



The God “otherwise than being” of Emmanuel Levinas

O Deus “outramente que ser” de Emmanuel Levinas

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the philosophical problem of God in the way it was considered by the Lithuanian-French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, who understands it under the sign “otherwise than being”. For this purpose, the text intends to show that the Levinasian refusal to address the question of God from the ontological horizon starts from a peculiar conception of being. The being is seen as incapable of safeguarding alterity in its compact unity, eradicating all difference and revealing itself as pure impersonality and neutrality. Based on this assumption, Levinas proposes to think God “Otherwise than being” through the reading of Platonic “beyond essence” in an exclusively ethical hermeneutic key, in the proper sense that the latter term acquires in his thought.

Key-words: God; ethic; Levinas; ontology; transcendence.

Resumo

Este texto busca analisar o problema filosófico de Deus, tal como pensado pelo filósofo lituano-francês Emmanuel Levinas, que o compreende sob o signo de um “outramente que ser”. Para tal, procura mostrar que a recusa levinasiana de abordar a questão de Deus a partir do horizonte ontológico parte de uma peculiar concepção do ser. O ser é compreendido como incapaz de salvaguardar a alteridade em sua compacta unidade, erradicando toda diferença e se revelando como pura impessoalidade e neutralidade. Partindo desse pressuposto é que Levinas propõe pensar Deus “outramente que ser”, lendo o “mais além da essência” platônico numa chave hermenêutica exclusivamente ética, no sentido próprio que esse último termo adquire no seu pensamento.

Palavras-chave: Deus; ética; Levinas; ontologia; transcendência.

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Introduction

Related to the themes of ethics and transcendence, of the relationship with the other human considered in its absolute alterity and with the question of the meaning and humanity of man, the question of God in the thought of Emmanuel Levinas takes shape and acquires contours increasingly dense as the reflection on these issues deepens and expands.

In this text, we will be dwelling on the problem of God before the question of being, as reflected by Levinas. Our purpose is to show that the Levinasian recalcitration of the approach of God from the horizon of being is part of the assumption that being, even in its analogical character, does not harbor the singularity and eradicate any and all differences; in this sense, it does not involve any generosity, contrary to what Heidegger thought, but only impersonality and neutrality. Considering our objective, we will not be exploring in detail, issues related to Levinasian thinking about God, such as the idea of the infinite, creation, the name God and testimony, given the conciseness required of us.

We will follow, for our purpose, the following itinerary: first, we will address the approach and the distance of Levinas in relation to Heidegger, that is, his agreement with the Heideggerian thesis that interprets the metaphysical tradition in the light of the ontoteological paradigm and his criticism of the proposal to approach God from the truth of being, even considering, as Heidegger intends, the ontological difference. We will then show that this refusal to approach the question of God from the ontological horizon takes root in a peculiar conception of being, understood as incapable of safeguarding alterity in its compact unity. Finally, we will be analyzing the Levinasian proposal of thinking about God “other than being”¹ starting from Levinas peculiar interpretation on the platonic “*epekeina tes ousias*” by showing the ethical tone he attributes to this expression.

¹ For the purpose of this article, we chose to translate the French expression *autrement qu'être*, used by Levinas to give the title to his greatest work - *Autrement qu'être or au-delà de l'essence* (LEVINAS, 1978) -, for “otherwise than being”. Similar to the English term otherwise, the neologism “*outrement*”, adopted here, appears to be more fruitful than “otherwise”, because it expresses the adverbial way related to the question of alterity in Levinas. Similarly, the French expression *au-delà de l'essence* was translated “beyond the essence”, in order to underline the hyperbolic character used to describe both the anteriority and the significance of ethical transcendence. In turn, the hyperbolic method, in the Levinasian way of thinking, is a peculiar method of promoting the passage from one idea to another. “Emphasis”, “superlative”, “hyperbole” and “exasperation” are, therefore, terms by which the author referred to this procedure that led him not only to higher or excellent meanings, but to the very meaning of transcendence; for more details, see Campos (2016, p. 208-227).

1 God as otherwise than being: ontoteology as a wrong way of thinking about God

The problem of thinking God and being together became, from Heidegger's philosophical reflection, an issue constantly revisited and discussed by philosophers and theologians². According to the hermeneutic key from which Heidegger intended to bundle the entire metaphysical tradition under the sign of ontoteology³, God would have been enthroned at the apex of the hierarchical chain of beings at the same time that being was buried in forgetfulness.

On the one hand, Levinas admits the Heideggerian reading of metaphysics from the ontoteological paradigm⁴; on the other hand, he deems it necessary to permanently banish the question of God from the realm of being, even before the thematization of ontological difference, considered by Heidegger as “the guiding and dominant question of ontology”, the “homeland” in which “all other questions move and to which they necessarily lead to” (GREISCH, 1987, p. 68).⁵

When treading on the wake of the exegetical route forged by Heidegger, Levinas ratifies the impossibility of continuing to think about God through the bias of metaphysics determined ontoteologically. For him, the ontoteological

² Beierwaltes (1989, p. 360-378; 2000, p. 1-8, 105-145) showed that the Heideggerian hermeneutic key does not apply to the Neoplatonic metaphysics of Plotinus and Proclus. In turn, Aubenque (1991) and Berti (1992, p. 64-79) accused the inapplicability of the Heideggerian ontoteological paradigm for a correct interpretation of Aristotelian metaphysics. Beierwaltes (1989, p. 360-378; 2000, p. 1-8, 105-145) showed that the Heideggerian hermeneutic key does not apply to the Neoplatonic metaphysics of Plotinus and Proclus. In turn, Aubenque (1991) and Berti (1992, p. 64-79) accused the inapplicability of the Heideggerian ontoteological paradigm for a correct interpretation of Aristotelian metaphysics. The first scholars of the Thomistic doctrine of being (*esse*) in contemporary Thomism, among them Gilson (1994, p. 352-377), Fabro (1959; 1960) and Lotz (2002), denounced the inadequacy of Heidegger's hermeneutics to interpret Aquinate's metaphysics. Later on, Boulnois (2001; 1986) and Puntel (2011) were added. For Boulnois (1995; 2011; 2015, p. 187 - 220) and Honnfelder (2002; 2010, p. 76-81), the ontoteological model in the sense advocated by Heidegger only applies to a metaphysics founded on the univocity of the concept of being, such as the practice of Duns Scot to Kant. In its well-documented work, Courtine (2005) carried out a historical-critical examination of the construction of the notion of metaphysics, leading to an extension and differentiation of the concept of metaphysics and, consequently, to the refusal of the destinal-historical unity of the aforementioned ontoteological constitution advocated by Heidegger. Regarding the medieval structures of metaphysics, Boulnois (2001; 2002) proposes to distinguish them in “protology”, “katholou-protology” and “katholou-tinologia”. For an interpretation of the “history of being” in ancient metaphysics that distances itself from the Heideggerian model, see Dubarle (1986).

³ This Heideggerian thesis is exposed in the text “The onto-theological constitution of metaphysics [Die onto-theo-logische verfassung der metaphysik], which constitutes an important part of Identity and difference [Identität und Differenz] (HEIDEGGER, 1996a, p. 185-200). With regard to the expression “ontotheology”, it is important to distinguish the meaning it receives in the Critique of Pure Reason [Kritik der reinen Vernunft]. Kant (B 660; 2012, p. 485) calls therein the transcendental onto-theological theology, which intends to demonstrate, through simple concepts, the existence of the supreme being (God).

⁴ See Levinas (1993, p. 137-148). Since Levinasian reflection accepts the paradigm proposed by Heidegger, it should redirect it the criticisms that accuse the impertinence of this model to encompass the totality of metaphysical thinking.

⁵ See, also, Heidegger (2003, p. 66-69). By writing *Sein* (Seer) instead of *Sein* (Being), Heidegger (2015a) aims to achieve what feeds the ontological difference. The new spelling therefore means that the being is no longer thought according to metaphysics structured in an ontoteological way. For a chronology of Heideggerian meditation on ontological difference, see Greisch (1987, p. 29-138).

discourse is not appropriate to deal with the question of God. In his view, as well as in Heidegger's, God can no longer be said in the categories of being or entity, although in the superlative form that calls him "ipsum esse subsistens" or "ens supremum". Therefore, he accepts the distinction between being and God, which has been of key importance for Heidegger in the thematic framework of his proposal to overcome metaphysics interpreted according to the ontoteological a model.

Levinas also corroborates Nietzsche's Heideggerian reading, according to which our age is marked by the "death of God" as the crown of metaphysics determined in an ontoteological way, that is, as the last possibility of its historical happening. However, on the other hand, it gives an ethical accent to this weakening of the Christian religion, understanding it under the sign of "Same".⁶ (LEVINAS, 1993, p. 141; 1969, p. 63; 1975a, p. 95; 1980, pages 233; 1987, pages 40-41).

However, if on the one hand Levinas agrees with Heidegger about the distinction between being and God, on the other hand he considers it impossible to conceive the being as the horizon where God can reveal himself. Therefore, trying to go beyond the path offered by Heidegger to think about the question of God, Levinas (1986, p. 194, emphasis added) questions whether the "neutrality offered to the thought of the being that transcends the being can be enough for divine transcendence".

Insurrecting against the impersonality that, in his view, the Heideggerian concept of being implies, Levinas understands that the thought should take a step further back than that intended by Heidegger and, instead of thinking the ontological difference, in which the primacy of being is maintained, he should think "the distance" or absolute transcendence of God in relation to being.⁷ This way, Levinas inverts the terms of the problem: "has the lack of onto-theo-logy consisted of taking the being for God - or, rather, taking God for the being? [...]"

⁶ The expression "the same" aims to enunciate the knowing subject while affirming and identifying himself through the process of knowledge, in which the Other's alterity is overcome, as it is approached in the neutral and impersonal horizon of being. It is under the sign of a "philosophy of the Same" that Levinas characterizes the entire history of philosophy, in a genetic-symptomatic analysis in the Nietzschean and Heideggerian way.

⁷ It is worth checking Narbonne's explanation (2006, p. 331-332, emphasis added) about this thesis.

Doesn't God mean “otherwise than being?” (LEVINAS, 1993, p. 141, emphasis added).⁸ Whereas Heidegger would have looked at the damage that this way of asking the question had caused to the question of being, for Levinas it is urgent to think about the consequences imposed on the problem of God. In his view, the mistake of metaphysics was not to have forgotten being by dwelling on the ontic sphere, but to have engaged the “otherwiser than being”, addressing Him in the ontological horizon.

Indeed, for Levinas (1978, p. 3, emphasis added), “if transcendence has a meaning, it cannot mean anything but the fact, for the event of being – for the “esse” –, to the essence, passing to the “other of being [...] Pass on to the other of being, otherwise than being. Do not be otherwise, but otherwiser than being. Not even not to be.”⁹. Coming to understand, therefore, that the being goes through the ordeal of its negation unscathed, that is, that the negativity that tries to reject it is immediately submerged by it, Levinas proposes another path, different from that circumscribed by the logic of being and of nothingness. The statement of the “other of being” - that is, the “otherwiser than being or beyond essence” - would manifest an even more fundamental difference in relation to that which separates being from nothing and a diverse difference from that which distinguishes being and entity: namely, the difference from the “beyond”, the absolute difference of transcendence.¹⁰ (LEVINAS, 1978, p. 4). It would point out to an “intrigue of a different meaning from the ontological one”, “in which the right to be is questioned”, the very privilege to exist, and which, according to the author, “it is necessary to remain attentive” (LEVINAS, 1982a, p. 254; 2009).

Well, the fact that the thought and the statement about God require another “meaning intrigue” is based on the Levinasian conception of being. Here's what we intend to demonstrate now on.

⁸ See also Levinas (1993, p. 143-144).

⁹ Check also Levinas (1982a, p. 125).

¹⁰ In the Levinasian thought, the term “transcendence” receives an ambiguous meaning, being understood both as the movement towards “beyond being”, identified under the sign of “ethical intrigue”, and as the most proper or characteristic of what is presented as absolutely another (that is, others and God), that is, as the constitutive element of alterity by itself.

2 The violence of being

In the Levinasian concept of being, there is both an inherited part of Rosenzweig, especially with regard to the criticism that this author addresses to the Hegelian idea of being, and an explicit criticism in relation to the Heideggerian idea of being. When Levinas (1980, p. XVI), at the beginning of *Totality and infinity* [Totalité et infini], evokes the idea of totality, he refers to Rosenzweig's *Star of Redemption* [Der Stern der Erlösung]. Therefore, there is a clear inheritance there. From Rosenzweig, Levinas takes the idea that the notion of being - and, therefore, that of ontology - is inextricably intertwined with that of totality. In fact, for Rosenzweig (1982a, p. 34-53; 1982b), being is not beyond of all entities, as Heidegger thinks, but the sum of all of them, thus designating the very conception of wholeness. Being, in the thought of this Jewish philosopher, addresses the Hegelian notion of being¹¹ (11) in which everything comes together, and it is against such an idea that the work *Estrela da Redenção* [Der Stern der Erlösung] rises.

Elsewhere, among the veneration for Rosenzweig, Levinas also had contact with Husserl and Heidegger, and in particular with the work *Being and Time* [Sein und Zeit], to which he devoted particular admiration - expressed, in the Levinasian writings of the early 1930s, through the ontological inflection given to the Husserlian theory of intuition. Now, in the context of this work, the being is thought not in terms of “concept”, “idea” or similar, but as the transcendental par excellence. The being is not approached there as any kind of genre, even if the most universal, capable of putting everything into it. Rather, it is understood as the universal a priori, the condition of possibility of the manifestation of the entity as such and, therefore, of the knowledge of any concrete presence (HEIDEGGER, 2012, p. 51-56). To the extent that it enables the manifestation and knowledge of the entity as an entity, the being is therefore related to the truth. The being so characterized is being as truth (*ens inquantum verum*) or being in its relationship with the intellect, a so-called original relationship, not of adequacy, but of unveiling. It is, therefore, about being thought of as a condition of possibility for the self-showing of entities, prior to

¹¹ In this regard, see Hegel (2016, p. 85-112).

the conceptual predication itself, that is, of its revealing itself, as a phenomenon, to the intellect, which welcomes this manifestation. This welcome, in turn, outlines the very meaning of understanding, which does not arise in the form of a representation, of an explicit thematization of what is received, but of a “allowing-to be”, that is, of caring for the other human and other intramundane entities as a fundamental characteristic of Dasein itself. The being-there is, therefore, always being-there-with in the sense of letting-be, that is, of welcoming and caring for what is presented as “being” (as existing, as being). And it is precisely because it allows Dasein to understand anything as “being” (that is, as an entity) - that is, because of this relationship of original co-ownership between being and intellect, or even between being and the question of truth itself, is that the transcendental of being finds the just reason for its expression in the metaphors of horizon, clearing and opening.

In turn, Levinas understands the Heideggerian being in a very idiosyncratic way. For him, the phenomenological metaphor of the horizon, attributed to being, plays a role equivalent to that of the concept in classical idealism: that of mediation, peculiar to Western philosophy and that “es gibt” in its own way reinstates, but within the scope of understanding, and that is done only under the sign of violence against alterity. In their view, in the “horizon” of being “the entity appears on a background that surpasses it”, such as “as the individual from the concept” (LEVINAS, 1980, p. 15). Like the concept, which is a *tertium quid* between the knowing and the known, the Heideggerian being would be inserted between the self and the other, allowing kidnapping, appropriation, domination. This is how, for Levinas, the Heideggerian ontology would subordinate the relationship with others to the relationship with being in general, remaining under the aegis of “the obedience of the anonymous” and thus revealing itself as heir to that same “imperialist” and “tyrannical dynamism” of the “Same”, hegemonically constitutive of Western philosophy. In fact, Levinas believes that the Heideggerian notion of understanding the being is but a new guise of the “thought of the Same”. Launching an idiosyncratic interpretation of paragraphs 9 and 41 of *Being and Time* [Sein und Zeit], which deal with the authenticity of Dasein, the Lithuanian-French author interprets them under the sign of “an existence in view of itself” (LEVINAS, 1974, p. 65).

Now, if Dasein is always an understanding of being, its own way of existing is realized, in Levinas' understanding, in the form of a "being with a view to oneself" and that is only the other side of the rapture of alterity. Being always means, therefore, in the case of Dasein, an existence by virtue of itself and, at the same time, an existence to the detriment of others, insofar as it is "comprehended" (that is, in the peculiar sense of the Heideggerian notion of understanding as unveiling) from the same horizon - that of being -, at the same time common and "luminous", but also transcendent, in terms of the relation, namely, the subjectivity understood as Dasein and what presents itself as "other". At the expense of its relationship with the intellect and the truth, that is, its "luminosity" or "phosphorescence", the Heideggerian *es gibt* is, in short, associated with the classic paradigm of vision¹², which Plato thinks in analogy to noetic knowledge and under which, in Levinas' point of view, all the intellectualism of the Western philosophical tradition would have been built.

What Levinas believes he has found is, therefore, a kind of domination based on the freedom of the Same. This domination takes place, according to the author, "through a third term, which I find in me" (LEVINAS, 1980, p. 14, emphasis added), and which is the being of the entity, transcendent, at the same time, both to me as to the other human. The Lithuanian-French thinker thus describes the Heideggerian being as the "horizon" in which the "opposite entity" - understood as "the Other" - "surrenders", "is lost and appears, is captured and becomes a concept" (LEVINAS, 1980, p. 14), that is, it becomes intelligible, but at the price of a "betrayal", that is, a rapture of its strangeness, of its character from another. In the light of being as a "work pursued by the being", the other is stripped of its transcendent character and made immanent in thinking itself, that is, "reduced to the Same" (LEVINAS, 1980, p. 12-15). And it is under the idea of this kidnapping of alterity, made possible by the mediation of being, that Levinas interprets the meaning of the Heideggerian notion of freedom as

¹² According to Levinas (1980, p. 39), "Heidegger puts in advance this background of being as a horizon where every entity appears, as if the horizon and the idea of limit that it includes, and that is peculiar to the vision, were the ultimate plot of the relationship". However, in spite of Levinas' understanding, it is worth clarifying that the category of horizon, in its phenomenological sense, is constituted by a paradoxical structure that shows it as both the "surrounding" and the "open". In metaphorical transposition, this opening character is designated by the mobility of the horizon line, which follows the position of the observer in space. Thus, as the observer approaches, the horizon moves away, so that the latter remains absolutely unapprehensible, but at the same time involving the gaze that peers at it. By the way, see Vaz (1992, p. 21-22). Regarding the Levinasian judgment directed at the notion of the horizon considered in close relationship with the metaphor of light as an inherent characteristic of Western philosophy, let us refer to our study: Campos (2016, p. 37-49; 55-65). For an analysis of the Heideggerian question of ontological difference using the metaphor of the "abyssal fund", see Panis (1986).

“letting-be”, thus relating the process of knowledge mediated by being to the freedom of the subject understood under the sign of “Same” (LEVINAS, 1980, p. 12).

It is because of this neutral and impersonal structure of being, which enables the eradication of alterity, that Levinas refuses to think, in the Heideggerian way, of the “there is” [*il y a*] as generosity, seeing in it pure neutrality, in whose midst all difference it is taken away¹³. In his view, everything happens as if Heidegger, when presenting the being under the sign of an “abundant generosity”, had not questioned that form of thought in which Western philosophy was erected and moved, a tradition in which the being is identified with the good as a transcendental notion. Thus, exactly where Heidegger placed the distinguished emblem of a gift, the Lithuanian-French author will insist on seeing the evident sign of annulment of alterity. For this reason, in a gesture similar to that of Avicenna¹⁴, but in an even more radical way, Levinas opposes the dialectical circularity between being and good, separating them from each other and associating being with evil.

Thus, Levinas' refusal to admit that being can enable knowledge or the truth of beings (entities) and, in a single stroke, safeguard their differences is evident. In his view, being only enables the intelligibility of particular entities at the price of an annihilation of their specific differences.¹⁵ And it is precisely for this reason that he refuses to attribute to being an absolutely transcendental character or an analog range by which we can refer it to entities in general, as well as to the human being and to God. Whether under the sign of “thought concept”¹⁶ or as a “bright horizon”, the being appears, in Levinas' view, as the condition of possibility for the domination of the other human by the cognizer subject, who affirms himself in the very act of knowing what is presented to him as absolutely different, strange and infinitely distant.

¹³ For the difference between the levinasian *il y a* and the Heideggerian *es gibt*, see Pontremoli (1991).

¹⁴ Rémi Brague (2011) stated that the disrepute and abandonment of traditional metaphysics is due to Avicenna, who would have separated being and good, relegating being to the condition of pure contingency of a fact of no importance.

¹⁵ “Being excludes all alterity,” says Levinas (1974, p. 213).

¹⁶ See the criticisms that Derrida (1967, p. 200-228) brought to Levinas, claiming that he would have neglected the non-conceptual character of Heidegger's thinking.

It is under the assumption of this understanding of being that the Levinasian suspicion that philosophy, from Parmenides to Heidegger, despite the vicissitudes of its historical figures, was only an “egology” or a philosophy of the Same is manifested. Even famous Scholastic names, like Tomás de Aquino, also do not escape the severity of the Levinasian judgment (LEVINAS, 1974, p. 188).¹⁷ Everything happens as if philosophy had been unable to safeguard the absolute transcendence of God, submitting it to logical order and crowning the hierarchical scale of entities with the biblical God, understanding it as the supreme entity (*ens summum*) and cause of itself (*causa sui*).

In this sense, it is worth noting that Levinas' thinking is driven by the fear of seeing the “God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob”, the God of the revelation of the history of salvation who had manifested itself to Moses in his *nomen substantiae*, reduced to a squalid idea of the supreme being.¹⁸ We are, therefore, facing a diagnosis that accuses the ontology not only of proving itself incapable of safeguarding alterity, whether that of the other human, or that of God himself, but of suppressing it in the very act of inserting it into a rational and intelligible system, that is, to approach it under the sign of being (LEVINAS, 1974, p. 188).

¹⁷ It should be noted, however, that this theoretical gesture does not mean, as Levinas intends, at least regarding the philosophy of Heidegger and Thomas Aquinas, to subordinate God to being. Rather, it is a question of integrating the knowledge of God in the ontological order, so that the realm of being is presented, rather, as the only human bias of access to divine reality, but if only by a limitation of human knowledge itself, of human intelligence in its structural correlation with being, and not for a lowering of its transcendence. See, by the way, Mac Dowell's lucid reflections (1999) and Villela-Petit's (2009) objections to Marion (2009), when refuting the well-known thinker that Heidegger was an idolater. A good part of these objections, in fact, can be re-dimensioned to Levinas (2010a, p. 349, emphasis added), in whose thought, which accuses the “geniuses of the Place” - read: Heidegger and his followers - of having been seduced by the “splendor of the world”, “that anti-human splendor”, in an “eternal seduction of paganism, in addition to the infantilism of idolatry”, Marion certainly anchors himself. Brito's (1999) presentation, in his book Heidegger et l'hymne du sacré, corroborates the objection that Hederman (2009) addressed to Levinas in 1980 (date of the first edition of the collective work Heidegger et la question de Dieu), when stating that the Heideggerian thought of the sacred is “much subtler” than his former student would have estimated. On the question of the sacred in Heidegger, see also Mac Dowell (2013).

¹⁸ In this sense, both Levinas' and Heidegger's criticisms only make sense if applied to the metaphysics of the univocity of being, whose origin goes back to Duns Scotus, but not to the Thomasic metaphysics, given the absolute transcendence of the Thomasic God to remain unscathed to “contamination of being”, that is, not to be reduced to the ontological order nor to be limited to the logical-formal universality of the “ens commune”. That's because the analogy of proportionality, peculiar to Thomasic reflection, postulates the transcendence of the Absolute (God) over the relative (the creatures). Likewise, if one considers Thomasic metaphysics, the statement, anchored in the Heideggerian reading that interprets the history of metaphysics in the light of the ontotheological paradigm, that “the history of Western philosophy” has been “a destruction of transcendence” (LEVINAS, 1982a, p. 95), whereas this history itself was able to engender a truly respectful thinking in relation to divine transcendence; by the way, see Vaz (2003; 2012a, p. 95-103). On the distinction between Thomasic metaphysics and that of Duns Scotus, see Vaz (2012a, p. 171-191). For the proportionality analogy, see Marty (1965). For the univocity of being in Duns Scotus, see Vignaux (1986). On the quarrel between ontotheology and the thinking of Tomás de Aquino, see Prouvost (1996, p. 57-73), Garulli (1997) and the special issue of *Revue Thomiste* (1995), with important texts on this topic.

What makes Levinas (1947, p. 99) claim that the verbal formulation “there is” [il y a] “leads us to the absence of God, to the absence of all entities” is the fact that the concept of being does not harbor difference, not even analogously.

This determination of being as “il y a”, in which “il” does not mean or the [illéité] of God nor the [illéité] Of the third party, but the absence of both is the central point of the question. This is because, unlike the “il” of God’s “eleidade” and the “il” of the “eleidade” of the third (he, at the bottom of “you”), the “il” “[il y a]” always remains neutral and impersonal, faceless¹⁹ (19). Hence, for Levinas, it does not make sense that “il y a” can mean alterity, either from God or from others.

For Levinas, through the concept of being, the diverse is subsumed, homogenized and integrated into a totality, and thus led to the identical. Hence, the notions of knowledge and ontology have been criticized and abolished, since they lead inexorably to the identity and primacy of cognizer subject. Thus, Levinas considers an ontological knowledge of God unfeasible, proposing, on the other hand, an exclusively ethical sense of what is called “knowledge of God”, made possible only through the relationship with the other human.²⁰

¹⁹In fact, the Heideggerian *es gibt* is understood as “an impersonal and faceless power like a *fatum*”, which gives “meaning to the real” (LEVINAS, 1994, p. 99, emphasis added).

²⁰In our view, a metaphysical misunderstanding regarding the notion of knowledge and ontology remains there. Now, an adequate metaphysics of knowledge reveals to us that, in the act of knowledge, not only does the knowing subject remain in his ipseity, but the known object or being also remains in his alterity. There is really an intentional identity of the subject and the object, but it occurs in the real difference that distinguishes them. This means that the principle of intentional existence occurs under a double face: in the perspective of the subject, as an operation or activity of the knowing being and, in the pole of the known object, as an update of its form. Here is the paradox of an irreducible duality subsisting in the strictest unity; by the way, see Vaz (1998) and Simon (1934). If so, it is worth asking in what sense the generality of the concept constitutes a violence against the uniqueness of real individuals. It is worth asking whether what Levinas presents as a “*de facto* judgment” - namely, the thesis that knowledge necessarily implies violence against alterity - is not, in fact, a value judgment. Now, it is evident that human reason, when applying universal concepts to the multiform diversity of reality, ends up dispensing with the empirical singularity of human individuals as free and different people. By definition, rational knowledge requires an overcoming of the individual towards the universal. But is this not a necessary moment for the recognition and the affirmation of difference on another plane? Is the peculiar character of metaphysical reason, per Aquinas’ understanding, not exactly the analogous predication that makes the concept more flexible so that it encompasses, in its unity, the real differences of entities, without suppressing them? On the other hand, is it not rather the intellect that takes the form of the thought object? Puntel (2011, p. 264-267) raised this last objection against Levinas. On the Levinasian notion of knowledge, see Levinas (1982a, p. 61-62; 1986, p. 212-213; 1993, p. 149). See also Campos (2016, p. 116-155).

Levinas refuses, therefore, that the analogue character of the being is capable of preserving the differences.²¹ He rejects the idea that the being can unite by diversifying, that this principle exercises its role of unifying and, at the same time, safeguards differences. For him, “the being refuses all specification and does not specify anything” (LEVINAS, 1947, p. 17). In other words, when recalcitrating the idea that in the shadow of the compact unity of being differences are safeguarded, what the author of *Noms propres* [*Proper names*] ultimately refuses is that “the simple unit of analogy” (LEVINAS, 1976, p. 101), while inherent to the ontological order, can shelter and protect singularity and alterity, keeping them unscathed in relation to totalization, to its dissipation into a “totalized totality”, in a neutral and indifferent “sameness”. That is why, for him, it is essential to remove the being from his “indestructible royalty”, “stronger than that of the gods” (LEVINAS, 1978, p. 14) and move towards another instance, that of “beyond being” or “otherwise than being”, which is but an epithet of “ethical intrigue”.

Now, if thought, in its correlation with being, is incapable of harboring and safeguarding alterity, even if it suprasumes it on a higher plane, there is no other alternative for the philosopher than to postulate another “intrigue of meaning” from which the difference can reveal itself in all its height and infinity. It is therefore urgent for Levinas to reverse the path of thought: from existence to what exists, as the title of his work of 1949 *De l'existence l'existant* shows. From Neutral and impersonal “there is” towards someone else, or even, as best nuanced in the final pages of “Difficult Freedom” [Difficile Liberté], from one human being to another, a movement that, according to the author, draws the very sense of time, language and of subjectivity (LEVINAS, 2010a, p. 435437).

²¹ It is appropriate to question the relevance of such a thesis for a fair interpretation of the Thomasian concept of being, which has an analogical character. Now, for Aquinas, the true principle of individuation, the guarantor of uniqueness, is not matter or substance, Aristotelian “ousíaaa”, but the act of being - the “esseee” (De Potentia, 7, 2 ad 9; TOMÁS DE AQUINO, 2001a, p. 23. De anima, I, resp. and ad 2). The act of being (Thomist) in fact unifies, by placing the entity (ens) in a class of other entities (entia) in the world as a whole. However, for Doctor Angélico, the entity enjoys an irreducible uniqueness in the measure in which it is or exists, that is, its difference or alterity is safeguarded as it, the entity, presents itself in its act of being own and diverse in relation to all other acts of being, to the way of existing proper to all other beings. Thus, in Aquinate's view, the act of being (that) radically singles out, he “excludes all universalization in the generalizing way of the intelligible form” (GILBERT, 2005, p. 19), given by the ens commune (being while very universal concept). It is the analogue face of the being that assures, therefore, each entity its irreducibility to any other entity: everything that is said in terms of being is or exists, but what is exists each one in its own way, that is, according to their own way of being or existing. It is in this sense that Thomism considers being in an analogous sense, because it is certainly equal in everything that has to be or existence, in everything that is, but each time unique and singular, and exactly the same because unique and singular each time. On the problem of analogy and the unity and plurality of being, see Weissmahr (1986, p. 82-158). Regarding the metaphysical notion of analogy, see also the studies gathered in the special issue of the journal *Les études Philosophiques* (1989), especially the text by Louis Millet, as well as that by Holz (1981).

3 Otherwise than being: the question of God thought from the ethical significance

Levinas proposes another way of philosophizing which, of course, is already, in itself, a movement that belongs to philosophy itself. Levinas himself recognizes this other way of philosophizing, distinct from the ontological one, when he affirms that although philosophy has arisen as a continuous discourse about being in the vicissitudes of its historical development, it was able to point, in moments of lucidity, to its overcoming itself. Levinas believes that he finds this other way of philosophizing in some moments of philosophy, but above all in Plato, not only Platonism itself, but the very inspiration that emanates from him for Neoplatonism, above all that of Plotino, quoted by the Lithuanian-French author in several passages of his works.

For his reflection, as we know, Levinas uses above all the Platonic formula that places the Good “beyond the essence”. The title of his major work, “Otherwise than being” or “beyond the essence”²² (22) [Autrement qu’être or au-delà de l’essence], intends to evoke what is considered to be found in that expression, of platonic of origin. However, Levinas gives this formula a meaning that goes beyond the Platonic and even the Neoplatonic letters. In *Totality and infinite* [Totalité et infini], the philosopher writes that “[...] Greek metaphysics conceives the Good as separate from the totality of the essence and, thus, sees [...] such a structure that the totality can admit the existence of a beyond. [...] It is by this means, precisely, that he is beyond being” (LEVINAS, 1980, p. 76). This statement reveals the peculiar way in which Levinas reads and interprets Plato's thought. Another statement is added to it, later enunciated in the text itself, which summarizes what should be understood there, but it also elucidates Levinas' own purpose (1980, p. 269, emphasis added): “To the idea of totality, in which the ontological philosophy brings together - or includes - the multiple, it's about replacing the idea of a separation resistant to synthesis.”

²² There, in this work and in the books published later, Levinas (1978, p. 3, note 1) understands by “essence” the process or the event of being, in the sense of existing, diverse and at the same time common to the existing ones. This notion, therefore, refers to being distinct from being, that is, being in its verbiage. To designate what is essential, that is, what makes a thing what it is, the philosopher uses the term *eidos* and its derivatives, such as “nature”, “essence”, “fundamental”, etc.

Well, this idea of a "separation that is resistant to synthesis", of this "beyond" not only distinct, but also "separate from the totality of the essence", is what Levinas believes he can extract from the Platonic lyrics. It is evoked in the form of a contrast directed to the very hegemonic face of philosophy understood as ontology, which would have been, despite its historical vicissitudes, only "a destruction of transcendence" (LEVINAS, 1982a, p. 95). This author comes to question "whether Western philosophy was faithful to this Platonism", as if philosophy were required to pay attention to this "philosophical dignity of a project in which the meaning is separated from the manifestation or presence of being" (LEVINAS, 1982a, p. 124, emphasis added). But what does the Levinasian gesture consist of with respect to the "epekeina tes audios platonic"? First, it should be noted that the appreciation of the Platonic idea of Good, in Levinas, is not arbitrary. In fact, against Heidegger and, therefore, also Nietzsche²³, Levinas resumes and revalues the Platonic idea of Good, weaving a reading that sees in Plato not a mystic, as occurs with Simone Weil, but a great metaphysician. By metaphysics, however, and differently from the Platonic way of thinking itself, an occurrence or event, uprooted from ontology, more than just thinking, if by thinking the link with being is presupposed, and which Levinas himself calls "ethical intrigue". In his words, "[...] metaphysics - relationship with the entity that takes place in ethics - precedes the understanding of being and survives ontology" (LEVINAS, 1994d, p. 100). Now, for Levinas, ethics is neither an organized reflection on ethos nor an immediate datum of conscience; it is neither the law of God imposed on men nor the manifestation of autonomy in each man. It is, above all, an event: it is the encounter with the other man, or more precisely, the revelation of the face, through which the self is no longer a force that extends and asserts itself, being led to responsibility.²⁴

²³ Indeed, the Heideggerian idea that Platonic thought marks the decline of early Greek thought is rooted in Nietzsche's accusations. Two of these accusations, at least, should be highlighted. In the preface to *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche (1910, p. 17-18) considers "the Platonic invention of the pure spirit and Good itself" as "dogmatic error", "the most inveterate and the most dangerous of all". Another anathema directed by Nietzsche (1976, p. 298, 208) against Plato, conceiving him as "a Semitic of instinct", is that of having the latter "devalued the Greek gods with his concept of Good". Influenced, therefore, by Nietzsche's reading, Heidegger conceives metaphysics as exhausted in its epochal possibilities and advocates its abandonment in favor of a more original thought of being. For him, "throughout the History of Philosophy, Plato's thought, although in different figures, remains decisive. Metaphysics is Platonism. Nietzsche characterized his philosophy as inverted Platonism." (HEIDEGGER, 1972, p. 270). See also Heidegger's (2015b) seminars on Nietzsche, published from 1937 to 1944.

²⁴ The Levinasian notion of ethics evokes the legacy of Gabriel Marcel's reflection, which states: "only a relationship of being to being it can be said to be spiritual ... What counts is the spiritual exchange between beings; here it is not about respect, but about love." (MARCEL, 1935, p. 207; LEVINAS, 1976, p. 9). Indeed, in his *Metaphysical Journal* [*Journal métaphysique*], Gabriel Marcel (1935) seeks to restore to existence that metaphysical priority that idealism intended to deprive it of, when he takes a stand against "monadism", "solipsism" and "subjectivism" that are typical of the subject conceived as pure spirit.

It is known that Heidegger identifies in Plato the origin of the problem of hiding the “truth of being”, as a constitutive structure of metaphysics understood ontoteologically.²⁵ Now, in the text of the essence of the foundation [Vom Wesen des Grundes], written in 1929 and included in the work 'Marks of the way [Wegmarken]', we find the last manifestation of Heidegger (2008a) who calls himself the epithet of Plato's heir regarding the question of being. When conceiving the question of transcendence as immanent to Dasein, the author interprets it as the *epekeina tes "ousias"* (Republic VI, 509 B) attributed to the agathon, stating: “The problem of the agathon is nothing but the culmination of the central and concrete question the fundamental guiding possibility of the existence of “being-there” in the polis sphere. ” (HEIDEGGER, 2008a, p. 172). But, in this text, the philosopher still goes back, adding that, in addition to this ontological dimension, as it refers to the transcendence of Dasein, the agathon also reveals a metaphysical dimension, since, as a power, it “has in its power the possibility of truth, understanding and even to be, and, in effect, the three simultaneously in one unit” (HEIDEGGER, 2008a, p. 173). It should be noted, however, that Heidegger is quick to refuse his ontological-existential interpretation of “beyond essence” (*epekeina tes ousias*), by adding, in a note from the second edition, of 1931, the following statement: “No! The being-there is by no means either conceived or experienced. Epekeina is also not transcendence, but agathon like *aitia*” (that is, cause). This added note, by which he denies his first interpretation of Plato, synthesizes the very twist (Kehre) of his thought.

In rising up, therefore, against the Heideggerian interpretation that he believes to find in the “beyond being” attributed to the Good only an allusion to the question of transcendence as immanent to Dasein in the form of projecting itself into existence, Levinas will emphasize the dimension of transcendence of '*epekeina tes ousias*' by understanding it under the sign of ethics and moving it definitively away from the plane of knowledge and ontology. To Plato-gravedigger blamed to promote the “complete burial of the beginning”

²⁵ As regards Plato's Heideggerian interpretation, both the text of the course given during the winter semester from 1931 to 1932, but published only in 1988, and entitled On the essence of truth [Vom Wesen der Wahrheit], are decisive, as the article "Plato's doctrine of truth" [Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit], 1940 text, but published only in 1942. Consider also his Introduction to Metaphysics [Einführung in die Metaphysik], published in 1953, and § 6 of the course entitled Parmenides [Parmenides]: see Heidegger (1996b; 2005; 1966; 2008b, p. 130-169).

(HEIDEGGER, 1996b), that is, of the initial thought, which turns out to be the thought of the three great pre-Socratics - Anaximander, Parmenides and Heraclitus - and to establish the decay of the original Greek thought, Levinas will oppose Plato-metaphysical, who would have provided moments of lucidity to philosophy itself, by postulating the idea of the Good beyond the essence.

On the other hand, it should be noted that the author in focus makes the same gesture carried out in relation to the Cartesian idea of the Infinite: from the Platonic idea of Good, Levinas also retains only the formal design, through which it is located beyond the essence - this is what interests you -, however, purifying it from its power and causal function.²⁶ (26).

In fact, according to Plato's scholars, one of the most controversial issues in the central book of the Platos' S Republic is whether how knowledge of the Idea of Good is achieved and, therefore, whether and how it is possible to define it.²⁷ But, in the context of Platos' S Republic, the Idea of Good appears as object "noéseos", ²⁸ that is, as an object known by the "nous", precisely as a cause of science (epistème) or source of intelligibility for the object of science, which is the Idea or intelligible form. It is in this sense that Socrates thinks the Idea in analogy with the Sun.²⁹ Now, just as in the sensitive world the eye does not see "distinctly" (saphôs) (República, 508e; PLATÃO, 2016, p. 560-561) the visible things except through the sunlight, in the same way the soul does not know intelligible beings (enóesén te kai éгно), and does not know them as such, that is, as intelligible forms, unless they are illuminated by the truth that emanates from Good (República, 508d; PLATO, 2016, p. 560-561). From this it can be

²⁶ On the question of power and the causal function of the Platonic idea of Good, see above all Szlezák (2001), Franco (2003) and Vegetti (2003).

²⁷ Regarding this thorny and controversial issue, see Reale (2002); Szlezák (2001; 2003, p. 163-188), Krämer (1989; 2012), Vegetti (2002) and Dixsaut (2005). Following in the perspective of analysis open by the Tübingen-Milan School, Perine (2014, p. 201, p. 245-253) argues that the definition of the Idea of Good is reached by the return of all things to the anipotetic principle, which in the context of unwritten doctrines was identified with the One as the most perfect measure of all things, including other intelligible ideas or forms. For him, the reasons why Plato refrained from elaborating the definition of the essence of the Good in his written work were exposed by Plato himself in the so-called philosophical passage of Letter VII (340 B-345 C), and can be better understood in the context of the criticism of the writing formulated in the Fedro, 274 B-278 E (PLATÃO, 2011a, p. 180-193).

²⁸ Vaz (2012b, p. 223-229) distinguishes three modes of the appearance of the Good as an object "te noéseos". Contrasting with Festugière's interpretation (1950, p. 202-204), who endeavored to show, through a joint analysis of the Republic and the Filebo, that the Good is "a reality superior to" ouσίας, therefore, superior to the Idea, Vaz points out that the knowledge of the Good should not be understood in the form of a "sense of presence" hovering above the "ordinary norms of knowledge", whereby the Principle could not be understood or defined, but only to be felt and "seen" - read that last term in the sense of an immediate knowledge, without connection with the previous dialectical movement of the soul - and, therefore, of a knowledge not mediated by the rational order, or even, of an immediate contact with the intelligible, as in the original contemplation of the soul not yet imprisoned in corporeal matter.

²⁹ Concerning the famous comparison involving the correspondence between the Good in the intelligible world and its analog (508b), that is, the Sun in the sensitive world, see Vaz (2012b, p. 213-219).

inferred that the Idea of Good is a “cause” (aitía)³⁰ of “science” and the “truth” of essences or ideas in the very process of knowledge (hos gignoskoménou) (República, 508e; PLATÃO, 2016, p. 562-563).

But Sócrates makes another analogy of the Good with the Sun: just as the same sun gives sensitive objects not only visibility, but also “generation, growth and food”, in the same way the Good gives intelligible people not only intelligibility, but also “Existence” (tò eînai) and “essence” (ousía) (República, 509b; PLATÃO, 2016, p. 562-563). In this way, the author of “The Republic” proposes a certain causal dependence, in the same order of intelligibility, of the whole Idea and the world of Ideas as a whole in relation to the Idea of Good, a dependence that manifests itself precisely in the dialectic movement upward towards the intuition of the Good.³¹ The Idea of Good rises, therefore, in the ideal world, as a source of being (existence) and intelligibility of all other intelligible forms.

It is true that Socrates, using the comparison with the Sun, affirms that the Good is not “science and truth”, but something different, or more properly, the “most beautiful” (állo Kai Kállion)³² (República, 508e; PLATÃO, 2016, p. 562-563). However, this passage should be interpreted in the light of that of Plato’s Symposium, in which Diotima affirms that the Idea of the Beautiful should not be “represented” as “science”³³ (Banquete, 211e; PLATÃO, 2011b, p. 172- 173). It is stated there that the Good should not be identified with a science, but this does not mean that the Good is not an object of science. As the source of “science” and also the cause of everything, Good is not identified with science. However, this does not prevent it from becoming the object of knowledge. Just as the Sun, the cause of vision, is contemplated by the eye, so the Good, the source of knowledge, should be known by the intellect and precisely while it is the cause of science or the source of intelligibility for the object of knowledge.

³⁰ Vaz (2012b, p. 215-218) emphasizes that this causality of the Good is not a causality of “production” or “efficiency”, either in relation to the sensitive world or in relation to ideas. Rather, it should be understood as “formal causality”, in a *sui generis* sense, specifically Platonic. This causality of the Good in relation to other ideas has a sense analogous to the causality of the intelligible forms themselves in relation to sensitive objects. Vaz (2012b, p. 215-218)

³¹ Regarding this orientation of the soul towards the idea of Good, see Trabattoni (2002).

³² On the Platonic link between Good and the transcendental notion of Belo, see Vaz (2012b, p. 182-199). It is worth mentioning that Levinas, unlike Plato, not only differentiates, but also dissociates the Idea of Good from the notion of Belo.

³³ See also Vaz's comment (2012b, p. 222-223).

In fact, through a hyperbolic abuse of language, the author of *the Republic*, places the Idea of Good beyond intelligible forms, stating that it is “beyond the essences”³⁴ (*epekeina tes ousias*).³⁵ But, according to the interpretation of scholars of Platonic thought,³⁶ it is in line with a sui generis type of causality that a correct hermeneutics of the famous text should be operated. The Idea of Good is, therefore, “beyond the essences” in the measure of the action or the causality that it exerts in the intelligible world, that is, from the perspective of its performance as Principle.

Now, in a gesture similar to that carried out by Festugière, Levinas seeks to present the Good as a transcendence superior to ousia and, therefore, superior to the very thought that we may have of it and, finally, to the ontic and also to the ontological order. “What can be more than the question of being is not a truth, but the good”, says Levinas (1947, p. 28). Indeed, in the work “Otherwiser than being” or “beyond the essence” [Autrement qu’être or audelà de l’essence] we find a more nuanced statement. The author admits that, although Plato recognized the beyond being as Good, the ancient philosopher conceives it, however, as “an idea and a source of light” (LEVINAS, 1978, p. 23), interpreting what is excepted of being, from the being from which he excels.

In any case, to say that the Idea of Good is “beyond the essences” does not mean, in Plato, that it transcends the plane of being, it does not mean that it is ineffable and unknowable, or that it is not an object of knowledge and even of another order or kind. It is not, in the Platonic text, a transcendence of the Good above or beyond the plane of science (epistème), or even, it is not a matter of affirming that the Good can be “accessed” in a sui generis way - in an ethical way, as we find in Levinas, and here is the novelty of his reinterpretation of Plato - that he cannot be “defined”. Now, the author of “The Republic”

³⁴ As Vaz stressed (2012b, p. 218, note 79), nothing can be said, in terms of the Platonic logos, about a distinction between “essence” and “existence” in the sense that was later established, especially in the scholastic period. In this sense, ideas, as intelligible forms or perfect natures, are, for this very reason and at the same time, “existing essences (eidos)”. The existential character of the ideas was highlighted by Loriaux (1952; 1955).

³⁵ In the Portuguese translation of the Platonic text used by us here, it reads: “[...] although good is not essence, but something that far exceeds essence, in power and dignity” (PLATÃO, 2016, p. 563). For a detailed analysis of the whole text that deals with the idea of the Good in *A República*, see the comments of Vegetti (2003) and Dixsaut (2000). The same idea is still expressed in the context of *The Banquet* (211 B); in the Portuguese translation we consulted, see Plato (2011b, p. 171).

³⁶ See, by the way, Dixsaut (2000), Ross (1951, p. 41), Vegetti (2003), Franco (2003), Marques (2009, p. 154-156) and El Murr (2019), to quote only some names.

constantly affirms the Good as an Idea,³⁷ that is, as an intelligible form, and it is as an Idea that the Good is considered, in turn, “anipotent principle”. As an Idea, the Good presents itself as an existing reality that gives reality and intelligibility to other ideas. As a principle (arché) by which ideas have an “intelligible existence”, the Good presents itself as the end (telos) for which ideas are “ontologically ordered”. Essences (oussias), object of dianoia,³⁸ are the expression of a special *eidos*, which is the Idea of Good. It is, therefore, from that Idea of Good that those ideas receive their being and their intelligibility. Thus, in Levinas, the primacy of the Idea of the Good does not find expression in the metaphors of “participation”, “presence” or “communion”.

This is because it is not to the Good understood as an absolute intelligible that primacy is granted, but to the Good understood under the sign of “ethical intrigue”. In other words, the radical primacy of the Levinasian Good is not due to the fact that it reveals itself as the supreme intelligible, which explains itself and, at the same time, explains the imperfect objects of the sensitive experience; it does not happen because the Good rises as a pure intelligible, the noeton, the support of every attempt to give reason, as occurs in the Platonic letter. Rather, the primacy attributed to the Good stems from its exclusively ethical character, which, in a Levinasian perspective, supposes the overcoming of the domain of knowledge and ontology. It comes from the sublimity or height to which the Good summons us, by redirecting the movement of metaphysical Desire towards the other human, away from him. Now, in Plato, eros presents itself as a desire and an aspiration of the soul to “take all that is beautiful and good” (Banquete, 203 D; PLATO, 2011b, p. 152-153) and Plato's effort is precisely in orienting this dynamism towards the intelligible sphere (VAZ, 2011, p. 55). In Levinas, on the contrary, the dynamism of Desire is oriented towards the transintelligible, which is someone else's alterity.³⁹ That is why Desire is said to be metaphysical.

³⁷ By the way, see República, 505a; 508e; Plato (2016, p. 562-563); República, 517b-c; Plato (2016, p. 578-579); Republic, 526e; Plato (2016, p. 604-605).

³⁸ That is, the reason or discursive thought that proceeds step-by-step, to discourse (dia-noein); therefore, in a mediated way, and not immediately, like noesis (intuition)

³⁹ In the work *Otherwise than being or beyond the essence* [Autrement qu'être or au-delà de l'essence], Levinas maintains the same thesis already stated in *Totality and infinite* [Totalité et infini], namely, that alterity is irreducible to knowledge: “Not encompassing at present, refractory regarding the thematization and representation, the alterity of the other [...]”. (LEVINAS, 1978, p. 195).

Therefore, if there is a postulation of invisibility in the Platonic logos, it is only to attribute intelligibility to the production of something that manifests itself in the visible plane, that is, so that men can contemplate what is good in itself and become Good in their actions (MARQUES, 2009, p. 154). In the Levinasian logos, invisibility argument of the invisibility about the idea of the Good (LEVINAS, 1987, p. 86; LEVINAS, 1982a, p. 95), in a similar way to the Cartesian idea of the Infinite, presents the role of affirming the transcendence of this idea regarding the order of knowledge and understanding; therefore, in relation to the domain of being (ontological plane) in its strict correlation with the sphere of thought. In fact, for Levinas, the beyond being is understood in the sense of a beyond the ontic-ontological order, that is, it is not convenient to refer to the Idea of Good in terms of existence or essence; this, in fact, denies radically the ontological character attributed by Plato to the Idea of Good. The invisibility of the Good, that is, of the *illicité*⁴⁰, therefore, is announced under the species of a transcendence or surpassing in relation to the ontological order and also the gnoseological order, in a theoretical gesture that associates it, before, with the “ethical intrigue”, Which for Levinas constitutes the proper domain of meaning, that is, of a “meaning beyond being”, of a meaning that is no longer said in terms of being, can no longer be enunciated through the so-called ontological categories and it can no longer be captured by the meshes of thought itself, of the apodeitikos logos (demonstrative, apophantic reason). The “knowledge of God” itself, here, acquires a meaning no longer epistemological: it is devoid of its properly epistemic and rational character, and it would obtain forums for a nobility called ethics, understood as older and more significant than the very rationality of reason.

The Levinasian idea of “the invisibility of God” thus opposes the supposed possibility of an intrinsic and, in his view, pernicious relationship between the conceptual plane and idolatry, to a kind, therefore, of conceptual idolatry. This is because the term “idol” - eidolon, in Greek, and pebsel, in the Hebrew language -, when designating sculpture, given to see, would witness the inscription or imprisonment of the invisible in the visible, that is, the visibility

⁴⁰ The neologism *Illicité*, with which Levinas refers to transcendence, is a vicarious term, forged to avoid enclosing it in a concept and, at the same time, to express the ethical intrigue in which the holy Name it is enunciated without paradoxically, being themed. By forging this term to express, in philosophical language, the intrigue of God, Levinas also seeks to express the Talmudic interdict of not pronouncing the holy name of God in vain.

of what, strictly speaking, would reveal Himself as not visible. As an idol, the concept - understand, above all, the concept of being, considered as the most eminent of all - would be, in this case, this “visible that improperly seizes the invisible, limiting HIM, and pacifying HIM” (LÉVY-VALENSI, 1983, p. 139), insofar as the concept petrifies the dynamism of HIS existence⁴¹ in the mutation of a name, of a noun. Those who name God, those who aspire to positive knowledge about the divine, trying to fix HIM on a concept, would be, as Maimonides also emphasizes, His “enemies”, “adversaries”, “hostile” idolaters (MAIMONIDE, 1979, p. 86). And this is because they have a conduct that exposes man to the danger of the evidence of the divine, of His gleam, as much as a nonsense and a temptation, thus contradicting the second precept - “you shall not make for yourself an idol or any image” (lo taassé lekha pessel vekol temouna) - which, in the book of Exodus, precedes the teaching of modalities related to the construction of the tabernacle designed to house holiness and the divine in its unrepresentability (Ex 26), as well as the episode of the construction of the golden calf (Ex 32). According to this perspective, if man had been able to renounce making an image of God, that same temptation had persisted, however, at the conceptual level, insofar as man proposes to enclose him in a concept.⁴²

But, it should also be noted, when interpreting this transcendence of the idea of the Good in a way that situates it at the same time “beyond being and thought” and the possibilities arising from this relationship of co-belonging, that Levinas is much closer, as understood Narbonne (2004; 2006), from the spiritual universe of Plotinus.⁴³ In fact, on several occasions Levinas spontaneously refers to Plotinus, when he returns to the Platonic idea of the Good beyond being. He would not, therefore, be the forger of such an idea, but

⁴¹ It is worth remembering the dynamism that the biblical concept of the term “word” (dabar) contains, in order to express the dynamic fullness of being

⁴² In this sense, it is important to understand that the Levinasian logos are dissonant and critical both to the thoughts of eminent Jews, such as Maimonides (1979, p. 135) - who dared to say that nothing can be affirmed about the Most High, unless that He is, necessarily - as for competent Bible translators who do not hesitate to write, albeit with reverence, “you are the Being”, for *ata El* - “You are You, the Almighty Being” (Ps 77, 15) - or to express God as the invariable Being to translate the famous statement Eheyie Asher Eheyie present in the book of Exodus (Ex 3, 14). On the other hand, the gesture of starting to listen to the word “God” beyond being establishes its roots in an ancient and venerable tradition. Luria’s cabal (Kabbalah), for example, already evoked the withdrawal of god within his own being, his inner exile for the world to come into existence (SCHOLEM, 1972, p. 262268). Through this doctrine of the primordial space of the Tzimtzum, that is, the contraction and concentration of God far from any and all points, of his withdrawal in a region within himself so that another could become or begin to exist, Isaac Luria did not hesitate to plead for an idea of the divine radically different from that of an all-powerful and supreme Being.

⁴³ On the question of Good in the context of Plotinus’s Neoplatonic reflection, see also Chrétien (1980). Regarding the Plotinian overcoming of classical ontology, see Aubenque (1971).

Plato in his Neoplatonic affiliation - more properly, Plotinian - who would have announced a more original and fundamental dimension of reality, commonly relegated to the shadows of oblivion by the history of philosophy. Evoking, therefore, the two ancient Greeks, as well as their thought regarding the idea of Good, Levinas (1994d, p. 75-76) does not hesitate to establish the distinction between the idea of the infinite (Cartesian idea associated with the Platonic idea of Good) and the idea of being.

Certainly, for Plotinus, the Good is beyond being. But he is beyond being whereas he is in every being: it is in this sense that one cannot have reminiscence of the good. Thus, the negation of all anamnesis of the Good does not imply, for Plotinus, a renunciation of the thought of the immemorial, but only that the antiquity of the Good becomes present from a reminiscence; therefore, in a different understanding to Plato's (CHRÉTIEN, 2014, p. 52).

In its own way, this correlation between the beyond being and the unrememberable is also present in the reflection of the author of *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* [Otherwisely than being or beyond the essence], title that bestows upon itself the Platonic legacy and which translates, in its own way, the "*epekeina tes ousias*", epithet of Neoplatonism itself and of which Platonism is thought of as the foundation itself. The novelty of the Levinasian project, however, resides in the link established between what Narbonne (2006, p. 343-349) called "the argument of previousity" and the refraction of the scope from thinking and being, therefore, to the realm of knowledge and ontology. In fact, for Levinas, thinking "beyond being" is addressing "a refractory diachrony to all synchronization, a transcendent diachrony", to a "past that is older than any representable origin, a pre-original and anarchic past", to a past "that is present, more than perfect", "immemorial, unrepresentable, invisible", finally, to an "immemorial past intolerable to thought" (LEVINAS, 1980, p. 11, 13, 191). "Incomprehensible by its immensity or by its 'superlative' humility [...], invisible, separated (or holy), and in that, not origin, anarchic. [...] Unrecoverable by reminiscence [...], due to its incommensurability with the present" (LEVINAS, 1980, p. 13), such a past, still says Levinas (1980, p. 16), "shows itself in the present of obedience without having a memory there, without coming from memory". The immemorial past "shows up" or becomes

phenomenal as such, as refractory to presence, “in the present of obedience”. This formula is quite paradoxical, since the past in no way becomes present and it still “shows itself”, in an ethical way.

This time lost in advance, this “unforgettable past that did not cross the present” (LEVINAS, 1980, p. 75, emphasis added) is supportive, therefore, of that what it asks me (before all consent), for the other. It is associated with this responsibility without measure, which constitutes me as I in the accusative.⁴⁴ “It is because of otherwise than being that novelty means, in being, otherwise than being”, says Levinas (1978, p. 229). The face of otherwise than being has always requested and made me responsible, and the immemorial accompanies the unavoidable and non-transferable character of the commandment, which in turn breaks the subject's contemporaneity with himself.

It is exactly this ethical aspect that radically separates such a thought from that of Plotinus, for whom ethics could not be the highest, but what leads to the highest, that is, the path to the first principle. In fact, ethics as a “first philosophy” does not exist in both Plato and Plotinus. Whether in Platonic or Plotinian thought, as in any other Neoplatonic philosophy, the “beyond being” attributed to the Good does not identify with the ethical, as occurs in Levinas.⁴⁵ In this way, Levinas' discourse already takes distance from the Platonic and Neoplatonic logos, insofar as it interprets this transcendence, this “beyond the essence” or *epekeina tes ousias*, in an exclusively ethical hermeneutic key.

The Good beyond being establishes an alliance with subjectivity and which is only named by an abuse of language (LEVINAS, 1987, p. 83). In this sense, the Levinasian “otherwise than being” is not the non-being, but a third way between the being and the non being, which Levinas “thinks he finds” in the very philosophies of Plato and Plotinus (LEVINAS, 1994d, p. 99). “That subjectivity is the temple or theater of transcendence⁴⁶ and that of the intelligibility of transcendence takes on an ethical sense, this does not contradict the idea of the Good beyond being”, says Levinas (1982a, p. 124). Here is the

⁴⁴ On the question of debt and election in Levinas' thought, see Chrétien (1991).

⁴⁵ This novel aspect of Levinasian thought is highlighted by Narbonne (2002; 2004; 2006) and by Chrétien (2014, p. 53).

⁴⁶ Also in this aspect concerning the bond established between God and subjectivity, it is worth noting the influence of Gabriel Marcel (1935, p. 5), for whom “there is an immanent connection between the reality of God and the realization of God in the saint”.

paradox of a philosophy of subjectivity whose “diachrony” does not emerge except in the form of an inner wound constituting the subject, so that the self-rises already split, permeated by alterity.

Conclusion

The experience of the nazi horrors gradually tilted Levinas' thought in a new direction, that of the absolute preeminence of ethics. In fact, as Silva (2012, p. 31) has emphasized, Levinas replaces the metaphysical principle of immanence and identity, which establishes its roots in Cartesian philosophical reflection, with the ethical principle of alterity. This theoretical gesture, in turn, causes a double inversion: on the one hand, the prerogative of the Self in modernity is questioned, as the absolute foundation of all truth, so that the primacy is redirected towards the other pole, that is, the pole of alterity or of the other human in its irreducible singularity;⁴⁷ on the other, it is intended that the relationship understood as the first in the order of the meaningful, that of the intellect with being, gives way to the intersubjective relationship

In fact, it is from the significance of saying - read: ethics as an event in which the subject is challenged, by others, to be responsible for the other human and for all others that concern him in opening the Face - that Levinas derives the ontological sense. This is what he does, for example, when he talks about essence as an eon,⁴⁸ (LEVINAS, 1978, p. 197), borrowing gnosis terminology. The latter defends, in turn, the character derived from knowledge and marks the Jewish cabal with the seal of that idea. Therefore, it is not just a matter of establishing that ethics precedes essence, but above all that showing, that is, the essence of essence, rises up as “a modality of essence” (LEVINAS, 1978, p. 29).

Levinas wonders, therefore, how God comes to the idea, not from invocation or prayer, but from the ethical imperative that the Face, the other's own alterity, imposes on me: “you shal not kill!”. In this sense, he is not

⁴⁷ The assumption that Levinas has in mind is that the Self continually acts in its own cause, in favor of itself, so that it is necessary to operate a true inversion of the primacy, so that the subject can be removed from his egological empire.

⁴⁸ In a study entitled *The struggle between the God of Plotinus and the God of the Bible in the ancient cabal* [La lutte entre le Dieu de Plotin et le Dieu de la Bible dans la kabbale ancienne, according to the French version], Gershom Scholem (1983, p. 23) points out: “Gnostic speculation about aeons has affirmed itself very strongly and effectively within the Jewish and Muslim esoterisms [...]. From the point of view of the history of ideas, this meeting of gnosis and neoplatonism is of crucial importance for understanding the character of these theosophies”. From the same author, see also: Scholem (1966, p. 78-108, 194-201).

concerned with demonstrating whether this idea of God has a point of reference in reality, so that the question of his existence - "Does God exist?" - is replaced by the question about the meaning of what we call God, which we could translate by: “what is the meaning of this idea of God, from what event or circumstance does it affect me and start to mean? What does it mean to the subject at the very moment of his emergency?” For him, God means in intelligence (in solo intellectu) as an idea of God, and that idea has an eminently ethical sense. This significance, in turn, is not inscribed in the intellect in the manner of an existence (*essse*) nor of an entity (*ens*), of a being in intelligence (*esse in intellectu*). The orders of meaning and existence are distinguished and separated there, to the point that Levinas affirms a sense of the idea of God, without that meaning eventually implying a being in the form of an objective reference in reality (*esse in re*): the meaning of God in intelligence is equivalent, for him, neither an existence in consciousness nor an existence outside it.

For this, it is essential to challenge the mode of presence as a mode of consciousness, as well as the idea of adequacy between the intellect and its object. Therefore, there is no alternative to the philosopher, but to postulate a clear separation between the ontological order and the “ethical intrigue of meaning”. In this way, he proclaims the independence of meaning of the latter. Therefore, thought is given another alternative, another formal design to the meaning of its own act: the alternative of thinking without referring to the intelligible horizon of being, without proclaiming an ontological determination to what is presented to being but already withdrawing, that is, to alterity itself, whether that of the other human, or that of God. In this perspective, not everything that is imposed on thought is said in terms of being, and this only becomes possible whereas it is allegedly challenged and abolished the formal and temporal scheme of presence. Strictly speaking, what eventually shows up does not remain the time necessary to be grasped by thinking, so that it remains only for the philosopher to replace the way of "pre-presentation" of the thing (as a thought object) with the metaphor of the passage, of a continuous movement and unapprehensible in itself.

Thus, in proposing the separation between the order of meaning and the ontological order, Levinas seeks to contest: 1) the absolutely necessary and

universal - and therefore transcendental⁴⁹ (49) character - of being; 2) that the being may be, formally and immediately evident, the principle of intelligibility of all things, including, and above all, the alterity of the other human; 3) the relation of any and all content of thinking with the absolute of being, that is, the ontological value of all objective determination of consciousness,⁵⁰ or even, the idea that the ontological statement is the a priori condition of possibility - hence, the ultimate condition - of every object in consciousness, of every giving or revealing of an object to intelligence; 4) finally, Levinas refuses to integrate what is meant by “knowledge of God” in the orbit of being and to understand it as the exclusive human way of accessing the reality of the transcendent.

It is necessary to question, however, whether it is still thought and whether it is still possible to speak of “object”, of “something”, in short, if something “exists” and with meaning, whether or not one can affirm some kind or form of meaning or significance there, touching the thought and moving away from it continuously and infinitely, in the manner of an “insinuation”,⁵¹ to the appearance of a paradoxical “relation without relation”, of an infinite moving away continuously and, for this very reason, remaining untouchable and inexpressible, inadequate to words, categories and concepts, unavoidable by judgment, absolute transcendence, to the point of its possible confusion with “there is” itself [il ya]. Is there still a relationship in this non-relationship? Is it even possible to affirm and attest to its meaning, even if transcendent, since it continually moves away from thought in the very moment that it “touches” it, that is, that “hurts” him, that “awakens” or “inspires” him, according to Levinas’ own terminology? How to ensure that “something” (even if that “something” is not enunciated in ontological terms, but in terms of signification) had touched the thought, if it was precisely in that place that it did not remain the time

⁴⁹ Differently from what happens in Kantian philosophy, the sense of transcendental, in the Middle Ages, is in opposition to “categorical”. Conceived in the 13th century, the doctrine of the transcendentals deals with the very first concepts and, therefore, more comprehensive, which, because of their universal scope, enhance the categories. In his work *Quaestiones disputatae de veritate* (q. 1, a. 1), Saint Thomas Aquinas presents a systematic deduction of the “transcendentia”, which, in turn, make explicit the sense peculiar to the entity (ens), highlighting, among them, the one (unum), the true (verum) and the good (bonum). In the Latin-Portuguese bilingual edition we use, see Thomas Aquinas (1999, p. 139-157). On the doctrine of the transcendentals in the medieval context, especially in the reflective plane of Aquinate, see the classic work of Aersten (1996).

⁵⁰ For the thesis of the ontological character of all objective determination of consciousness, which underlies ancient realism, see Muralt (1991, p. 48-63) and Aersten (1988).

⁵¹ What the Levinasian ‘logos’ intends, ultimately, is to deny the primacy attributed to being, that is, the thesis that affirms being as first intelligible (proton noetón), thesis that is present mainly in the old and medieval philosophical tradition. Levinas, therefore, protests against the idea that finite intelligence must unite intentionally to being (here understood as a formal object of thought) under the logical form of an “identity in difference”, requiring a minimally ontological determination of its object: aliquid est (something is). Greisch (1993) highlighted this aspect of Levinasian thought.

necessary to be grasped or verified - which would imply, in turn, the identification by the thought, its “look-directed-towards ...” or its movement of intentionality? This is the paradox in which the Levinasian 'logos' is definitively swept away, in its fear or scruple of seeing the absolute transcendence of the "God of the prophets" reduced to a scanty idea, namely, that of a "Being beyond the totalized totality" (LEVINAS, 1976, p. 101), no matter what the “height” or “elevation” evoked by such thought.

Thus, we see the paradox in which Levinas' discourse inevitably entangles itself, exactly when it intends to enunciate itself with meaning. What Levinas ends up establishing, therefore, is an ontology of ethical significance in itself as his speech evokes the rubric of intelligible and understandable.⁵²

In fact, to express what in his view is “beyond ontology”, it is necessary to use it, at least formally, as Levinas himself ⁵³ consents: this is the aporia that Levinasian logos cannot get away with it. When trying to affirm the evasion of being, his discourse ends up becoming entangled in the ontology itself, leaving him only the task of distinguishing the ontological order - that is, that of thinking about his relationship with being, that of discourse, of the Said, of phenomenology and showing - that other, namely, the order of significance or signification, that of ethical relationship with the other human, that of "proximity", in short, that of saying.

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⁵² In this perspective, Gordon (2008, p. 188) seeks to show how what Levinas calls “ethical relationship” stands less as an “alternative” to ontology than an attempt to “give a more radical answer to a question that remains ontological in its own structure”. Courtine (2012, p. 9-43) also analyzes what he calls “the fundamental ontology of Emmanuel Levinas”.

⁵³). See, for that matter, Levinas (1978, p. 198-199). Now, the negation of being, as Aristotle showed, refutes itself. The principle of contradiction thus proves to be unavoidable, insofar as it is a condition for the possibility of any and all coherent discourse. Tugendhat and Wolf (2005, p. 47, n. 3) affirm, in turn, the transcendental character of what scholasticism called the argument of retorsion, given that Aristotle presented this principle of non-contradiction as the condition of the possibility of all language with meaning. Regarding the refutation by retorsion (apodeixai elentichos) in Aristotle, see Reale's comment in Aristotle (2002, p. 167-180); Berti (1989, p. 92-101) and Maréchal (1926, p. 16-17; 81-84). On the application of the Aristotelian argument of retorsion in the criticism of supposedly non-ontological discourses, see Vaz (2000a, p. 156-157).

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