioethics

Emmanuel Levinas: implicaciones del paradigma relacional en la bioética

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Abstract

In a changing world that offers new health-care situations, the inadequacy of traditional models of bioethics are demonstrated. A new ethic needs to be based more on a relational paradigm; where inter-subjectivity, encounters with 'the Other' particularly with his/her face as a unique person, and where responsibility is at the center, as outlined by Emmanuel Levinas, the French-Lithuanian philosopher. His philosophy helps bioethics in its search for foundations.

Resumen

En un mundo cambiante que ofrece nuevas situaciones de atención de la salud, la inadecuación de los modelos tradicionales de la bioética está demostrada. Una nueva ética debe basarse más en un paradigma relacional, dónde la intersubjetividad, se encuentra con 'el Otro' especialmente con su rostro como persona única, y donde la responsabilidad está en el centro, como explica el filósofo francés-lituano Emmanuel Levinas. Su filosofía ayuda a la bioética en su búsqueda de fundamentos.

Key words

The Other; care; responsibility; relationality.

El Otro; cuidado; responsabilidad; relacionalidad.

Fechas

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1. Introduction

The world is continuously changing and new situations in health care constantly arise. At times the inadequacies of traditional models of bioethics are demonstrated, pointing to their seemingly excessive focus on licitness, the rightness and wrongness of actions and the role of health care professionals. This necessitates the need for a new ethic which is based more on a relational paradigm where; inter-subjectivity, encounter with 'the Other' (in french: *autrui*) as a unique person, and responsibility are at the centre, as outlined by Emmanuel Levinas. His heteronomous ethics is based on 'the Other' and not the self. The use of an uppercase 'O' in 'the Other' does not denote a category through a word. As is the case with the use of capital initials in proper names, the capital 'O' is used to pay due respect to the 'Other' and acknowledge him or her as an individual rather than a number. This encounter with 'the Other', particularly the face and the voice, gives rise to a sense of responsibility for; a responsibility which is not optional given that the word 'responsibility' comes from the verb 'to respond'. Who is Emmanuel Levinas?

2. Biography of Emmanuel Levinas

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Emmanuel Levinas is a Lithuanian-French philosopher of the 20st century. He was born in 1906 in Kaunas, Lithuania and died in Paris in 1995. At the age of seventeen Levinas went to Strasbourg in France to study philosophy. In 1931 he became a French citizen and he regarded himself as French. During the holocaust his entire family in Lithuania was killed. His philosophy and his worldview were highly impacted by the Second World War. He also wrote various interpretations of Jewish scriptures, and, although he kept these two interests apart, the impact of Jewish traditions is also evident in his philosophical contributions. He published two major works, with the first book being called *Totality and Infinity* (published in 1961 and translated to English in 1967); and another one titled *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (published in 1974 and translated to English in 1991). The former focuses on the alterity of 'the Other', whose alterity is construed on a mechanism that makes the subject consider the existence of another being. It also highlights that ethics cannot be captured by reason. The latter book articulates the impact of the ethical relation on the subjectivity of the Ego, where ethics is found within the self. Ethics can only be awakened and manifested as a response to the call for responsibility from 'the Other'. He is indebted to the phenomenology of both Husserl and Heidegger. This social context affected his philosophy of the 'Other'.

3. Who is 'the Other'? Seeing the face of 'the Other'

By attempting to read human beings through the face, Levinas draws up a reflective ethic. The face becomes a facial epiphany expression holding an anonymous gaze to the

recognizable presence of humanity[1]. "The face of the Other for Levinas is metaphysical. It is beyond comprehension, beyond totalization"[2].

'The Other' is not an unknown who could be known, but radically 'Other', where 'the Other' invades my 'I' without asking, without notifying, and even demands too much

According to Levinas, when approached by the face of 'the Other', the ego no longer strives for self-preservation, living only for the self (body and ego) and away from 'the Other', but rather is called to a non-ontological ethical responsibility. I know myself as a self, be me in the eyes of others with all my knowledge, logic and predictability, only in relation to 'the Other'. This 'Other' through his or her *face*, reveals itself even if it refuses to give itself. It is always before me, addresses me, and questions me –at times even without use of any language, "what right I have to be and whether I, simply by being, take the place of someone else"[3]– through such behaviour the 'Other' elicits from me some form response. The face reveals the expression of the whole body of the self, and paradoxically, this provides an irreducible means of access. On the face, Levinas stated that:

> The first thing which is evident in the face of the other is this rectitude of exposure and defencelessness. In his face, the human being is most naked, destitution itself. And at the same time, he faces. It is a manner in which he is completely alone in his facing us that we measure the violence perpetrated in death. Third moment of the epiphany of the face: it makes a demand on me. The face looks at me and calls me. It lays claim to me[4].

In no way can I choose not to respond to the call of 'the Other', where 'the Other' intersects the life of a subject through crossing the path of one's life. 'The Other' is not an unknown who could be known, but radically 'Other', where 'the Other' invades my 'I' without asking, without notifying, and even demands too much. I cannot escape the appeal in the face of 'the Other', even though 'the Other' is at a distance from me. I have an opportunity to respond. I have to respond, and in no way ignore his call, whether by a 'yes' or by a 'no'. I have to be responsible in my response. *How* I respond will depend on *how* sensitive am I in using my freedom. Better still, all that I choose to say and to do is a response to 'the Other' addressing me. An attempt to ignore 'the Other' is morally a strong, negative response. It is an attempt to reduce 'the Other' to an object, where one is not offering oneself. The face of 'the Other' calls me to respond in goodness by a 'yes', that is, 'here I am', (in French: *me voici*) (Sam 3,4). Nonetheless, I can opt to say 'no' by pretending to be invisible. By

1 Cf. Millán-Atenciano, M. A., y Tomás y Garrido, G. M. (2012). Persona y rostro, principios constitutivos de la bioética personalista. *Persona y Bioética*, *16*(2), 166.

2 Root, A. (2006). Practical Theology as Social Ethical Action in Christian Ministry: Implications from Emmanuel Levinas and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *International Journal of Practical Theology, 10*(1), 55.

3 Levinas, E. (1985). *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philip Nemo*. Pittsburgh/pa: Duquesne University Press, p. 121.

4 Robbins, J. (Ed.). (2001). *Is it Righteous to Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas.* Stanford/ca: Standard University Press, p. 127.

doing so however, I will be pretending that 'the Other' is invisible in actual fact and this is a violation of him or her.

From the moment 'the Other' looks at me, I am responsible for him/her without even having to take responsibility in connection therewith; his responsibility is upon me. It is a responsibility that goes beyond what I do. The face of 'the Other' is vulnerable and naked. It does not hide behind a mask like the ones used in carnival to obscure facial features along with all the expressions that they carry and the information that they give about the person's feelings and experiences. This is not a threat to one's own existence, because irrespective of one's efforts to preserve his/her own being, the face still holds that one's existence is indebted to the fraternal inter-subjective encounter with 'the Other'. The encounter with 'the Other', which emerges from deep within the human being and discloses the dependency, is a total invasion in the 'I'. Encountering and embracing 'the Other' involves opening the self to risk, "comes in conflict with my need to understand and explain a need that is at the base of my efforts to exist as an 'I', a need that is also the root of violence against others"[5]. "I only become myself when I find the resources to respond to the Other, who always has priority over me, before me. If the primordial human experience is the encounter with the face of 'the Other', where 'the Other' meets me with his or her *face*, then the primordial ethical experience is not 'to be', but 'to be otherwise', or as Levinas often remarks, 'otherwise-than-being'"[6].

The human face inspires ethics as in it there are the moral features; the feelings of suffering, pain, joy, enthusiasm, hope and the physical features such as a look or a smile, which together communicate to us the inter-subjective body language

The human face inspires ethics as in it there are the moral features; the feelings of suffering, pain, joy, enthusiasm, hope and the physical features such as a look or a smile, which together communicate to us the inter-subjective body language[7]. Thus it provides access to what lies deep within 'the Other's' being. This theme of 'the Other', is what makes one a human. The essence of the human and what makes him genuinely so, lies in his relationships with the Others. This is the grand mystery of humanity. A true dialogue and conversation between people –the transcendence, the exit from oneself– is the human as is the relationship with the other people.

Levinas purports that the human person encounters the Divine (the 'Otherwise than Being') through the neighbour as 'Other' and receives a command for action toward the neighbour, where the self-possessed subject is awakened as an obedience to his moral responsibility to 'the Other'. Therefore, "a Levinasian understanding of Christian ethics, being open to the face of 'the Other' who solicits us in the face-to-face encounter is a methodological process, a psychosocial disposition, and finally a theological direction"[8],

5 Aasland, D. G. (2009). *Ethics and Economy: After Levinas*. London: MayFlyBooks, p. 68.

6 Holland, S. (2003). Levinas and Otherwise-than-Being (Tolerant): Homosexuality and the Discourse of Tolerance. *jac 23*(1), 167.

7 Cf. Millán-Atenciano, M. A., y Tomás y Garrido, G. M. (2012). Persona y rostro, principios constitutivos de la bioética personalista. *Persona y Bioética*, *16*(2), 173.

8 Drazenovich, G. (2005). Toward a Levinasian Understanding of Christian Ethics: Emmanuel Levinas and the Phenomenology of the Other. *Cross Currents*, *54*(4), 41.

where one actually encounters God. Thus, human relationships are determined by the duty and responsibility towards 'the Other', where being human implies being an *I-for-the-Other*. An encounter with 'the Other', therefore gives insights to Christian disciples when fulfilling their responsibilities toward Others.

"Taking up the terminology of Levinas, sin consists in not respecting the eminence of the face of 'the Other'"[9]. It echoes God's words when he asked Cain; "where is your brother Abel? and "what have you done?" (Cf. Gen 4,9-10). This philosophy translates into the following ethical question: to what extent am I challenged by 'the Other'? Thus, a radical ethical responsibility for the beckoning 'Other' is necessitated where "the minute I start posing questions about my duties to an 'Other': what do I owe to this specific other?, I am already in the domain of politics"[10]. The resulting relationship is asymmetrical with "the I" having to be willing to deny the self, suffer for the other, and offer "the very bread from my mouth to the other"[11].

4. Philosophical argument

Following, the understanding of who is 'the Other' and of the meaning of seeing the face of 'the Other', it is crucial at this point, to delve deeper in Levinas' philosophical argument. Levinas criticized Husserl, describing his phenomenology as being too intellectual and abstract. He developed Husserl's phenomenological engagement with 'things in themselves' into an ethical structure of relationality. Levinas favoured Heidegger's concept of *being* in the world, here and now, in an actual lived experience. He wanted to know the origin (ontological foundation) of our lived experience. However, Heidegger is overly focused on 'the Other' as 'the They' (being in the world, already through in the world, *Dasein*, being with), and how to push away 'the They' as being a threat which covers and obscures who I really am. For Levinas 'the Other' is not simply 'the They'. For him 'the Other' shows that there is a relationship between 'me' and 'the Other', which is a primary and primordial relationship –the foundation of one's existence–. It is not a question of: 'to be' or 'not to be', but rather a question of: *how* I am being together with others in the world.

Thus, ethics is all about the relationship and encounter between 'me' and 'the Others'. Ethics is the ground of existence

Thus, ethics is all about the relationship and encounter between 'me' and 'the Others'. Ethics is the ground of existence. Levinas challenges the priority of ontology in Western philosophy; he argues that ethics is *First Philosophy* and that it comes before ontology,

9 Collange, J. F. (2005). Bioethics and Sin. *Christian Bioethics*, 11, 178. doi: 10.1080/13803600500203871.

10 Thorstad, R. (5 October 2014). Ethics, Politics, and the Levinasian Subject, p. 2 http://www.docstoc.com/docs/37965356/Levinas-Final-Paper.

11 Root, A. (2006). Practical Theology as Social Ethical Action in Christian Ministry: Implications from Emmanuel Levinas and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *International Journal of Practical Theology, 10*(1), 55.

"where ethics is understood as a relation of infinite responsibility to the other person"[12]. This responsibility is a radical heteronomy.

For Levinas, ethics is something that is situated outside of being –more radical rather than temporal primacy, spatial exteriority, or a difference between categories–

"For Levinas the ethics without interest occurs between sensitive men"[13]. The book *Totality and infinity* begins with a verse from Rimbaud: "the true life is absent. But, we are in the world"[14] in order to transcend anonymous life, "in order to open up and admit 'the Other' with his/her distinction, overcoming the egomania and the condition of being based on interest"[15]. While escaping is also a quest for the true meaning of life, it is not at distant heights, where, thus, Levinas insists on "the failure of an ethical priority emerging from a theory of being in which the self is trapped in an (amoral) recurrence of itself, without reference to moral choice or responsibility for 'the Other"[16]. Through Levinas' philosophy, a new paradigm was initiated for explaining categories such as subjectivity, rationality, obligation, will, autonomy and freedom, where responsibility precedes freedom and autonomy; other and self.

For Levinas, ethics is something that is situated outside of being –more radical rather than temporal primacy, spatial exteriority, or a difference between categories–. The ethical can be likened to what Levinas sometimes refers to as the 'ethical breakup of being', and what *Otherwise than Being* calls the 'hither side of being'[17]. "The ethical might be where I am always again constituted as a subject by the one-for-the-other of substitution, but it is also somewhere where I never actually find myself as a subject"[18].

It does not mean, seeing 'the Other' as someone who wants to take something from me, or wants to befriend me. Nor is the 'Other' a person whom I work with. We often generalize and totalize who people are, and also label them –they are just like this or that– as a result of ontological relations. When I totalize, I conceive the relation to 'the Other' from some imagined point that would be outside of it and I turn myself into a theoretical spectator on the social world which I am really part of, and in which I am an agent[19]. We therefore need to avoid totalizing 'the Other' and seeing him as incomprehensible (thus infinity).

12 Critchley, S., & Bernasconi, R. (2004). *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 13.

13 Gomez, M. V. (2009). Emmanuel Levinas & Paulo Freire: the Ethics of responsibility for the face-to-face interaction in the virtual world. *International Journal of Instruction, 2*(1), 49.

14 Levinas, E. (1967). *Totality and Infinity. An essay on exteriority* (Alphonso Lingis, trans.). Pittsburgh/pa: Duquesne University Press, p. 33.

15 Gomez, M. V. (2009). Emmanuel Levinas & Paulo Freire: the Ethics of responsibility for the face-to-face interaction in the virtual world. *International Journal of Instruction, 2*(1), 49-50.

16 Zimmermann, N. (2009). Karol Wojtyla and Emmanuel Levinas on the embodied self: the forming of the other as moral self-disclosure. *The Heythrop Journal*, 990.

17 Thorstad, R. (5 October 2014). Ethics, Politics, and the Levinasian Subject, p. 2

18 Id.

19 Critchley, S., & Bernasconi, R. (2004). *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 13.

Contrary to this philosophy of the totality, which is a consequence of Nazism, the unavoidable presence of the face leads to a philosophy of infinity. Simultaneously, Levinas describes the ethical relation to 'the Other' in terms of infinity, which by definition, is a thought that contains more than can be thought. He states that this very relationship is infinity or that we are entering in a relationship with the infinite, which is something we cannot grasp. He takes the idea of Descartes which portrays God as the infinite. In fact, "the ethical relation to the other has a *formal* resemblance to the relation, in Descartes's Third Meditation, between the *res cogitans* and the infinity of God"[20]. I have a lived experience and knowledge that I cannot put to words, I cannot express. This encounter with 'the Other' always happens through language, both through verbal and non-verbal communication, that is discourse.

Levinas calls this difference alterity. This difference tells me, what is going on when I encounter 'the Other' and whether I am expected to initiate some form of discourse or response with him/her

Furthermore, Levinas questions epistemology founded on ontology. Knowledge cannot in his system be the mere grasping of concepts by the subject. Knowledge must instead be encountered in the matrix of the encounter with 'the Other'. It is never complete, it never allows the subject to rest, because the subject can only find its true self in the knowledge of, and response to an ethical imperative which it can never satisfy[21]. Levinas thus places epistemological priority on the question rather than the answer, on learning as the eternal attitude of questioning and being questioned rather than on the process of acquiring answers and mastering concepts.

What about the ethical systems? The pressing issues here are not about equality, or autonomy, or about greater good as those are all things which come later. They are derivate moods of more fundamental foundations based on lived experience. Our lived experience is what provides solid grounding or foundations upon which issues like equality can occur or manifest themselves. The foundational experience which is ethical happens between me and 'the Other'. What becomes truly evident, is not that we are equal with the others but that we are actually very different. What strikes and surprises me as the subject is that the 'Other' and myself are different. The 'Other' speaks to me differently, and acts different from how I act. Levinas calls this difference alterity. This difference tells me, what is going on when I encounter 'the Other' and whether I am expected to initiate some form of discourse or response with him/her. This changes the way I think now and it opens me to another world. I have to change my thought because I have encountered the 'Other' who is questioning me. It is this difference that makes me question what is going on.

Thinking about John Donne's famous words; "no man is an island" brings forth the realisation that if I am isolated, I do not question that I am different from 'the Other'. Since we do not live in isolation however, differences between us inevitably exists and this leads us to question who we are, what happens, how we should act, what the

20 Ib., 14.

21 Cf. Hand, S. (1989). Ethics as First Philosophy. In Seán Hand (Ed.), *The Levinas Reader* (pp. 80-82). Oxford: Basil Blackwell Ltd.

meaning of everything is and why are things unfolding in the way they do. Nevertheless, this is not to be understood in an oppositional sense. Levinas says that when I encounter 'the Other', 'the Other' asks me something and requests: "Thou shalt not kill me." Having to face 'the Other', face to face and see him through my own eyes, creates this incomprehensible relationship. He requests: "Thou shalt not kill me", which shows me the vulnerability of 'the Other'. I see a person who is hurt or who is in agony and, temporarily at least, I forget my present preoccupations. I am no longer driven by my personal agenda.

Dussel faults Levinas for working at the abstract level of the essence of the ethical intersubjective relationship without discussing concrete instantiations

Levinas asks whether we "ought" to be this way. He concludes that this is the origin of existence and we "ought" to be this way. We should always respect this difference and allow ourselves to open up to others like this. In face of evil, we must have faith, not only in God, but also that *love without reward* is the highest level of faith. Even if I'm not getting anything in return, I must love you. Even in the case of my enemy, I must have faith that *love without reward* is worthwhile. According to Levinas, who was an idealist in the 21st century, it is possible to have faith and to make the choice to love 'the Other' without expecting or receiving anything in return. This is how he defines unconditional love. This will give me meaning. 'The Other' provides me with opportunities to love unconditionally, and if I "kill 'the Other'" which could also mean ignoring and blocking him from my life – refusing to listen to what he has to say; then I will simply be wasting these golden opportunities. It is through engaging with 'the Other' that I earn myself the chance to love unconditionally and thus experience higher levels of faith.

Levinas' philosophy was criticized, amongst others by Dussel, whose criticism seems to be rather unfair. Dussel argues that Levinas' philosophical works are Eurocentric – that he never acknowledged how 'the Other' could be an Indian, African, or Asian. Dussel faults Levinas for working at the abstract level of the essence of the ethical intersubjective relationship without discussing concrete instantiations. Another criticism is that Levinas focuses only on human beings and does not take into account a responsibility to the world where these humans live or to non-human beings. However, Levinas describes the complexity of this relationship where the 'I' and 'the Other' are not alone, since there is also a third being or object, by which the laws are conditional and justice is established, since we are obliged to judge, to make judgments and to compare[22] hence the importance of the presence of the State.

5. Framework for bioethics

The philosophy of alterity left its impact on bioethics. The conceptualization of ethics in terms of hospitality and openness to the alterity (difference) of 'the Other' offers a productive model for thinking about life and the human, both in its social and biological

22 Cf. Levinas, E. (1985). *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philip Nemo*. Pittsburgh/pa: Duquesne University Press.

setup. As a philosopher who cares profoundly about life, especially about the precarious life of 'the Other', Levinas provides us with a useful set of concepts for responding responsibly to other bodies and lives as they present themselves to an embodied self[23]. However, criticisms and humanist limitations of Levinas' own ethical position are not lacking.

There needs to be *hospitality,* through the creation of an environment which is welcoming, trustful and safe, full of love, care and healing where the question (as explained above) is open

Levinas helps us to deepen our understanding of issues which may arise in the provision of healthcare: why do we take care of and up to what limit should care be given? What is the aim of taking care of patients in adverse health situations? As previously stated, there is a responsibility in front of the vulnerability of every face, of every 'Other' who is not 'me', as through my exposure to others I become vulnerable, and there is a call for responsibility. There is an interpersonal relationship, not to be *with* 'the Other', but to be there *for* 'the Other', where one goes beyond thinking about himself and starts to think out of the box, thinking *for* 'the Other'. In front of all this, I have to take care of 'the Other' (caring-about-others) because he is there, in front of me, requesting my help and I have no other option other than to respond. Taking care of others is a responsibility which is not innate but needs to be stimulated, and is a type of responsibility where one does not *leave 'the Other' alone*[24]. Taking care of 'Other' is a type of recovery, rescue from his/her vulnerability.

In the realm of clinical activity, the "physician's first order responsibility consists in patiently accepting the 'visitation' of his patient, without too hastily closing the encounter of a specific rational and technical kind"[25]. This means that the "physician's first ethical task is to accept the extraordinary 'otherness' of the ill person who is in front of him, that is expressed by his vulnerable face, and that constitutes an ethical call for help and care"[26], where this openness to the otherness is the basis for proper care. For Levinas vulnerability, which is a major feature of the *conditio humana,* is tied to sensibility of being open to others. There needs to be *hospitality*, through the creation of an environment which is welcoming, trustful and safe, full of love, care and healing where the question (as explained above) is open.

Moreover, this relation is not simply one of a being alongside another. As Levinas explains in terms that might seem familiar to practitioners of intensive interaction, "I do not only think that he is, I speak to him. He is my *partner* in the heart of a relation which ought only have made him present to me"[27]. For Levinas, while 'the Other' is known

23 Zylinska, J. (2009). *Bioethics in the Age of New Media*. London-Cambridge/MA: MIT Press, x.

24 Cf. Florencia Belli, A., y Quadrelli, S. (2011). La Ética como filosofía primera: una fundamentación del cuidado médico desde la ética de la responsabilidad. *Revista Selecciones de Bioética*, noviembre, 28.

25 Benaroyo, L. (5 October 2014). The notion of vulnerability in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas and its significance for medical ethics and aesthetics, p. 5. http://www.api.or.at/aebm/download/docs/web_levinas.pdf

26 Id.

27 Levinas, E. (1951). Is Ontology Fundamental? In A. T. Peperzak, S. Critchley & R. Bernasconi (Eds.), *Basic Philosophical Writings*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 7. Emphasis in the original text.

through sympathy it is also specifically a non-reciprocal relationship in the sense that "I have an ethical responsibility towards the other yet this responsibility does not expect anything in return. I can only act *for* 'the Other'"[28].

Therefore, the importance of incorporating the value of fraternity, not always taken into consideration in the field of Bioethics, is indispensable to the resolution of conflicts in health. Levinas deepens the argument of alterity from the concept of universal brotherhood. The subject is called to be responsible for 'the Other', so, 'the Other' imposes a limit to own freedom[29].

To understand the personalist thought of Levinas it is necessary to highlight the importance of fertility and openness to the being and the human dignity that inhabits him

We must worry about the 'Other', care for the 'Other' and not see him/her as a threat because we have a responsibility towards the 'Other' since the self is the result of someone taking care of us. Thanks to this we can feel irreplaceable, because behind me there are others who are not me. Levinas proposed a humanism of the 'Other' who takes responsibility and responds totally for the 'Other'. Thus we pass from a closed self (Cartesian ego) to an open self, since philosophy from now on will not begin in the self, but in the 'Other'. This ethics of alterity go in line with C. Gilligan´s ethics of care, where the exclusive and rational use of the principles can leave the human affectivity in a second plane. In this, Levinas' relational ethics together with Gilligan's ethics of care there is an important issue in the situations of illness at the end of life of the human being. The issue is the action of caring for the 'Other', where care is seen as a fundamental question in the relational ethics with the 'Other'.

To understand the personalist thought of Levinas it is necessary to highlight the importance of fertility and openness to the being and the human dignity that inhabits him. The value that Levinas gives to the expression '*being for other*' can be recognized in fertility splendour of beauty erected in an ontological category, which leads to a point that puts the I-Other as transcendence itself, and at the same time, we can see the face of 'the Other', from the choice and the equality that form the fraternity. This allows us to glimpse at the ethical responsibility we have towards our fellow men[30].

Thus, patients are to remain 'Other', to know them and to care for them, and to focus on what they need. The shift is from pathology to the care of persons (ethics of care). McArdle, following an analysis of the bioethical cases of Nancy Crick and Terri Schiavo, concluded that "a relational theology recognises the patient as one who suffers and who is 'Other' in a manner that transcends the projections or files of competence of the professional career. This is to say that the patient is a person –with the totality of relationships and values involved in such a status; therefore, not just a pathological

28 Matthews, P. (2013). Communication strategies and Intensive Interaction Therapy meet the Theology of the Body: Bioethics in Dialogue with People with Profound Disabilities. *The New Bioethics, 19*(2), 107. doi: 10.1179/2050287713Z.00000000031.

29 Cf. La Rocca, S., Mainetti, M. M., y Issel, J. P. (2010). Libertad, igualdad ¿y fraternidad? en el paradigma de la bioética latinoamericana. El aporte de la ética dialógica y de la ética de la liberación. *AGO.USB Medellín-Colombia, 10*(2), 483.

30 Cf. Millán-Atenciano, M. A., y Tomás y Garrido, G. M. (2013). La fecundidad: primera realidad humana. Una visión sobre la persona desde Levinas. *Persona y bioética, 17*(2), 195.

object"[31]. Furthermore, she points out that if "personal alterity is not respected... a distortion enters into relationships concerned: the 'other' –in its inexpressible uniqueness and transcendent destiny– is reduced to the 'same', as, say, a projection of 'my' needs or concern or as even as an object of 'my' care: the unique 'you', becomes merely an extension of 'me'. The cases of Nancy Crick and Terri Schiavo demonstrate the dangers where health care allows such distortion to be commonplace"[32].

"Levinas' ethics of 'seeing the face of the other' demands an intimate understanding of the life and essence of a patient. This deeper understanding can serve as an ethical basis for practically recognizing autonomy in the non-competent patient context"

From this one can deduce the ethical moments, as pointed out by Altez-Albela. In her article, this author calls upon Levinas' philosophy to point out that "human beings are 1) more than their thoughts, as 2) they are made of flesh and blood and that 3) they are in and thus influenced by the world"[33]. Furthermore, the author highlights that "Levinas' most radical regard of the body is in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence,* where we find sensibility through amplified affects (pain, wounding, fatigue, patience, persecution) that depict the subject's struggle to Be-for-the-Other"[34]. From the sensibilities and the phenomenology of sensitivity, which culminates in the encounter of 'the Other' through his/her face, Altez-Albela points out three ethical moments – 3S's:

1) *Saying* – the risky uncovering of the Self which breaks human inwardness by allowing oneself to be exposed to traumas and pain, hence be vulnerable to suffering.

2) *Sacrifice* – the struggle to exist despite oneself – a patient resistance to remain in the Said by Unsaying, in order to Say the Unsaid – to lose (Unsay) the Self (Said) in order to welcome (Say) the Unsaid (Other).

3) *Substitution* – that speaks of Infinite, the extent of responsibility; for Levinas, to substitute is the radical expression of being for the Other – an unassailable obsession to be for the Other and every other[35].

"Levinas' ethics of 'seeing the face of the other' demands an intimate understanding of the life and essence of a patient. This deeper understanding can serve as an ethical basis for practically recognizing autonomy in the non-competent patient context"[36]. Thus another important point from Levinas' philosophy to the bioethics framework is the relationship between the autonomy and responsibility. Zcuzsanna Pörczi, in her medical

31 McArdle, P. (2009). Levinas and Responsibility for the Other: A practical theological analysis of the cases of Nancy Crick and Terri Schiavo. *Australian eJournal of Theology, 13*(1), 15. http://aejt.com.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/158454/McArdle_Levinas-and-Responsibility.pdf

32 Ib., 16.

33 Altez-Albela, F. R. (2011). The body and transcendence in Emmanuel Levinas' Phenomenological ethics. *Kritike, 5*(1), 36.

34 Ib., 42.

35 Ib., 42-43.

36 Bierlein, M. (2007). Seeing the Face of the Patient: Considerations in Applying Bioethics Mediation to Non-Competent End-of-Life Decision-making. *Ohio State Journal of Dispute Resolution, 23*(1), 63.

doctorate thesis, titled *Autonomy versus responsibility within bioethics and healthcare,* presented at University of Pécs in Hungary, points out that:

The focus is to be on the life and needs of the patient and should not be shifted around by numerous interests and actors, as often happens, as in the cases of Ramon Sampedro, or Terry Schiavo or Nancy Cruzan

> the application of the levinasian ethics of responsibility can be considered one of the most progressive and constructive initiatives of the 21st century bioethics. The application of vulnerability interpreted according to the ethics of responsibility developed by the French phenomenologist as a bioethical principle might provide an answer to the exaggerated presence and function of the principle of autonomy in earlier periods of scientific discourse and also support a more adequate reaction of bioethics to the latest ethical dilemmas of medicine and health care[37].

Moreover, Pörczi claims that:

> Bioethics should shift its attention from the patient as a sovereign ego as rooted in the Western tradition and move out of the self and open itself to the other. By doing that the technocratic practice within medicine and technocratic discourse in bioethics could be interrupted and by that the apparently unbridgeable distance between medical professional and patients could be reconstructed and the legitimate rationalizations of that distance could be deconstructed. (e.g. At present a scientific discourse legitimates the situation in which it is not the patient but the disease that gets treated, a failure in the operation of the organism that is intended to be averted. The medical encounter often does not demand the participation of the human subject only the presence of its organ(ism)[38].

Therefore, Levinas' philosophy can be applied to the autonomy gap, the gap between theory and practice, where a new paradigm is possible. Autonomy remains the focus of the end-of-life decision-making issues. With Levinas seeing the face of 'the Other', the gap could be bridged where the focus is shifted towards understanding the patient and his/her condition[39].

Thus it is not a responsibility for 'the Other' grounded on a contractual relation or categorical duty, but a responsibility that is founded on love and moral responsibility. Levinas is patient-focused and patient-oriented. Thus his ethics can address the need for determining a non-competent patient's end-of-life treatment decisions in a manner consistent with the exercise of patient autonomy. The focus is to be on the life and needs of the patient and should not be shifted around by numerous interests and

37 Porczi, Z. (2013). *Autonomy versus responsibility within bioethics and healthcare.* (Ph. D. Thesis). University of Pécs, Pécs, pp. 9-10.

38 Id.

39 Cf. Bierlein, M. (2007). Seeing the Face of the Patient: Considerations in Applying Bioethics Mediation to Non-Competent End-of-Life Decision-making. *Ohio State Journal of Dispute Resolution, 23*(1), 73-74.

actors, as often happens, as in the cases of Ramon Sampedro, or Terry Schiavo or Nancy Cruzan. "Seeing the face of 'the Other' requires one to intimately understand the life and condition of the patient"[40] for a deeper meaning.

6. Conclusion

The bibliography on Levinas is vast and, for me, this paper was not only an intellectual exercise but at times (more often than not) a spiritual enriching experience, with points to ponder and reflect upon. Levinas is a mind-blowing philosopher who puts 'the Other' at the centre and where responsibility from my side as the subject is crucial. The paradigms he introduces make one rethink bioethics in ways that are truly new and innovative amongst other sectors such as economics, business ethics and education. Despite its Judaic background, it still provides solid basis for all religions, especially when one takes into consideration the human dignity principle which is enshrined in all major world-wide declarations. For bioethics, the centralization of the patient is of utmost importance apart from the bio-ethical challenge. The patient has a face, which through body-language, demonstrates that beyond the bio-ethical challenge there are other issues, which need to be taken into consideration through a holistic personalistic approach.

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40 Ib., 76.

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