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Translation as an Ethical Relationship between Ethics and Politics. An Interpretive Reading of Emmanuel Levinas

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Abstract: The otherness of the other, considered as foreignness, is deeply intertwined with the problem of translation and with the one of morality. How can the two of them be brought together based on the work of Emmanuel Levinas? The main question which leads my analysis is the following: does morality limit itself to the relationship with another person or does it concern society in its entirety? In the thought of Levinas, ethics is placed on the side of the dual relationship with the other, while the presence of the third institutes the realm of politics. At first glance, the two dimensions contradict each other, for the first one is characterized by infinity, overabundance, and love, while the second one comports a dimension of finitude, measure, symmetry, and justice. Yet these two domains always exist contemporaneously, each of them needing the limitation brought by its counterpart. How is their relationship to be thought? I will argue that the answer can be found within the domain of translation, understood as an essential asymmetry that is both harmonic and disruptive.

Keywords: ethics; politics; love; justice; translation; the other; the third

1. Introduction

Autrement dit: the French formula introduces an explanation, a rephrase, or a *translation*, the latter being understood as an "inner translation", namely one which operates within language itself[1]. In English, we could retranslate it through the expression "in other words", yet the English equivalent would miss both points that constitute the essence of the French saying. Firstly, the French verb transformed in a past participle—*dit*, which comes from "to say", means *said*—becomes in English a noun, "words". Secondly, the English "other" defines here a different type of object, a different type of "thing": "other words". On the contrary, if the French *autrement*, assigned to a past participle, still holds within itself the trace of the *saying* which it determines, this happens precisely because *autrement* is an adverb: an *other* which is not simply applied to another object, that is, to a different thing, but an *other* which expresses the otherness understood as a *way* of being—here, as a way of saying.

The *autrement* remains something completely other than that which is said; it is of another "nature" than the said itself. In French, the *autrement* could hence be redefined as *autrement que le dit*: "other than the said". *This* "other", this *autrement*, which is intrinsically verbal, and which does not merge

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[1] When one considers the question of translation, one is placed before three different possibilities of accomplishing this act. The type of translation that takes place as reformulation, within the same language, is one of those three possibilities. See Jakobson (2000, p. 114): "We distinguish three ways of interpreting a verbal sign: it may be translated into other signs of the same language, into another language, or into another, nonverbal system of symbols". Several thinkers consider that translations between two languages can only take place due to the possibility of the "inner translation" (see for example Ricœur 2004, pp. 45–46 and Heidegger 1992, p. 18).

with any object or word, represents the essence of translation. The latter does not lie thus within the exchanged words themselves, considered as just "other words". At the same time, translation is neither a simple differentiation within verbality. The gesture of translating does not lie in the fact of just "*saying* differently", "*dire* autrement", but in the *differently* itself, i.e., in the *autrement*, as an act which distinguishes itself from everything that was, will be, or is being said.

What are the characteristics of this translative act and how can we describe it based on the reflections developed by Emmanuel Levinas? The French philosopher is to be taken as a guide in this enterprise because he outlines the realm of an *autrement qu'être*, an "otherwise than being", which is not simply a certain "being", nor a manner of "saying otherwise"—*être autrement*, *dire autrement*. For Levinas, the fact of envisaging an "otherwise than being" is a gesture that aims to overcome the "said" of the ontology by means of ethics and thus regain the true dimension of the relationship towards the otherness of the other (Levinas 2006, pp. 4 sq.). Why speak, nonetheless, in terms of *regaining*? Where and when was something lost, if ever? Lost, hidden, or simply misinterpreted, the relationship to the other is endangered at each and every moment—for the danger of falsification, misinterpretation, or misconduct does not come from a philosophical fault of bygone days, which one could simply invert by means of another philosophy that would assume the heroical task of overcoming ontology. The danger comes from within human relationality and, more precisely, from within otherness as such, since it is never simply the *other* that we encounter, but also the other of the other, namely the *third*.

A curious affiliation between several aspects could be thus observed: the presence of the third is deeply linked to the idea of ontology and to what Levinas calls "the said". All these elements contradict the *autrement* of the otherness, of ethics and, as one may have already noticed, of the most intimate essence of translation. If one intends, then, to inquire more deeply into the nature of the latter, one must equally address its opposite—and always contemporaneous—term, namely the realm of the third. How should one pursue such an analysis based on the Levinasian thinking and what are the steps of the inquiry?

2. Bibliography, Method and Results

The present article will concentrate itself mostly on notions that are developed by Levinas in his later work, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (2006), although some very important aspects of the relationship with the other will be drawn from the earlier work, *Totality and Infinity* (1969). A shorter, yet thorough reflection, which resumes the parallel that I am going to sketch out between the realm of ethics and the one of politics is to be found in the interview *Philosophy, Justice and Love* (1983).

The method that I am going to follow consists in analyzing, firstly, the opposition just mentioned between the encounter with the other and the presence of the third, by considering this opposition from the point of view of ethics, on the one hand, and of that of politics, on the other hand. This opposition will present itself as a conflict between asymmetry and symmetry or, furthermore, as an opposition between love and justice. Secondly, since the two realms are nonetheless always present at the same time, I will try to show that we must consider their opposition not as a sheer separation or as a mutual exclusion, but to assume the point of view of their already given co-presence. The main question will then be: what is the nature of this co-presence or of the *relationship* between the two domains, no matter how conflictual this relationship might seem? To put it bluntly, if it is a relationship already "unnatural" by nature—for what *relationship* can there be between symmetry and asymmetry as such—how can we express it?

The results of the research will consist in the fact that by examining the characteristics of this "relationship" thoroughly, one can not only join ethics and politics, but also develop a new sense of translation[2]. As it will be shown, the latter does not limit itself to the sheer differentiation, the pure

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[2]　　Another very interesting approach to the asymmetry between the relation with the other and the relation with the third can be found in the work of Bensussan (2017), who argues that the "entre-deux" or the transgression between ethics and politics

verbality, the harmony, and respect for the absolute difference of the other, which are contained in the *autrement*. Translation in its new sense, understood as a relationship between two asymmetric realms, is of a different kind of asymmetry than the one which characterizes the relationship with the other. This new sense implies equally rifts, breaks, and caesuras. It implies, namely, a certain shattering essence, as an ineluctable *autrement* of the *autrement* itself—which not only the third is, but which I equally am, as the first other of the other: an *other* to myself, as Paul Ricœur would say (Ricœur 1990), but which I only come to be through the alterity of the one that I encounter.

A possible critique of my analysis could lie in the fact that the discussion remains too "theoretical", without describing a particular case to which the relationship between ethics and politics applies. Should this be interpreted as a "masterful account" of Levinas' position and, in general, of philosophy as such, which seems so often to ignore the concrete presence of the other? My answer to such a critique is that far from failing to give a "loving" account of the otherness, the analysis presented to the reader tries to bring him or her closer to a more fundamental realm. The latter is not a theoretical one in the sense that it would go "beyond" the other's concrete presence, and, as such, beyond ethics—on the contrary, it situates itself, somehow, "before" the concrete encounter of the other. The realm which I have in view is the address of the other, which has *always already* taken place, and which first opens the possibility of ethics. In other words, if the enterprise seems to be theoretical, it is not because it limits itself to a masterful account, but because it follows Levinas' own quest: namely, before inquiring into ethics, describing the domain out of which ethics itself becomes possible.

3. Discussion

3.1. Ethics and Love

How can one describe the Levinasian realm of ethics, which at first glance seems to be opposed to the one of politics? Although the word "ethics" could be considered as a philosophical discipline, namely as the discourse about morality, I will be using it in the pages to follow as a name for the relationship towards the other as such: the so-called "face-to-face relationship" presented in the first major work of Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, or the responsibility for the other which Levinas describes in his later work *Otherwise than Being*, and which will occupy a more important place in my analysis.

The most essential trait of the ethical relationship is the encounter of the other in his or her singularity. Ethics always concerns the *two* of us, the other and I, and it presupposes the recognition of the incomparable character of the other as such—for each and any other, as Levinas stresses, is unique (Levinas 1983, p. 9). The other overcomes, by means of his unicity, anything that I could master, anything that I could plan, instrument or foresee and, above all, the other overcomes everything that I could, myself, be. In this respect, the other appears as *infinite*, not in the sense that he or she would find himself or herself beyond any limits of individuation, but because the other incarnates the sheer difference of the *autrement* as such. The other person is not just "another I", another body or another subject that could be recognized as other by way of taking my own self as a measure of things. If one goes back to the question of translation which constitutes the background of this research, one could say, in this respect, that the other does not represent *another word*, but the verbality of the otherness as such, which disrupts any measure there may be.

Since the other is far from being a thing that I could master once and for all, he or she "appears", or, better said, makes his or her presence known only through a constant address, which is a constant verbalization or differentiation. Such a differentiation between myself and the other, which is brought about *by the other* and not by myself, means, further, that the other "appears" only through the

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can be thought in terms of forgiveness. One could therefore ask in what respect, if ever, forgiveness itself can be considered as a translative act.

disruptive movement that breaks every measure there is and that brings me into a relationship with him or her. Consequently, this relationship is already asymmetrical.

Being marked by an abyss, by a rift provoked by the presence of the other, this relationship between myself and the other can only be described, from the point of view of symmetry and reciprocity, as utterly non-relational. Yet here lies one of the major points that should be stressed: it is precisely in this asymmetrical sense, at which one arrives through an analysis of the otherness of the other that the notion of *relationship* should originally be understood. "Relationship", in an originary sense, does not consist in a neutral liaison which would be meant to bring together two terms that would be situated within two horizontal, parallel domains and that would exist already prior to the fact of being brought into a relationship. This means, furthermore that "relationship" is not a concept that one could forge in advance, defining it as a neutral liaison and afterwards applying this definition to the encounter of the other. On the contrary, what "relationship", as such, is, should be understood from a phenomenological description of the encounter of the other. Such an approach allows us to discover two very important traits of the relationship.

Firstly, it becomes clear that the existence of the one takes place only through the emergence of the other. The asymmetry of the relationship, which occurs through the disruptive address of the other, engenders, so to say, the second pole of the relationship, constituted by my own subjectivity. I *am* from the moment which the other assigns to me my responsibility for him, his or her own address constituting, for me, a principle of individuation ([Levinas 1983](), p. 12). It is, therefore, also very important to notice, based on this assertion that the "self" in this case, or that which we usually call our "own" is not a matter of subjective possession. That which is most intimately *my own*, i.e., my individuation as such, can only be achieved through the other.

Secondly, one comes nonetheless to see that a certain reciprocity is still in place within this asymmetrical relationship. It is a reciprocity, though, which remains far from any idea of equity, equality, or equivalence. Reciprocity in this case means only the sheer, neutral fact that just as *I* am only through the address of the other, the other as well, the *autrement*, is only through "myself"—that is, through the fact that he or she addresses to me. Although each of us plays a completely different role within the relationship, the latter remaining thus deeply asymmetrical, the reciprocal nature of the relationship lies within the fact that each role depends on the existence of the other to take place.

Which conclusion could be drawn thereof? The differentiation or the rift itself, precisely to be completely *other* than everything there is, *needs* the measure that it disrupts in the exact moment when it allows it to be by means of this disruption. The way one needs the other and vice versa is an indication of the fact that no matter how asymmetrical the relationship might be, it still presents a trace of the classical concept of "relationship" with regard to a small, yet crucial aspect: the Levinasian relationship, just as any other relationship, implies *two* elements, nothing more, nothing less. Although they are of a different nature, and although it may even be said that we actually find only *one* element, on one side, and a sheer differentiation, rift, or abyss on the other side, we still have to admit that we are placed before a pair, that is, before something which is always constituted by *only* two realms. Asymmetry requires a dyad just as much as symmetry would, excluding the possibility of a third party.

For this reason, the ethical dyad can only be described in terms of proximity ([Levinas 2006](), p. 81 sq.), instituted by the inseparable couple of call and response. The address of the other, infinite by essence, calls for an appropriate response on my side. In addition, as one can easily remark, an appropriate response to an infinite call can only be, consequently, an infinite response. However, how could *I* ever respond infinitely? What could this claim *actually* mean?

An infinite response on the side of my subjectivity means that I can never fully respond, I can never be sufficiently responsible or sufficiently ethical. Responding infinitely to the injunction of the other represents, in other words, not a certain act or gesture, *something* that I could do for the other and that could be described within the limits of an ethics understood as a philosophical discourse containing moral laws. Responding infinitely is to be found in *a way of being* towards the other, characterized by an intrinsic insufficiency. "I am infinitely responsible" means that I am never, factually, responsible

enough and that among all the things that I could do, none of them could ever ascertain me of having accomplished my debt.

The only possible response that accords itself with the demand is, therefore, one which does not lie in a certain act, gesture, or thing, but in a certain way of being towards the other. In addition, as one might already begin to see, the only way of being which is characterized in its turn by insufficiency, rift, or infinity is my openness towards the other. This openness consists in the fact of carrying the other within myself and letting the other be within myself insofar as I also allow my own vulnerability to be. Such an openness is nothing more and nothing less than love[3], understood as agapic love, that is, absolute charity for the absolute other.

Once arrived at this point, the first part of the analysis could be resumed by putting together several aspects of the relationship towards the other which are deeply intertwined in the philosophy of Levinas. What characterizes ethics is, first and foremost, the dual nature of the relationship: the other and I. Secondly, this dyad presents itself as proximity and interpellation, even as rupture or rift caused by the address of the other. Thirdly, the difference between myself and the other expresses itself as a sheer otherness, having an infinite and incomparable character. The other *as* other, precisely because he or she cannot be reduced to an object or to an already given event, does not incarnate a positive infinity: the other's infinite character lies in the verbality of his or her presence, a *saying* that remains other—*autrement*—that anything said. Last, but not least, the authentic response that I can give to the address of the other, a call which assigns to me my absolute responsibility for him or her, is love understood as charity—for love is the only way of being with the other which preserves his or her essence as verbal, infinite, and incomparable.

However, once this answer is expressed clearly, why not let the analysis end here and conclude that the true nature of ethics has been found? The reason for continuing the inquiry is that two problems arise at this point, one coming from the nature of love itself, the other from a phenomenological given fact—both of which point towards a limitation of the ethical dyad. The concern arising from love is that paradoxically, it can be *too* loving and thus become blind or destructive, that is, *unloving*. The concern arising from our factuality is that we are never only two, but always already—at least—three, that is, always already members of a plural society.

How does then the "relationship" towards the third present itself? In the following section I am first going to outline its main characteristics by stressing the points which distinguish it from the relationship with the other, to arrive afterwards, by means of this opposition between the two realms, at the possible relationship between them. Finally, I will inquire into the nature of the "relationship" between the two types of "relationship" already mentioned, i.e., the one with the other and the one with the third.

3.2. Politics and Justice

The main point of the description of the relationship with the third consists in the fact that this relationship never concerns *only* a third, only "one" of those who are other than the other. If it were the case, then nothing would distinguish such a relationship from the dyad already mentioned. On the contrary, the completely different nature of the relationship with the third comes from the fact that since this relationship is inseparable from the ethical dyad, and since the latter always remains in place, the *third* already implies, as such, a multiplicity—and therefore all the others in the world. I am never *only* in relation to the third (case in which he would just occupy the place of "the other"), but I am always related to him *as a third*, that is, as an element which, simply through its presence,

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3　In Levinas' view, love is infinite precisely because it looks at the face (Levinas 2001, pp. 193–94).

institutes a multiplicity, and thus brings along not only a third as such, but all the others, and that is, the political realm[4].

What are the implications of this multiplicity? Let us take a step back and direct our attention towards the language that we use and towards what it suggests to us between the lines. By saying "all the others"—by simply uttering the "other" as a plural—we are depicting an assemblage of several elements which, to be gathered within a category, must have something in common. What the others have in common is to be others than the I, as well as others than the other. It follows, then, that in their case the *otherness* as such is deprived of its verbal, infinite character, to become a noun: a common trait that all the other people share to count as a member of the more general category of "others". Consequently, the otherness, here, is no longer considered in accord with its own essence *as* otherness, i.e., as the unique, infinite, and incomparable *autrement*, but only as a common feature based on which, precisely, a comparison can be instituted. Regardless of their different traits and unicity, the others share the fact of being simply others and are entitled therefore to an equal treatment, applied to all of them indistinctively.

This treatment, which concerns the political realm of the third *par excellence*, is to be found in *justice*. In what Levinas is concerned, in *Totality and Infinity* he uses this term ambiguously, applying it both to "my" relationship with the other and to "my" relationship with the third. On the contrary, when it comes to his later work, *Otherwise than Being*, "justice" designates exclusively the relationship with the third, and it is in this sense that the term is further being understood here as well[5].

What characterizes justice, then, if it only applies to the realm of multiplicity? The presence of the third brings along a more "impersonal" relationship, which does no longer rely upon the "face-to-face" encounter, nor upon the absolute responsibility for the other, a responsibility which comes from the other himself. The new type of relationship, on the contrary, brought about by the third, is meant to remain in place *as relationship* regardless of the terms which find themselves gathered in it. Instead of emerging *as* and *from* the encounter, this relationship, on the contrary, forges the encounter. The relationship towards the third as justice presents itself therefore as an exterior connection between neutral, independent and, above all, *symmetrical* terms, which already exist prior to their relationality. Better said, it is a relationship taking place between already existing *roles* that each and any of us assumes at some point with no concern for what constitutes our personal, individual, or temporal traits.

This kind of exterior relationship, precisely in order to remain in place regardless of the personal—eminently dual—encounter of those that it relates, can only take the form of an institution. Within its confines, everyone has the right of being treated as *any other*, for everyone is from the very first moment considered not as himself, but as one who simply shares the common feature of "being other". Within an institution, *I* am from the outset *an other*, just as any other might be, including *the other*.

However, does this necessarily mean that *everything* that we essentially are is betrayed by this neutral, indifferent perspective? Not completely. At the same time, one is entitled to consider that justice remains the most noble expression of this indifferent character proper to any institution, for justice incarnates the respect for the humanity of each and any of us that we equally share, regardless of our individual traits. One may thus notice that justice does not limit its presence to the courts of justice, but it represents, at a larger scale, precisely this "indifferent" or neutral character of our institutions, namely the right of each of us to be treated as any other on the ground of the absolute *unicity* that we *all* share, no matter how paradoxical the juxtaposition between "all" and "unicity" might seem.

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4   *Political* is to be understood here as describing the open domain of society as *agora*; in French it would correspond to "*le politique*", and not in the restricted sense of politics as political institutions, in French "*la politique*".
5   See Levinas' preface for the German translation of *Totality and Infinity* (Levinas 1971, p. II). The same point is stressed by (Römer 2018, p. 392).

One could assert, consequently, that although justice carries out a comparison of the incomparable (Levinas 2006, p. 16; Ricœur 1997, pp. 3–4), betraying the unicity of the incomparable individuality of each of us, justice at the same time *does justice* to this unicity. The paradox of its nature comes from the fact that justice places itself at the intersection between, on the one hand, the exigency of morality, which comes from the presence of the other, and on the other hand, the presence of the third. However, let us notice that there is a certain disproportion within the parallel that has just been made: on one side, the presence of the other *and* the demand for morality, on the other side *only* the presence of the third. Should we add, then, that the third also proffers a demand, namely the one for equality?

My answer is negative, and it is precisely for this reason that the further point should be thoroughly stressed: equality is *not* an exigency coming from the presence of the third, but it identifies itself already with justice. In other words, we should not think that the other, on the one hand, calls for love, while the third calls for equality, measure, and symmetry. My point is that far from placing itself on the same level with love and entering into a conflict with it, equality is, as such, already a response given to the exigency of love *when* the third enters the room and a political horizon is opened. According to this interpretation, justice represents the response given to the need for an equal *moral* treatment that arises from plurality itself. Or, to put it differently: justice is the form love takes when the third manifests his presence.

Why should then, nonetheless, *this* kind of "love" that transforms itself into justice take the form of limitations, measures, calculus, rules, and comparisons? An explanation could be found within the fact that once the intentionality of the moral subject directs itself towards the third, it *lacks* a unique direction towards which it can project itself, for the third is already plural. Therefore, rules and measures are needed, to allow us to find a good, moral way through diverse, and almost always conflictual obligations, debts and requirements (Römer 2018, pp. 392–93).

It can hence be stated that justice, *far from opposing itself to love*, represents the *other loving answer* given to the call of the otherness. Justice could be regarded, fundamentally, as something which roots itself in an ethical demand—and therefore in love—, but which, at the same time, by bringing about limits and measures, imposes a limit to love itself. Only with respect to *this* limitation can it be argued that justice at the same time contradicts love, for the latter is by essence non-limited, i.e., infinite, never sufficient, and always overabundant.

3.3. Harmony and Rift

Is such a conflict between ethics and politics, love, and justice, necessarily a negative one? This time, negative can only be the answer to the question just uttered. For, as I have stated at the end of the first section, a danger lies within the overabundance and the excessiveness of love itself—namely that it can naturally tend to *accomplish its overabundant essence* and become too loving, that is, tyrannical, both with respect to the other and with respect to the one who loves, namely the "I". The excess of morality on my side would consist in the effort to actualize something which, by nature, is meant to be insufficient and incomplete, namely my response to the address of the other.

What would the consequences of such an actualization be? On the one hand, I would be unjust towards myself: I would die every day, I would impoverish me every day or forget myself completely in favor of the other, to the point where I could not even be able to answer to his or her address anymore. On the other hand, in what the other is concerned, an excessive answer would destroy the possibility that his or her address takes place. The fact of wanting to answer so overabundantly that I fully accomplish my debt would correspond to the fact of writing off the other's interpellation and, thus, his or her presence as such. Accordingly, the leitmotiv which traverses Levinas' writings as an injunction coming from the face of the other, namely "Thou shall not kill"—*Tu ne tueras point*—could be read both ways: you shall not be unethical or indifferent, but you shall neither fall under the danger that lies within the excessiveness of the ethical demand itself.

Therefore, it should firstly be noticed that justice—and, more fundamentally, the presence of the third—is not only a problematical issue for the ethical dyad, a limitation, a violent disruption of it, but

also a necessary rift, a break, or a caesura that impedes the overabundance of love to become unloving, that is, unethical. Justice is, under this perspective, a rift *within the confines of love*, but it is not one that would destroy love, on the contrary—it is a rift that allows love to be what it is.

However, if justice represents a necessary break of love, and if, at the same time, justice is a consequence of the irruption of the third, then a second essential point comes to light: the presence of the third as such—a presence which, as Levinas says, always lets itself be known in the face of the other[6], "disturbing" the duality—represents, *precisely as this interruption or disruption of the ethical dyad*, the condition of possibility for the ethical character of the latter.

Last but not least, a third point should be stressed: if the presence of the third plays such a role, then it could also be said that the social and political realm as such—the multiplicity already contained within the presence of the third—constitutes a necessary disruptive background for the proximity which characterizes the relationship between myself and the other. Although the latter remains primary—given the fact that justice itself is, as I have stressed it before, rooted in a moral demand—the presence of the third is always contemporaneous with the ethical dyad, and, moreover, the presence of the third is always incumbent.

Justice, then, as the realization of the good in the presence of the third, could be regarded as the "ethical" turn of the social relationships with all the others—that is, of the state. For what more could one require from the social and political domain than the fact of being just? Couldn't justice represent therefore the definitive answer to the question of politics and to the one of the "ethicity" of the relationships with all the others indistinctively[7]? The answer, once again, must be negative. Why? Because justice as well tends to forget its loving, moral roots and therefore it tends to become rigid, limiting itself to the limitation of calculus and measure.

The danger lies, one may say, within the rift itself: namely, the rift could destroy the element that it breaks, becoming oblivious of the fact that the rupture took place only to *let be* the element that it breaks. In Levinasian terms we could explicate this fact in the following way: Justice allows morality to be moral, limiting its excess by means of equal rules that are meant to assure the respect of the humanity in us. However, the limitation of the moral excess, at the same time, "breaks" the unicity of each and any of us. At the same time, nonetheless, it breaks it or contradicts it only in order to allow it to be. Or, to put it differently: if *tout autre est tout autre*[8], "each other is completely other", and if each *other* of the plurality is, with respect to himself, an *other* just as much as the other from the ethical duo, then, in order to preserve this verbal otherness, justice needs to contradict it by transforming it into an universal rule, that is, into a noun, a category, a measure.

The danger lies within the tendency of this measure or scheme to becomes oblivious of its initial content and to content itself with the fact of being *only* a measure, a category, an institutional rule. Instead of relating itself constantly to that from which it emerged—namely to the otherness of each other, to human unicity and to the quest for morality—this just measure "freezes" within its symmetrical, equal essence. As such, it turns itself afterwards towards the irreducible otherness, but only to make it obey to the category of measure and symmetry, that is, to make it fit into the Procustian rules of an uprooted justice.

This movement corresponds to a "fossilized" institutionalization, i.e., to a neutral, "frozen" social realm, to a simply formal justice, which is not only the result of the forgetfulness of its "loving" fundament, but it is also the result of an excessive accomplishment of justice. Why does this happen?

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6   (Levinas 1983, pp. 10–11): "Le tiers n'est pas là par accident. En un certain sens, tous les autres sont présents dans le visage d'autrui. Si nous étions deux au monde, il n'y aurait pas de problème: c'est autrui qui passe devant moi".

7   (Levinas 1983, p. 10): "[. . .] c'est à partir de la relation avec le Visage ou de moi devant autrui qu'on peut parler de la légitimité de l'État ou de sa non légitimité. [. . .] Dans le *Deutéronome*, il y a une doctrine du pouvoir royal, l'État est prévu comme conforme à la Loi. L'idée d'un État éthique est biblique".

8   This is the well-known formula through which Jacques Derrida interprets Levinas (Derrida 1999, p. 98), and that I consider as untranslatable—that is, I think that we should not confound the "tout autre" with God, but rather understand that each other is, always, a completely other.

The reason for it is that *an oblivion of the origins goes hand in hand with an excessive accomplishment of the subjective nature of the originated, to the point where it cannot even be itself anymore, contradicting its own essence.* This means, in the case of politics and justice: oblivious of love and ethics, the overabundance of the equal, measurable character of the social realm leads it to being unjust, by depriving it of its relationship to the otherness, a relationship which it was meant to break only in order to preserve it.

Thus, a further point comes to light: if, as I have shown formerly, justice does not limit itself to the law court, but represents a way of acting in the world, its excessive countermovement shares the same trait. The "unjust" perversion of the political domain does not resume itself to the social institutions that we share, but is coherent with a certain way of thinking and acting that betrays the otherness of the other just as much. As Levinas shows, the realm of justice is one and the same with the domain of language, which is no longer understood as a verbal saying, but as a nominal *said*: language is that which allows the identification of an entity as one and the same as this or that insofar a certain meaning is ascribed to it (Levinas 2006, p. 36). In addition, since this idea of "one and the same" sets the basis for a totalitarian understanding of unicity as subjective and autarchic, the domain of justice and the one of the *said* are equally coherent with the one of ontology, which represents for Levinas a countermovement to ethics.

If one were to explain the relationship between these intertwined dimensions, one should resume it in the following way: far from the verbal character of the *saying*, words belong now to a fossilized *said*, i.e., to a sedimented language to which we can all indistinctively appeal, since we all share the same significations which have been instituted once and for all and which now find themselves at our disposal regardless of the use we make of them. Language loses its intrinsic verbality and ceases to be an expression of ethics as a face-to-face relationship to the other or as responsibility for the other. Consequently, language limits itself to a theoretical viewpoint crystalized as "ontology". The latter, as Levinas understands it, makes way for a separated, isolated, and autarchic subject who is, according to its essence, deaf to any call that might come from the other and who is thus equally blind to the otherness of the other itself.

What does this allow us to notice? Having analyzed the consequences of an "uprooted" institution, the conclusion that can be drawn is the following: in the same way in which justice limits the excessive tendencies of love, justice itself—and, along with it, the socio-political domain in its entirety—needs to constantly go back to the "fundament" which institutes it. That is, in order not to become unjust, institutions must always reconsider ethics, love and the quest for morality out of which justice itself had emerged as a need to preserve the otherness of *all the others*.

However, if the moral exigency comes, first and foremost, from the encounter with the other—for all the others should be justly treated insofar as each of them is a potential *other*—, this leads us to several other conclusions: firstly, we discover once again that the ethical duo is primary, although it always already contains a relationship with the third. Secondly, if justice needs to go back to its loving fundament in order not be unjust, this also means that politics need ethics just as much, for a state not to become an expression of the war of all against all[9]. In addition, finally, we may notice that the realm of the third needs to be constantly disrupted by the presence of the other, just in the same way as the other is a disruption—and, as such, a limitation—of the excessiveness of the ethical duo.

Gathering all these points together, one could resume the paradoxical relationship between ethics and politics, love and justice, the other and the third, in the following way: although one of the elements has the primacy—namely ethics, love, the other[10]—, the two occur always contemporaneously, being

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[9] (Levinas 1983, p. 10): "Un État où la relation interpersonnelle est impossible, où elle est d'avance dirigée par le déterminisme propre de l'État, est un État totalitaire. Il y a donc limite à l'État. Alors que dans la vision de Hobbes—où l'État sort non pas de la limitation de la charité mais de la limitation de la violence—on ne peut pas fixer de limite à l'État".

[10] This perspective finds itself on the opposite side of the one developed by Franck (2008, pp. 236–40), who states that if one is ever to think that justice and love, ethics and politics are contemporaneously, one is able to undertake this reflection only within the realm of justice, for it is precisely justice which makes possible contemporaneity and symmetry in the first place. Ergo, for Franck, justice must be primary.

mutually dependent and mutually disruptive. How could then their relationship itself be described, in its very own essence?

4. Conclusions: Translation as the Relationship between Ethics and Politics

It has appeared so far that two sides enter a conflict with one another, each of them comporting deeply opposed traits. Let us review them briefly, before analyzing their relationship.

On the one side, the ethical duo is characterized by a verbal character of the otherness, which manifests itself as unpredictable and irreducible to any already stated rules or plans. This means that it is irreducible to anything that the subject could master. The sheer *different* character of such an otherness lies precisely within the disruption of my subjectivity, the latter emerging only insofar as the call of the other operates this rift. The relationship between the other and the I remains always asymmetrical, the other never being simply *an other*, one who would be different of myself. He or she is, on the contrary, the irruption of the otherness as such, namely the difference as such, which consists only in the differentiation brought about by the disruptive movement. This verbal character of the differentiation understood as *autrement*—i.e., as "differently", with no point of comparison and nothing of which it differs—lets itself be known only within the movement of translation, which is, precisely, an otherness "in act", "other-ing" continuously. The other of the ethical duo is *not* the other word, the other language, the other *said*, but the irruption of this otherness as such *and* my translative movement towards it, which was called for by the emergence of the other as disruption.

On the other side of the barricade, the realm of the third, considered as different from the ethical duo, also presents completely different rules: the other of the other at first glance contradicts the verbality of the otherness, transforming it into a horizontal symmetry. If one brings this statement under the perspective of translation, one may affirm that within the socio-political domain we are confronted only with *other words*, that is, with the frozen "substantivation" of the *saying* and with its fixation in already given significations, rules, and institutions. The third introduces measures, rules, calculus, and limitations, opening thus Pandora's box of a series of betrayals of everything that essentially characterizes the otherness.

Yet, as it appeared formerly, a *certain* otherness is still at the roots of the relationship with the third, reason for which we are entitled to consider that within the horizon of translation, the third does not represent a sheer contradiction of the emergence of the other as *differently*. The third does not situate himself or herself outside any translative act there might be, but is to be found precisely within the *translated* word: that is, within *words* which are certainly *different* of the initial language—that is, different from the "I"—but not as different as the *difference itself* is in the guise of the *autrement*.

To state it more clearly: from the moment when one recognizes the intimate connection between the domain of the other and the domain of the third, one is also capable of noticing their difference with respect to one another, as well as their difference with respect to the realm of the "I". Under the perspective of translation that I have outlined at the very beginning of this work, the other appears as a translative, asymmetrical disruption, while the third appears as the already sedimented disrupted word. The latter remains different from the "I", just as one language is different from another. However, it can only be different from the I through the translative movement itself—that is, through the asymmetrical flux of the difference itself, which is to be found in the outbreak of the other.

However, then, if one were to analyze the relationship between these two types of relationships—namely the "relationship" between the realm of the other and the realm of the third, the "relationship" between asymmetry and symmetry, between verticality and horizontality—what would the nature of this relationship be? It has been showed that each domain appears as a disruption of the other, while they both need each other and keep a trace of one another. It has also been showed that within this relationship, one of the terms has the primacy, namely the domain of the other.

Now it may become clear why exactly it is so—and the response to this question can only be coherent with the entire interpretation that has been outlined up to the present moment, namely: the original sense of the relationship is *not* a harmonic connection between two already existing terms,

neither a conflictual connection that would be, in its essence, just as symmetrical and harmonic. If the original sense of "relationship" as such is asymmetry, and if it consists in a rift which allows the thing that it breaks to develop itself, *then* the "relationship" between symmetry and asymmetry can only be, in its turn, *asymmetrical*. The "relationship" between ethics and politics, between the other and the third, or between love and justice, *is* of an ethical, loving nature, being characterized by the continuous disruption of the otherness. The relationship between the *saying* and the *said* can only lie within a flux which is of the same nature as the saying, just as the relationship between the act of translation and that which is translated can only rest upon the translative movement itself.

Does the otherness of the other and the whole analysis that has been undertaken teach us then *also* something about the nature of translation itself, in the quest for which we parted for this journey across Levinasian waters? With no doubt. The discovery concerning the nature of translation could be resumed in the following way: if the translated, in the two senses of the word—namely, the foreign language *and* the result of the translation—can only rely upon the act of translation itself, then it means that it is not because there are, objectively, innumerous other languages in the world that we can translate. On the contrary, it is because the *I* is always disrupted by the other that we find ourselves already in a movement of translation. It is because translating exists that we can factually confront ourselves with other languages as other and constantly engage in what we day after day so ingenuously call *translations*.

Nonetheless, a question that could arise at the end of this journey and that would touch, inevitably, upon the whole trajectory that has been undertaken, is the following: is one allowed to draw such "universal" conclusions about the nature of ethics, politics, and translation by taking the indications given by one particular language as a guide—in this case, namely, the French and its *autrement*? The answer may not be an easy one, yet it lies before our eyes in a two-fold manner.

Firstly, if we admit that a thinker's reflection always takes place within one language and goes across this language in order to transcend it to a more original silence, or to a more original difference, which does not belong to a language in particular anymore—then it is only by interrogating the language in which the thinker wrote that we can reach his most intimate and, sometimes, even silent thought, being able to think *with* him *beyond* him. The French has therefore a privilege here not so much in itself, but rather because it is Levinas who, by pursuing his reflections in French, let himself be guided in these reflections—be it in an explicit or implicit manner—by the way in which this language speaks and, above all, by the way in which it allows us to understand the otherness as such.

Secondly, it is true that one might fall nonetheless into the trap of relativism and think that in this respect, every linguistically oriented analysis is condemned to remain "subjective" and "partial". Such an impression can arise, though, only from the idea that each language is to be understood as a mirror of the world, covering the latter entirely, as a perfect label would do. Under such a perspective, it is understood that once the language is changed, the world changes as well and the truths that we discovered through one language in particular prove to be untrue under the auspices of another language. Yet such a perspective upon language has no phenomenological ground and is only the fruit of metaphysical thought and speculation. On the contrary, following a phenomenologically oriented path, language appears to be, from its very beginning, a *certain* translation of the world and of its silence. Therefore, if each language is thus, already in itself, "incomplete", appearing as a rift or as an asymmetry, then on the one hand one is of course entitled to consider each language interferes with the more profound silence that we encounter through it. Each language interferes thus as well with our reflections about that which transcends language as such. On the other hand, it is only through such an interference that the rift—i.e., the translative act itself, which is not to be confounded with *any language* in particular, because it represents the gesture that each language operates with respect to silence—comes to light. If one considers these two aspects together, one comes to the following conclusion: language is not only *a certain language*, and thus "partial", "particular", but it is also, at the same time, universal. Therefore, each language can lead us to something which no language can master—and which thus appears as a sheer otherness, an *autrement* which is no longer different from

something, but allows every language and every individuality to emerge *differently*. It is maybe in this sense that instead of bringing this reflection to an end, one can now begin it anew by following the words of Levinas, be it in French or in a translated sentence: "Language is universal because it is the very passage from the individual to the general, because it offers things which are mine to the other. To speak is to make the world common, to create commonplaces. Language does not refer to the generality of concepts but lays the foundations for a possession in common […]. The world in discourse is no longer what it is in separation, in the being at home with oneself where everything is given to me; it is what I give: the communicable, the thought, the universal" (Levinas 1969, p. 76).

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