

The Face as the Seat of Value in Levinas' Philosophy

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When we talk about “face value,” what is usually meant is the aesthetic quality of one’s personality (beautiful or ugly), the marketability of the face (noticeability/ attractiveness) or its monetary equivalent. This article is a preliminary attempt to show that in Levinasian philosophy, “face value” has a deeper meaning — the face, being the beginning and the center of values, is the core of ethics. Likewise it is an attempt to find the equivalent of the Levinasian Face within Filipino culture.

Lexically, the face is defined as follows: “[L *facies* form, shape, face, fr. *facere*, to make, do — more at DO] 1a: the front part of the human head including the chin, mouth, nose, cheeks, eyes, and usually forehead: *visage, countenance*... 2 archaic: presence, sight, view ... 3a: a cast of features expressing emotion or character: expression of countenance...” (*Webster’s Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*. Unabridged:1981) The term center is understood as a “place which serves as a capital or center” (*The New Merriam-Webster Dictionary*:1989).

Parson and Shils (in *Alexander and Seidman*:1996:40) understand value-orientation as that which “refers to those aspects of the actor’s orientation which commit him to the observance of certain norms, standards, criteria of selection, whenever he is in a contingent situation which allows and requires him to make a choice.” The *Encyclopedia of*

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Philosophy states: "The uses of "value" and "valuation" are various and conflicting even among philosophers, but they may perhaps be sorted out as follows. (1) "Value" (in the singular) is sometimes used as an abstract noun [a] in a narrower sense to cover only that to which such terms as "good," "desirable," or "worthwhile" are properly applied and [b] in a wider sense to cover, in addition, all kinds of rightness, obligation, virtue, beauty, truth, and holiness." (Vols. 7&8:1967:229); and *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics* expresses its definition as follows: "VALUE. It is an attitude towards fact, a weighing of fact in relation to an agent, and his feelings, desires, interests, purposes, needs and acts; and it expresses his appreciation (approbation) or reprobation (depreciation) of it in this relation." (Vol.XII:1922)

According to William Wallace (1977), "[t]he philosophy of value is an expression used to describe various attempts, from the late 19th century onward, to develop the notion of value into a distinct branch of philosophy, and sometimes into a complete philosophy itself. An alternate name is axiology, or theory of value."(188) It implies an in-depth investigation of the history of the notion, sorts and criteria, classifications and kinds, and other aspects of value.

For F. Landa Jocano, a noted Filipino anthropologist, value may be regarded relatively, i.e., it could either be good or bad, positive or negative. Value is neutral. Traditionally, a value is regarded as necessarily good, because if it is bad, then it is not valuable. It may be objectively bad, but if it is observed, then it can be taken as an apparent good. This paper subscribes to the traditional notion of value as good.

In the West, the notion of value may be traced to the Platonic idea of the "good" in *Republic VI*. Aristotle defines value as something which all men desire. He makes it the object of the faculty of the will in contrast to the "truth" which is the object of the faculty of the intellect. In modern times, the notion of value acquired a new impulse in Kant's "categorical imperatives." It could be said that this brought about : 1) the dualism of faith and knowledge 2) the supremacy of the practical over theoretical reason.

Later on, axiological investigations bloomed in Germany. F.E. Beneke (1797-1854) pioneered this new thrust. He was followed by Lotze (1871-1881) and Windelband (1848-1915). The Austrian schools of von Ehrenfels (b.1850) and Meinong (1853-1920) also largely contributed to the development of this trend. It is written in *The Encyclo-*

pedia of Philosophy that “the general theory of value and valuation is also inclusive of economics, ethics, aesthetics, jurisprudence, education and even perhaps logic and epistemology.”(229) This contemporary Philosophy of Value is said to have reached its peak in the writings of Meinong and von Ehrenfels, who are followers of Franz Brentano. Max Scheler and Nicolai Hartmann who are followers of the *phenomenologist Husserl (who was himself influenced by Brentano)* made axiological studies popular in Europe and in Latin America. Levinas belongs to this tradition as he is greatly indebted to the philosophies of Husserl and Heidegger.

I. EMMANUEL LEVINAS: PRELIMINARIES

Biographical-Philosophical Notes in Interpreting Levinas

Levinas' path of thought could only be completely understood if we consider his historical background, or to use Ortega y Gasset's word, his “circumstance.” It is to be noted that it seemed to be not a very happy one.

“Emmanuel Levinas, born in 1906, stems from a strictly orthodox Jewish family in which Talmudic learning was observed. He spent his childhood in Lithuania where, as he himself tells, the Hebrew Bible, Pushkin and Tolstoi were his spiritual nourishment. As a youngster he lived in the Ukraine, where he was a witness of the Russian revolution. In 1923... he registered at the University of Strasbourg. Later (in 1928/29) he studied in Freiburg, still later in Paris... Levinas took the option of French citizenship in the conviction that one can “know oneself united” with this nation “as strongly on the basis of spirit and heart as of origin.” As a Frenchman he had to enter the army in 1939... Thus young Levinas came to know the violence and the seductive powers of totalitarianism in several forms: as the all powerful czarist bureaucracy, as fascist and nazi state power, as total mobilization, total war and total extermination campaign. Millions of Jews fell victims to the persecutions, among them Levinas's entire Lithuanian family.” (Strasser:612,613)

Immediately after World War II, Levinas pondered on the crises of modern civilization and traditional religiosity. Because of this it is said that he struggled personally with the problem of atheism. In connection to Levinas' religious preoccupations as well as other intellectual interests, four points should be considered:

1) He grew up reading the Hebrew Bible and the Russian classics but was transplanted to the heart of western middle Europe. He knew both traditions (an “insider-outsider”), thus he is in a position to criticize both traditions.

2) He was confronted by the problem of war and peace. “The preservation of peace appears to him not as a military and political or economic, but as an ethical question” (ibid.).

3) He correlated the crisis of occidental culture and civilization with the dangers of totalitarianism. He reflected on the possible contributions of Western Ontological Philosophies to the totalitarian spread of power.

4) The failure of the traditional humanistic and idealistic philosophies of Europe made him seriously consider the alternative of radical atheism, but instead he opted for an ethical, religiously based “humanism of the other man.”

Levinas was a student of Heidegger. He also acknowledges his great debt to the phenomenologist Husserl. The influence of Gabriel Marcel and Martin Buber is “relatively small.” (*Ibid.*:614) His dissertation is on Husserl’s theory of intuition (1930). He also draws inspiration from Plato. In his book *Existence and Existents* (1978) he says that “[t]he Platonic formula which located the Good beyond Being is the most general and almost the emptiest indication of what is at the base [of my studies] as its guiding thought.”

His “revolutionary” philosophy is expressed in the numerous published books and articles. Four of them will be used as primary sources in this article. To facilitate the quoting process, they will be abbreviated as follows: *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence* (OB), *Collected Philosophical Papers* (CPP), *Totality and Infinity* (TI), *Ethics and Infinity* (EI). The first three books were translated by Alphonso Lingis while the last one by Richard Cohen.

The “Good” Platonic Influence

In Book VI of the *Republic*, Socrates dialogues with Glaucon and Adeimantos: “for you have often heard that the greatest task is to learn the perfect model of the good, the use of which makes all just things and other such become useful and helpful.” (*Plato*:303) “Then that which provides their truth to the things known, and gives the power of know-

ing to the knower, you must say is the idea or principle of the good, and you must conceive it as being the cause of understanding and of truth in so far as known... the eternal nature of the good must be allowed a yet higher value." (*Plato*:308) "Similarly with things known, you will agree that the good is not only the cause of their becoming known, but the cause that knowledge exists and of the state of knowledge, although the good is not itself a state of knowledge but something transcending far beyond it in dignity and power." (*Ibid*)

These must have been the passages that inspired Levinas to come up with his own ethical philosophy. [This reminds us of Whitehead's comment that western philosophy is a footnote to Plato.] Levinas was not original on this. The *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, published in 1922, says that "[w]hen Plato conceived the Good as the culmination of the Ideal world and as the principle which was to unify, systematize, and organize all the other 'forms' he was really putting 'value' above 'being', conceiving it as the supreme principle of explanation, and expressing the same thought as Lotze, when he declared that the beginning of metaphysics lies in ethics." (584) It adds that "R.H. Lotze (1871-1881) revived the Platonic idea that good ranks above being, wanting metaphysics to show that what "ought" to be conditions what "is"... (*Ibid*).

Alphonso Lingis, in his Introduction to *Totality and Infinity* writes: "For before being the structure by which truth is realized, it is a relationship with the Good, which is over and beyond Being." (OB:xii)

Lotze, however, focused on the psychological study of value. The philosophical cudgel would be borne by Emmanuel Levinas. In contemporary times, he is considered to be "the philosopher of ethics, without doubt the sole moralist of contemporary thought." (EI:viii) He considers that what is most important is not the self/ego but the neighbor/other; the I is justified by the Other. (This reminds me of an American Indian tribe who believes that being true to one's self is to give one's best to a person in need.) He adopted Alyosha's words in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov* as a theme: "We are all responsible before all for everything and everybody, and I more than others." We are all our brothers' and sisters' keepers, and in the Judeo-Christian tradition this means not only loving our neighbor as ourselves or as they love us, but as Christ loves them. (Cf. Jn.13:34)

The Revolt against Western Philosophy

Philosophy for Levinas is “thought that directs itself to all humans” (*penser en s’adressant a tous les hommes*) [Quoted in *Peperzak*, p.298 from EI]. The expression “Western philosophy,” as used by Levinas and other post Heideggerian French philosophers, “describes the average knowledge of a French university professor about the European traditions. It stresses the modern characteristics of our culture, ignores for the most part Medieval philosophy and identifies the Greek heritage mainly with the texts of Parmenides, Heracliteus, Plato, Aristotle and Plotinus.” (*Peperzak*:1983:298)

Accordingly, “[W]estern philosophy from Parmenides to Hegel is an Egology. The discourses in which it has expressed itself display a universe centered around an Ego that not only functions as subject of the “*cogito*,” but is also the center and the end of the world and the source of all meaning.” (*Ibid*:298-299) It can be characterized as “ontology,” “insofar as the intentional correlate of the central ego necessarily coincides with the totality of all beings seen as one Being... if Being is considered the first and ultimate word, it is inevitably conceived as a totality and therefore as excluding the possibility of real infinitude.” (*Ibid*:300)

Luk Bouckaert (1970:403) puts it this way: “According to Levinas, Western philosophy is generally an ontology, a grasping of reality which implies at the same time a “reduction of the Other to the Self.”[TI:13]. The thinking subject collects all the phenomena in their unity and distinction within a horizon. It reduces the multiplicity of the existents to a common ground that bears everything: history, logos, matter, the highest existent, being itself. Since this totality is centered in the thinking subject, Levinas calls it at times the Self, and he speaks of Western philosophy both as a philosophy of totality and as a philosophy of the Self.”

From the quotations above, we can see that philosophy is a “thought,” an idea, that is directed to man and is directive of human actions. It is knowledge proceeding towards an action. From epistemology and ontology, to metaphysics, then ethics. Western philosophy is an egology because the first “thought” is the self (who thinks) and everything else is reduced to it. It is also called ontology because the first “thought” is actually being, which includes the idea of “self” and everything else is explained by it. That is why the first metaphysical questions are “Does it exist? What is it?” (*An sit? Quid sit?*); whether

being or non-being. Egology or ontology is totalizing or absolutizing. The self possesses everything else that comes within its horizon. The horizon becomes itself. When I know the book, it enters into my being (in an intentional way). It becomes myself. That is why we ask: Do you "get" my point? Do you "grasp" my idea? Can you "hold" on to your position? Getting, grasping, holding, imply possession. My idea, my book, my room, my life - me, *moi*.

Being accounts for everything. Everything else is being. Being-with-others, being-towards-death, being-in-itself are contemporary expressions. From the study of being (ontology), all other branches of philosophy follow: being as being (metaphysics), being as knowable (epistemology), being as mobile (cosmology), being as God (theodicy), being as tending towards the good (morals or ethics). Being is the ultimate reality, the ultimate substratum, the highest principle. The idea of being determines all other ideas. Western philosophy is quick to point out that the being of all beings is God. Even Heidegger's Being could be interpreted as a divine that unfolds (*aletheia*) itself in the beings. Ontology is onto-theology.

In his lecture (May 1997), professor Van Der Vekens, Dean of the Institute of Metaphysics, University of Louvain says that the exodus from metaphysics is due to the metaphysics of Exodus. "I am the one that I am." He who is. (Exodus 3:14). Echoing Hartshorne (1897), he says that philosophy has been concerned with the ultimate reality, the all encompassing reality which we call Being and in theology the ultimate meaning or God. We are looking for the "*le fondement qui forte*" (the ground that supports existence) or the "*le fondement qui justifie*" (the ground that justifies existence/meaning). But this could not be because we could only know ultimate reality as qualified (URq). We could only grasp what is part and not the totality, because reality is constantly in process.

This is also in line with Levinas' repudiation of the absolutist and totalizing tendencies of western philosophy. But what concerns him more is its dangerous effects on society and politics. As philosophy is the foundation of actions, egology/ontology leads to totalitarian and authoritarian regimes. Western philosophy has been in error for a long period of time. A more important question on being is what justifies being and the self: What allows an I to be an I, a being to be a being and not non-being? Questions of justification are ethical in nature. Thus, ethics precedes ontology and metaphysics. Ethics justifies the

self by relating it to the other; the other comes first before the self. Because of this, philosophy becomes non-totalizing and non-absolutizing due to its equal consideration of the other/s, which leads to a espousal of pluralism, freedom, justice and peace. Levinas' critique of western philosophy is summarized by his major works: *Totality and infinity* ("The idea of the infinite cannot be reduced to or developed from the idea of totality." [Peperzak:300]); *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*; *Ethics and Infinity*.

A Note on Self-Contradiction

Levinas abhors the totalizing idea of being, but his own philosophizing is a conceptualization, and hence a totalization. We could rightly affirm and accuse that his philosophy could not stand on its own; that it fails in its own test. In fact, this paper is also an attempt to conceptualize and systematize Levinas' thoughts. Peperzak replies to this accusation: "...Levinas recognizes explicitly the positive and necessary aspects of the practical and theoretical totalizations produced by every civilization. More than once he has shown that a systematic totality is indispensable and good on the condition that it is not made into an absolute." (Ibid.:301) Thus, Levinas' attempt to interpret philosophy is not absolute. Knowledge continues to grow through discoveries, modifications or as Popper suggested, through conjectures and refutations.

Ethics as First Philosophy

Peperzak says that "Levinas' philosophical message is different. He does not write new ethics, but shows by means of subtle descriptions and analyses that the ethical perspective must be the starting-point of every philosophy that wants to be true to the facts." (Ibid.:302) Levinas tows the line between Plato and Kant. For Kant, ethics could not be based on cognition because it ends in antinomies. For Plato, the good is prior to being; hence ethics precedes metaphysics. Hence, God's existence is proved not by metaphysics but by ethics.

Before being, before the self, before knowledge, there is the indeterminate. It is not nothing and it is not being. It is otherwise than being. Being and the self are made possible by the Other. But the Other escapes conceptualization. It even goes beyond epistemological adequation. It is ineffable, indescribable, infinite. It could not be possessed. Yet it is there (il y a). The distance between the self and the

Other, between being and the otherwise than being is unbridgeable. The Other is distance and relation. What is first known is the Other and its relationship to the self. Hence the first question is ethical. The discovery of the Other is the discovery of responsibility. "The discovery of my responsibility is the beginning of all self-knowledge and all knowledge in general, because all knowledge has to be redeemed from its natural tendency to egocentrism by the unique revelation of the absolute."(*Ibid.*:302)

If ethics is first philosophy, then ultimately philosophy is understood as "nothing more than a commentary on that which reveals itself from beyond the essence: the Good. ... If philosophy is inspired by this desire, it is not a desire for absolute wisdom, but a *sophia* of authentic *philia*, a "*sagesse du desir*", a wisdom of true desire and proximity."(*Ibid.*:306)

The Paradigm-Shift

If we are to illustrate western philosophy, it would be like a triangle (). From one angle leading to the other two angles; from one point to the other points; from one to many. This will be like "from being and the self to other concepts." In contrast, Levinas' philosophy would be like two straight parallel lines (... ==...). It is infinite and indefinite. We cannot say whether the two lines have one starting point or whether they will coalesce later. There is an infinite distance between these two lines. But they are related or as stated, parallel.

Instead of being, there is the otherwise than being. Instead of the self, there is the Other. Instead of totality, there is infinity. Instead of metaphysics, there is ethics. There is that which is beyond essence, beyond existence. In fact, the words "presence" and "existence" imply this. "Presence" may be rendered as "pre"- "sense," meaning that which is before (*pre*) the meaning (*sense*). Ex-istence may be rendered as "ex"- "istence," meaning that which is formerly or before (*ex*) being (*istence*). What is former and before is the beyond-the Other. The Other comes first before me. I am responsible for the other. The Other and I are distinct. I could open up to him, and he could open up to me. We could talk. But we could never bridge the distance. What is important is the talking, made possible by language. What matters most is not the said, but the saying — the opening, the responding, the relating between the self and the Other. What is first in philosophy is ethics.

The Ethical Journey

Levinas uses the analogy of Abraham instead of Ulysses to describe man's ethical journey. Ulysses travels and returns home, whereas Abraham travels not knowing his destination. There is no security as to the destination and the journey is hazardous. In ethics, man's destination could not be determined beforehand. We do not know, yet we answer to the call to journey. What is important is the journeying itself, the Homeric: "the journey is the thing."

II. THE FACE, ETHICS, OTHERWISE THAN BEING

The good is prior to being. The good is found in this otherwise than being or the Other. The Other is known by the epiphany of the Face. The face immediately reminds one of the injunction: "Thou shall not kill"; (EI: 89) but love, protect, care and be responsible for this face. The face appeals and commands because of its nakedness and vulnerability. The face refers to the face of the orphan, the widow and the stranger. These are the faces that need to be cared, that are vulnerable, that need to be loved. In their vulnerability, they are powerful in as much as they disarm us, our tendency to hurt them, to control them, to oppress them. Instead they command us to share our life with them, to take them even prior to ourselves, "to feed them out of our fasting."

Ethics proceeds from the face of the Other. Ethical normativity commences in the encounter with alterity, with the face. Its conceptualization begins with an ontological, or ultra-ontological, explication of its mode of being — or otherwise than being." (CPP:xxx) "The exteriority of being (face) is morality itself." (TI:302) "The epiphany of the face is ethical." (Ibid.:199) "The epiphany of the face qua face opens humanity." (Ibid.:213) "The fact that in existing for another I exist otherwise than in existing for me is morality itself." (*Ibid.*:216)

In an interview, Levinas lengthily affirms: "I think rather that access to the face is straightaway ethical. You turn yourself toward the Other as toward an object when you see a nose, eyes, a forehead, a chin, and you can describe them. The best way of encountering the Other is not even to notice the color of his eyes! When one observes the color of the eyes one is not in social relationship with the Other. The relation with the face can surely be dominated by perception, but what is specifically what the face is cannot be reduced to that.

There is first the very uprightness of the face, its upright exposure, without defense. The skin of the face is that which stays most naked, most destitute. It is the most naked, though with decent nudity. It is the most destitute also: there is an essential poverty in the face; the proof of this is that one tries to mask this poverty by putting on poses, by taking on a countenance. The face is exposed, menaced, as if inviting us to an act of violence. At the same time, the face is what forbids us to kill." (EI:85-86) Because the face is the beginning of ethics, then "ethics is optics" (TI:23). The face is what is seen. Seeing the face is both perceptual and moral. (EI: 86-87)

The Face

The face is the beginning and the highest criterion of ethics; "[t]he radical originality of Levinas' philosophy consists in the formulation of this highest criterion. It is not the "being human" (*das Menschsein*) common to myself and all other human beings, as Kant claims. It is the epiphany of the Other's face and speech rupturing the homogeneity of my universe and breaking its totality." (*Peperzak*:301) "The concept of the face is the central moment of all of Levinas's phenomenology. While Husserl and Heidegger take the problem of the nature of the contact with the other to be a problem of the *alter ego* — and Sartre circumscribes the other as a "faceless obsession" (*Merleau-Ponty*), for Levinas everything is centered on the alterity of the *alter ego*. The other is other than me, but also other than things and other than others, pure alterity, singularity. (CPP:xxix)

As the epiphany of the Other, the face signifies infinity. This never appears as a theme [i.e., as an object that we could posit, observe, study or discuss], but [only] in the ethical signification [i.e., in the signs given by the ethical attitude] itself. The more I am just, the more I become responsible. One is never without debt with regard to another." (*Peperzak*:304) In the Introduction of the *Otherwise than Being*, Lingis says: "But — and this is the most distinctive and original feature of Levinas's ethical philosophy — the *locus* where this imperative is articulated is the other who faces — the face of the other. Facing, which is not turning a surface, but appealing and contesting, is the move by which alterity breaks into the sphere of phenomena." (OB:xiii) To borrow from Kant: the face is the categorical imperative.

As the highest criterion of ethics, the face *fortiori* demands respect and responsibility. ["The other's face, the fact that he or she looks

at me, makes me a servant responsible for the other's existence, life and behavior." (*Peperzak*:301)] Respect is a condition for ethics. (CPP:43) "To show respect cannot mean to subject oneself; yet the other does command me. I am commanded, that is, recognized as someone capable of realizing a work. To show respect is to bow down not before the law, but before a being who commands something from me. But for this command to not involve humiliation — which would take from me the very possibility of showing respect — the command I receive must also be a command to command him who commands me. It consists in commanding a being to command me. This reference from a command to a command is the fact of saying "we," of constituting a party." (CPP:43) As ethics, the face invokes language, is language; it presents itself in language. "Ethics is language, that is, responsibility." (*Ibid*)

Face and Language

Language is a communicative tool used to express oneself and to reach out to others. Since the face is the expression of the other and to which it also reaches out to other, the face is said to be language. In linguistic interaction there is the speaker and the receiver. Although there is speech, dialogue, the distance of the speaker and the receiver constantly remains. What is most important is the opening up, the dialogue. The face is dialogue.

Distance could not be bridged. Distance is constant. I could only open up to the other by conversation/dialogue. In a dialogue, the ego and the other always remains at a distance. Thus one could not be possessed or reduced by one or the other. I have to respect the distance of the other, in his individuality, but I am happy of his "opening", his exposing of his vulnerability in conversing with me. Dialogue does not control; it is open and free. "Language is most eloquently the Face. The Face does not have to speak; it is speech — as invocation, appeal, address and command: "You shall not kill." (*Aquino*:93)

Face as not only the Sensible Face

Although it is said that "[t]he essence of man is presented in the face"(TI:290), the face refers beyond the sensible physical face. The face is transcendent. It is beyond description and conceptualization. It could be called "the transcendent face of man."

"It is this presence before me of a self-identical being that we

term the presence of a face. A face is the very identity of a being. There he manifests himself out of himself, and not on the basis of concepts. The sensible presence of this chaste bit of skin with brow, nose, eyes, and mouth is not a sign making it possible to ascend toward the signified, nor is it a mask which dissimulates the signified. Here the sensible presence desensibilizes to let the one who only refers to himself, the identical, break through directly. " (CPP:41-42)

The Third Party

Facing does not only involve two persons. Other faces may be present which constitute the third party. Just the same, I am equally responsible to the third party. My concern is not so much on the responsibility each one has for the other but my care for them. If all of us are concerned for each other, the situation would lead to JUSTICE. The third party is the beginning of Justice. "The entry of a third party is not simply a multiplication of the other; from the first the third party is simultaneously other than the other, and makes me one among others. This alterity is itself first ethical, and not simply numerical; it is a relation of appeal and contestation. To find that the one before whom and for whom I am responsible is responsible in his turn before and for another is not to find his order put on me relativized or cancelled. It is to discover the exigency for justice, for an other among responsibilities." (OB:xxxv)

Face and Peace

The face is an instance of peace. It appeals for non-violence. "The face in which the other — the absolutely other — presents himself does not negate the same, does not do violence to it as do opinion or authority of the thaumaturgic supernatural. It remains commensurate with him who welcomes; it remains terrestrial. This presentation is pre-eminently nonviolence; for instead of offending my freedom it calls it to responsibility and founds it. As nonviolence it nonetheless maintains the plurality of the same and the other. It is peace." (TI:203) The face calls not just for absence of conflict, but for the internal disposition of respect and love, of "good-will" to others.

The Face and God

Levinas' philosophy is quite ambivalent regarding the face and God. The face reaches out to the beyond. It is transcendence. The face

manifests God. "The dimension of the divine opens forth from the human face. A relation with the Transcendent free from all captivation by the Transcendent is a social relation. (TI:78,291). "The 'otherwise than Being' is the glory of God." (*Peperzak*:304) However, the face is not God. Levinas may not be referring to the personal God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Whether God has a face or all human faces are faces of God remains problematic.

III. THE FACE IN THE FILIPINO CULTURE

Levinas' concept of the face rings a familiar tone to the Filipinos. The face too is the center of attraction. The term "face" is translated as *mukha*, *pisngi* in Tagalog; *nawong*, *panagway* in Cebuano. It commonly refers to the physical front part of the head which includes most of the senses (sight, smell, taste, hearing).

In the *New Vicassan's English-Pilipino Dictionary* (1995), "face" is translated as: (noun) "*mukha*, *pagmumukha*, *ibabaw*, *karayagan*, *pinakamukha*, *balat*, *harap*, *dangal*, *hiya*." (verb) "*humarap*, *magharap*, *harapin*; *maglaban*. *Lumaban*, *labanan*, *magkita*, *magpangita*; *magkaharap*, *makaharap*; *magpanagpo*, *magkatagpo*, *magpaibabaw*, *paibabawan*, *magtiaya* o *itihaya*." Although it refers to the physical, external face (*ibabaw*, *balat*, *harap*), it refers also to the internal, to the dignity of the person (*dangal*, *hiya*).

It is commonly observable that among Filipinos, the most valuable part of the body seems to be the face. It is the part of the body which is given most attention. It is a treasure and a source of pride. Some equate it with one's personality — one's identity. Perhaps this explains why in identification cards, only the picture of the face is placed.

Our "morning rituals" are actually "face rituals." Women especially spend more time in front of the mirror. Some apply cosmetics to enhance their beauty. The more monied ones undergo "face-lifts" or cosmetic surgery to "repair" or improve the face. Millions of pesos are invested for the face; and aesthetic businesses have a sizeable share in the market. The face spells fortune and fame especially in the mass media industry. It is a capital on which sales depend. In fact, for some jobs, "with pleasing personality" is one of the requirements for employment... Thus, there is a common joke: "You can face any problem except if your problem is your face."

Feelings are reflected in the face. Anger, hate, love, depression,

worry, joy, etc. Sometimes, people are rated and categorized according to their faces: beautiful, not so beautiful, ugly. The aesthetic facial quality influences our judgment. That is why advertisers employ the faces of babies, children and good looking people to endorse their products. Our language is peculiar, in that not perhaps because of lack of vocabulary, but we tend to interchange the words: truth (*tama, totoo*), beauty (*maganda*), and good (*mabuti*). Thus, what is beautiful is also considered as good and as truthful.

One's character is described by referring to the face: *Mukhang pera, makapal ang mukha, mukhang anghel, mukhang unggoy*, etc. The face exudes honor and dignity. Slapping one's face is an utmost insult. There are instances where one is killed just because of his irritating face or a bad look (*masamang tingin*). Never would we want to be shamed or "to loss our face." If we have breached our promise or have done something wrong, we say: *Anong mukha pa ang ihaharap ko sa kanila?*" (What face have I got to face them?)

Perhaps, the care for the face is universal. It is because the face brings with it not only one's identity but also one's history — the honor of the family's history. The face of the child reflects the face of his parents and of his parents' parents — one's ancestors. In the animated movie "The Lion King," Zimba, the Crown Prince who was running away from his responsibilities, finally took courage by looking at the face of his slain father, but which was actually his own face reflected on the clear water. Doctors also contend that the child, at the age of two, resembles the face of his father, as an assurance that the child is really his own.

According to professor E. Arceo, O.P., invoking St. Thomas Aquinas, during accidents people instinctively crouch to protect their face. Logically so, because the head in which the face is located, houses the most vital organs of the body.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the face is a center-stage. Man is created in God's image and likeness, i.e., patterned after God's face. Man reveals God through his dignity (face) in living a truly Christian life; and the meaning of life depends on this. Man's ultimate goal is to go back to God, to see him "face to face" — beatific vision.

There may not be a picture or a painting of the real face of Christ, but Christians figured out one to remind us that God became man, assuming a human face and died for our sins — the highest expression

of love. The tradition of the Shroud of Turin (which may not be authentic) is indicative of this. Jesus's image likewise reveals the face of the Father. (Cf. Jn. 12:45; 14:19). And we see God too in the face of every person, especially the poor, the weak and the oppressed — the Church (Cf. Jn. 8:19).

Concomittant with the consideration of the face is the problem of wearing masks or the problem of the face and the sur-face. We could hide emotions. We could have plastic surgery. We could deceive others by our face. But could we deceive ourselves? We could never hide ourself throughout this life. Sooner or later, our real faces, our true selves emerge. And even if we are wearing masks, even if we are just showing our sur-face, we would still be important for having a face — a face that appeals for help, for love and care.

IV. CONCLUSION

"Face value: the face as the seat of value." For Levinas, ethics is first philosophy. This comes from the realization that the "good" is prior to "being", that the Other comes before the self/ego. Ethics is based on this Other, the otherwise than being, which is manifested in the face. The face then is transcendent, both perceptual and moral. As the face is the beginning of ethics, it could also be said that it is the locus of values. The face reveals the most important value — the preservaton of life ("Thou shalt not kill."). The face appeals for love and reveals God.

Levinas' "face" is closely related with the Filipino concept of the face. The face too is the center of valuations. Perhaps, it is because we share a common tradition in our Judeo-Christian religion. But I think, Levinas' philosophy of the face even goes beyond it - transcends all cultures and religions. It is a universal appeal to take care and love the face because it stands for the person. In this time of radical individualism, egocentrism, and seeming obsession for control, the vulnerability of the face calls us back to the basic value of life, love, generosity and responsibility for the other person. The ultimate value of the face is that it is the beginning and center of all values. Behold the faces! They are all beautiful!

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