

The Gift of Hope: Emmanuel Levinas' Phenomenological Concept of Pardon

Patrick Andre C. Mencias

Far Eastern University, Manila

Abstract: This paper aims to examine the concept of pardon in Emmanuel Levinas' ethical responsibility as a gift of hope. While Levinas advocates an ethical response towards the Other that is characterized by his plight, violence also plays a role in the face-to-face ethical encounter where one chooses to either ignore, or to further inflict violence towards the Other. Levinas takes a phenomenological account of violence through its infliction to the Other which can be considered as a transgression. With violence and transgression becoming synonymous, it is therefore, worth investigating as whether Levinas would examine the role of forgiveness in his ethical responsibility. Thus, Levinas conceptualizes forgiveness or *pardon* as the undoing of time of transgression. The paper will be discussed as follows, first, is a discussion of the ontological roots of violence, and how violence manifests when the subject causes transgressions towards the Other in the ethical encounter. Second, to open the discussion of pardon within its first paradox as the "undoing of time." Third, the discussion of pardon in its second paradox as the "constitutive of time." Ultimately, the paper will conclude with how pardon is understood as a gift of hope that is rendered to the Other towards possibilities of renewal and reconciliation within Ethical Responsibility.

Keywords: Levinas, pardon, responsibility, fecundity

INTRODUCTION

What makes Emmanuel Levinas' notion of ethical responsibility interesting is its approach to ethics that focuses on the encounter with the face of the Other as an exposure to the good, and not through morals coming from a metaphysical conception of the good.¹ From here, Levinas departs from the notion of ethics as a construction of rights and wrongs; rather he intended to find the meaning for it.² Therefore, ethics is aptly characterized as a "response-ability" as it gives emphasis to the experience of how the face of the Other calls the subject, and the ability of the subject to respond towards the face.³ One could say that ethics for Levinas occurs in our everyday actions especially in the simple "after you, sir."⁴ However, within the moment of responsibility, Levinas was realistic enough to say that the response towards the face offered unto the subject is twofold; to either kill the Other, or to welcome him in his destitute character.⁵ Indeed, violence is always aimed at a face.⁶

Conversely, acts of violence can occur also in our everyday actions. To some extent, we can hurt other people when we face them. Indeed, there is a sense of realism in Levinas' philosophy when he says that in the event where the face exposes itself to us, it is an invitation for murder and non-murder. As human beings, fallible as we are, people have hurt us intentionally and unintentionally. And when we hurt other people, there is always an experience of fault and guilt because of our action. We have then

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1978), 126; See also Benjamin Hutchens, *Levinas: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York and London: Continuum, 2004), 77-78.

² Emmanuel Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. by Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 90.

³ Emmanuel Levinas, "The Paradox of Morality: An Interview with Emmanuel Levinas," in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, trans. A. Benjamin and T. Wright, ed. R. Bernasconi and D. Wood (London: Routledge, 1988), 169.

⁴ Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, 117.

⁵ Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, 86.

⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 225.

wonder, as Levinas advocates for peace in our lifetime, it is worth investigating whether there is a place for forgiveness in his philosophy of ethical responsibility. To put it simply, what does it mean to forgive the Other who has transgressed you from a Levinasian standpoint? This is the question that this paper aims to answer.

The concept of forgiveness for Levinas differs depending on which kind of work is being read. On the one hand, scholars wrote on Levinas' notion of forgiveness in the religious dimension as *Teshuvah* as the Judaic praxis forgiveness,⁷ while on the other hand, he discusses the concept of pardon as the “undoing of time” within the philosophical or the phenomenological works. Levinas clarifies that there is a difference between the philosophical and that of the confessional writings.⁸ He further explains in an interview that confessional works provide an exegesis to the philosophical.⁹ To clarify, this paper will not be a synthesis of forgiveness on both works, thus I simply narrow down the topic towards the concept of pardon within the philosophical dimension. In doing so, by way of discussion on the notion of pardon, I am coming from Robert Bernasconi's understanding of Levinasian Ethics where Levinas does not necessarily

⁷ The forgiveness in the confessional work can be found in the work entitled, “To the Other” in the book, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, wherein the article is Levinas' own commentary of the Talmud on the notion of Teshuvah delivered in a colloquium of French-Jewish intellectuals. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. by Annette Aronowicz (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 12; See also Patrick Andre C. Mencias, “Teshuvah and the Return to Goodness: Emmanuel Levinas' Concept of Forgiveness in the Religious Dimension,” in *Philippiana Sacra*, LVII:172 (January-April, 2022), 3-22.

⁸ See François Poirié and Emmanuel Levinas, “Entretiens Emmanuel Levinas–François Poirié,” in *Emmanuel Levinas. Qui êtes-vous?* (Lyon: La Manufacture 1987), 62-136. Since this is a text in French (for the sake of being accurate and specific), the statement can also be found as Roger Burggraeve discussed it. See Roger Burggraeve, *The Wisdom of Love in the Service of Love: Emmanuel Levinas on Justice, Peace and Human Rights*, trans. by Jeffrey Bloechl (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002), 188.

⁹ Levinas, “The Paradox of Morality,” 172.

construct an ethical system, but explains what is happening.¹⁰ Likewise, my way of discussing about the concept of pardon is to explain the very phenomenon of the undoing of time, and how pardon becomes the gift of hope. Aside from which, just as Levinas uses the term of “pardon,” there is no restriction as to whether pardon or forgiveness should be the term used for in so far as literature is concerned, scholars wrote on this topic with the term forgiveness.¹¹

By way of discussion, the paper divides itself into three parts, following this introduction. First, I will discuss the idea of violence in Levinas’ ethical responsibility as to illustrate how violence or transgressions occur in our everyday interactions. Second, I will open the discussion on pardon by examining its first paradox, the undoing of time. This explore how forgiveness as pardon (as coined by Levinas) allows one to be free from the burdens of his transgressions. The third part discusses the second paradox of pardon as a constitutive of a new time. When pardon allows the past to be “undone,” it constitutes another time as a time of sociality, of ethics. I hope to conclude in this paper on pardon by interpreting it in as the gift of hope, and the possibility of redemption.

VIOLENCE, TRANSGRESSION, AND ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY

According to Levinas, pardon is immediately connected to the moral phenomenon of fault.¹² This already signals how pardon begins in its connection to transgression or, perhaps in violence. In such a way, this can be understood within the context of our everyday relations with other

¹⁰ Robert Bernasconi, “Levinas’ Ethical Critique of Levinasian Ethics” in *Totality and Infinity at 50*, ed. by Scott Davidson and Diane Perpich (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2012), 255.

¹¹ Christopher Allers, “Undoing What Has Been Done: Arendt and Levinas on Forgiveness,” in *Forgiveness in Perspective* (New York: Rodopi, 2010), 20; see also Erik Severson, *Levinas’s Philosophy of Time: Gift, Responsibility, Diachrony, Hope* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2013), 124.

¹² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 282.

people. That to some extent, there are moments in our lives when we may have hurt other people. This part of the paper reexplores the concept of violence in Levinas, and how such violence occurs. However, I clarify that whenever one talks about the concept of violence in Levinas, it can either refer to the violence in human interaction, or the violence within the system of ontology. Here I will discuss both as they are linked to pardon.

In the chapter “Ethics and the face” in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas illustrates the ethical encounter between the subject and the Other as an “ethical resistance.” The ethical encounter is described as a confrontation face-to-face where the Other speaks the first message of “Thou shall not kill” to the subject. Yet, we should then clarify, how does man have this capacity or power for murder? Levinas answers the question with ontology, as a philosophy of power.¹³ Levinas argued against the very fundamentality of ontology as a mode of life. He criticizes how existence is merely an experience of conceptualizing and intellectualizing the world. Here, he refers to both Husserl’s phenomenology emphasizing on the concept of intentionality, and to Martin Heidegger’s concept of Dasein.¹⁴ Levinas further describes these philosophies as an ontology of power, or an “egology.”¹⁵ What Levinas means to emphasize here is how the concept of subjectivity tends to focus on the ego, on how meanings of one’s existence and of the world is derived from one’s consciousness.

To further elaborate, western philosophy has put the subjectivity at a pedestal. Philosophy focuses on reflecting and conceptualizing the world and understanding how man is at the very center of it. As Levinas (citing Pascal) further asserts in *Philosophy and Transcendence*:

My being-in-the-world, or my place in the sun’, my home—
have they not been the usurpation of place belonging to
others already oppressed by me or starved, expelled, to a

¹³ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁴ Levinas, “Is ontology fundamental,” in *Entre Nous: Thinking of the Other*, 1-13.

¹⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 44.

third world: rejecting, excluding, exiling, despoiling, killing. 'My place in the sun', said Pascal, the beginning, and the archetype of usurpation of the entire world.¹⁶

The passage resembles an argument against the Heideggerian Dasein as Being-in-the-world. By putting man at very center of human existence, he becomes the cause of usurpation and suffering in the world. This quest to search for meaning and conceptualizing the world, the human Other is reduced into a concept. This is what Levinas meant when the ontology of the Dasein is an "egology." The Heideggerian Dasein in the understanding of being is the whole of human behavior, "the whole man is ontology" that continually consumes the world in his intellect.¹⁷ In this regard, violence enters the picture when the subject reducing the Other towards his own consciousness. In *Diachrony and Representation*, Levinas discussed that a consciousness of the Other is a form of violence insofar as consciousness is an epistemological faculty. Consciousness reduces the Other into a concept in which the subject is conscious of. This movement of consciousness coming from the sense experience of vision where everything that the subject sees, is reduced into a concept.¹⁸ Therefore, Levinas stresses that "vision is a search for adequation"¹⁹, and later adds that "Murder aims at a sensible datum, and Other is the sole being I wish to kill."²⁰

Fleurdeliz Altez-Albela reverberates Levinas in explaining philosophical violence in the context of epistemology and ontology. For epistemology, thinking of the Other in the epistemic tradition reduces the otherness of the Other that in such a way that "thinking" encloses the Other

¹⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, "Philosophy and transcendence," in *Alterity and Transcendence*, trans. by Michael B. Smith (London: Athlone Press, 1999), 23.

¹⁷ Levinas, "Is ontology fundamental," 2.

¹⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, "Diachrony and Representation," in *Time and the Other* trans. by Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1981), 90.

¹⁹ Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 87.

²⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 198

into concepts. Furthermore, Altez-Albela bridges the epistemological and the ontological by showing the shift from the “I think” to “I can,” hinting that the two are connected to one another.²¹ Additionally, Roger Burggraeve describes violence as a “grasping knowledge” in the context when we understand that “knowledge is power,” the said knowledge is to have power over the Other by reducing him into a concept.²²

Coming from Levinas’ experience during the Holocaust, this tendency to conceptualize the Other is linked to the experience of anti-Semitism where Jews are reduced into conceptions that deprive them of their humanity. “Anti-Semitism is the archetype of such interment which eventually social aggression, fighting and violence imitates it.”²³ At this point, we can understand that being violent towards the Other person starts from conceptualizing him into a concept which becomes the reason why we inflict violence towards them. Therefore, it is easy to justify violence because we can give reasons towards it. Just as how Jews during the Holocaust were easily hurt and killed for being of “inferior status.”²⁴ Levinas challenges this tendency to conceptualize by putting subjectivity starting from the concept of freedom into a “freedom put into question.”²⁵ By putting freedom into question, ethical resistance occurs as the Infinite within the Other renders this “power” from subjectivity as powerless in the encounter face-to-face.²⁶ Hence, the ethical encounter is a resistance towards the subject’s freedom when he hears of the first message “Thou

²¹ Fleurdeliz R. Altez, “Banal and Implied Forms of Violence in Levinas’ Phenomenological Ethics,” *Kritike*, 1:1 (2007), 52-55.

²² Roger Burggraeve, *Proximity with the Other: A Multidimensional Ethic of Responsibility in Levinas* (India: Dharmaram Publications, 2009), 15.

²³ Emmanuel Levinas, “The Name of a Dog or Natural Rights,” in *Difficult Freedom*, trans. by Sean Hand (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990), 153.

²⁴ Anita Meinbach and Miriam Klein Kassenoff, *Memories of the Night: Studies of the Holocaust* (Norwood, Massachusetts: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc., 2004), 6, 13-14.

²⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 43.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 199.

shall not kill.”²⁷ The face of the Other challenges our tendency and capacity towards murder.

Levinas clarifies that violence does not always have to be in the form of actual killing of the other person with a gun, but it can also be through our everyday actions like drinking Ethiopian coffee and killing an Ethiopian who does not have food in the process. At the same time, Levinas also asserts that the commandment of “loving thy neighbor” is the same as loving the stranger as it expressed in several ways.²⁸ In another sense, violence occurs when a person becomes indifferent or a refusal to hear the first message from the Other.²⁹ Indifference is best exemplified when referenced to Levinas’ experience from the concentration camps during the second world war. Levinas exposed an irony where a dog named “Bobby” was able to see the humanity, the human face of the Other within him and his companions in the camps, rather than the Nazi soldiers who treated them as subhuman, and a gang of apes.³⁰

In a positive aspect, the ethical encounter is what makes our everyday interactions with other people possible. Just like the simple “After you, sir!” when holding the door for another person. Ethics is presupposed in all human relationships, and it occurs in our mundane lives.³¹ This signifies what I mean that while ethics happens within our every action, so is violence. I interpret violence can become forms of transgressions that we have done towards the Other in our everyday interactions.

“Loving thy stranger” then implies our responsibility in the ethical encounter, as to respond towards a face whose first message expresses his nude, destitute, poor character. By contrast, another example comes to mind as Levinas comments on Vasily Grossman’s *Life and Fate*, where Levinas emphasizes on a woman who hated the Nazi soldiers, gave them

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 195-200.

²⁸ Levinas, “The Paradox of Morality: An Interview with Emmanuel Levinas.”, 173.

²⁹ Levinas, “Ethics and Spirit” in *Difficult Freedom*, 10.

³⁰ Levinas, “The Name of a Dog or Natural Rights,” 152-153.

³¹ Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 89.

her last piece of bread for them to eat.³² This best shows the radicality and weight of being responsible for the Other.

As an alternative, in the preface of the 1987 German translation of *Totality and Infinity* highlights Levinas' assertion of the "human nakedness" where the meaningfulness of life is not found in reason and the capacity to conceptualize the world, but to an exposure to face of suffering in its "hidden misery."³³ Therefore, the trajectory of Levinas' philosophy is a critique of western subjectivity, through a mode of life that is not concerned with conceptualization, and the pursuit of meaning. Rather, to exist is to become ethical for the Other.

PARDON AND THE UNDOING OF TIME

Understanding the concept of pardon in Levinas' philosophy is not simple as it sounds. Levinas wrote the concept of pardon within the last part of his book in *Totality and Infinity*. Scholars have differing opinions about the themes and discussions on the last chapter of the book. On the one hand, Adriaan Peperzak asserts that the fourth and final part of the book entitled "Beyond the Face" has an unclear function in such a way, it gives another kind of relationship with the Other as it focuses on the concepts of the origins of intimacy and eros.³⁴ Robert Bernasconi, on the other hand, clarifies that the fourth chapter illustrates different modes of transcendence, other than the transcendence found in the ethical encounter or from the former chapters. The ethical relation with the subject and the Other is the same thing as the relation with the father and the child in paternity, where both relations are "concretizations of transcendence."³⁵

³² Emmanuel Levinas, "Interview with Francois Priorie," in *Is it Righteous to be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. by Jill Robbins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 81, 89.

³³ Levinas, "The Preface to the German Edition of *Totality and Infinity* (1987)," in *Entre Nous: Thinking of the Other*, 198.

³⁴ Adriaan Peperzak, *To The Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1993), 120-121.

³⁵ Bernasconi, "Levinas' Ethical Critique of Levinasian Ethics," 259, 265.

With this being said, pardon, as it is encapsulated within the fourth chapter of *Totality and Infinity* should be understood as a concretization of transcendence. Levinas here gives situations and dynamics where responsibility is manifested in concrete ways. The experience of pardon (which I will discuss afterwards), is immediately tied towards an experience of becoming responsible for the Other as it is concretized in this particular dynamic.

Totality and Infinity illustrates the idea of pardon in this statement:

The **paradox of pardon lies in its retroaction; from the point of view of common time it represents an inversion of the natural order of things, the reversibility of time.** It involves several aspects. Pardon refers to the instant elapsed; **it permits the subject who had committed himself in a past instant to be as though that instant had not past on, to be as though he had not committed himself.** Active in a stronger sense than forgetting, which does not concern the reality of the event forgotten, pardon acts upon the past, somehow repeats the event, purifying it. But in addition, forgetting nullifies the relations with the past, **whereas pardon conserves the past pardoned in the purified present.** The pardoned being is not the innocent being. The difference does not justify placing innocence above pardon; it permits the discerning in pardon of a surplus of happiness, the strange happiness of reconciliation, the **felix culpa**, given in an everyday experience which no longer astonishes us.³⁶

³⁶ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 281-282. Emphasis is mine.

To describe briefly, the experience of pardon comes in the very undoing of the time of transgression that has been elapsed. The subject is permitted to return to such past in order to “undo the past,” as though the subject has never committed to such. In the process of its purification, the past is then remembered as a *felix culpa*, or a happy fault. But how can forgiving the guilty person for the transgression he has made become undone?

Levinas further clarifies that undoing the past is not by way of forgetting the transgression done in the past. Rather, pardon acts upon the past, conserves it and purifies it. The importance of understanding this purification of the past entails that there is a need to conserve the past. Scholars such as Bernasconi and Allers noted on its importance. Robert Bernasconi emphasizes that the conservation of the past is crucial to pardon for there is a need for a recollection of such past to purify it. The purification of the past would then entail the experience of the *felix culpa* as the very liberation from burden.³⁷ Christopher Allers emphasizes how the transgressor is freed from the consequences and the burdens of the deed itself.³⁸ David Michael Kleinburg-Levin, on the other hand, deepens the understanding of the need to liberate the person from the past within the context of suffering. He emphasizes that the Other suffers because of the transgressions that he made. Recchoing Levinas’ ideas from his latter work, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, Kleinburg-Levin asserts that our corporeal nature as human as becoming sensible to suffering radicalizes our responsibility to forgive. Therefore, pardon plays a role to allow the suffering Other to embrace humanity once again.³⁹ Bernasconi

³⁷ Robert Bernasconi, “Hegel and Levinas: The Possibility of Forgiveness and Reconciliation,” in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 66.

³⁸ Christopher Allers, “Undoing What Has Been Done: Arendt and Levinas on Forgiveness,” in *Forgiveness in Perspective* (New York: Rodopi, 2010), 22-30.

³⁹ David Michael Kleinberg-Levin, “Persecution: The Self at the Heart of Metaphysics,” in *Addressing Levinas*, ed. by Eric Sean Nelson, Antje Kapust, and Kent Still (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 203-208, 220-224.

and Allers is correct to insist that the pardon does not forget the transgression. Purifying the past would not make sense if such past were forgotten, hence, there can be no possible experience of the *felix culpa* without remembering the past in its purified sense. Kleinburg-Levin's account is a unique approach towards pardon that it focused on what Fleurdeliz Altez-Albela calls the "affective level" in the hermeneutic possibilities of reading Levinas.⁴⁰

My take on the discourse on interpreting of pardon is that Levinas provides concepts that portray certain emotions to describe the experience of pardon. Kleinburg-Levin's work is a good primer to describe pardon in its affective level. While Bernasconi and Allers focused on the logic of the experience of the "felix culpa" where the past is needed to be preserved, Kleinburg-Levin focused on the suffering experienced by the Other. Pardon is only about the experience of the undoing of time, but there is the dynamic of bearing the weight of responsibility assigned towards us that eventually challenge one to forgive. It is one thing to understand the function of pardon in undoing the time of transgression, but it is another to talk about the intricacies of what makes us infinitely responsible to forgive. Just like how one experiences the epiphany of the face in the ethical encounter, the encounter can be understood coming from its affective level where indeed the face confronts us in his plight. Taking this affectivity into consideration, it is with no doubt that pardon entails an experience of foregoing of oneself to forgive. This is why Pardon can be understood a "gift." Like responsibility, to forgive a person comes to us in a surprise and affects our being that challenges our subjectivity. By undoing the past, and transforming it into a *felix culpa*, it is a gift that we can give to the Other.

To some extent, the experience of pardon is something that indeed no longer astonishes us just like how Levinas describes it. By way of example, there is a scenario when friends talk about their past transgression with laughter. I see this as a concrete experience of pardon.

⁴⁰ Fleurdeliz R. Altez-Albela, "Exploring Hermeneutic Possibilities of the Levinasian Texts," in *Unitas*, 79:3 (March 2007), 563-567.

When friends hurt or transgressed one another in either words or deeds, that event of transgression is usually be remembered among them. While the past where transgression occurred is still conserved, pardon purifies it. It repairs the past, seeing it in another light. Friends will remember the transgression as a part of growing up, and to be a starting point for maturation, rather than remembering the pain it has brought to their friendship. This is perhaps what it means to experience *felix culpa* or a happy fault, where a painful past becomes a past that brings a sense of joy in remembering it.

PARDON WITHIN THE CONCEPT OF FECUNDITY

Following the first paradox discussed in the preceding chapter, pardon has another paradox. The second paradox lie in constituting another time.⁴¹ This means to say, while pardon has the capacity to “undo” of the past where the transgression occurred turning it into an experience of *felix culpa*, pardon also constitutes another “time.” After the violent past becomes a purified past, then what kind of time does pardon constitute? What happens next? And to whose time does it constitute? In the following paragraphs, I aim to discuss the idea of pardon as constituting a time of “sociality” as Levinas mentions in *Time and the Other*.⁴² Here I will be discussing how pardon can also affect the subject, or the subject can be worthy of receiving pardon. In doing so, I aim to discuss the connection of pardon with the concepts of fecundity as found in *Totality and Infinity*.

Again, the experience of pardon is a connection with my past that aims to be purified. As previously discussed, the self is trapped within the linear concept of time as they are bound between the past and the future. Levinas initially describes time as being trapped within one’s history,

⁴¹ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 283.

⁴² Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. by Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1981), 30-31.

making himself irreparable to the transgressions he has done.⁴³ Here, the subjectivity is linked with the linearity of time and history, his personhood is limited to the historical events that transpired in his subjectivity. He is trapped within his own faults because history designates a character of him, or a person is simply judged according to his past. In such a way, it is a form of violence that totalizes the Other. As Levinas emphasizes, memory is found in the incorruptibility of the past, on the return of the I to itself⁴⁴ Nietzsche says something similar about memory in which a “resentful man” does not know how to forget, which[memory] becomes the basis for hatred and revenge.⁴⁵

To be free from the past, the Other is required. The concept of Fecundity takes part on the discussion of pardon where the Other or the subject has the capacity renew oneself. Pardon is immediately connected to the concept of fecundity where Levinas describes the ethical relation between the subject and the Other, as a father and child. This is one of the “concretizations of transcendence” that Bernasconi talks about. Levinas uses familiar terminologies and metaphors to illustrate how responsibility occurs. Edith Wyschogrod considers pardon and fecundity as an “inseparable phenomenon.”⁴⁶ Accordingly, the father is related to the child, but Levinas clarifies that the child is not owned by the father. As Levinas quotes from the Bible, “my child is a stranger to me.” This means to say, Levinas rejects the possibilities of seeing the child as project of the father. In another metaphor, Levinas mentions the story of Pygmalion. The child or the Other is neither a project nor an alter-ego of the self.⁴⁷ The child is

⁴³ Emmanuel Levinas, “Reflection on the Philosophy of Hitlerism,” in *Critical Inquiry*, 17:1 (Autumn, 1990), 65.

⁴⁴ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 52, 282.

⁴⁵ Paolo Bolanos, *On Affirmation and Becoming: A Deleuzian Introduction to Nietzsche's Ethics and Ontology* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 31.

⁴⁶ Edith Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 126.

⁴⁷ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 267-268.

simply his own and left to create his own possibilities. This relation is what characterizes as Paternity, the very establishment of relation with the child. Fecundity then, is to establish a relation with an absolute future, or infinite time.⁴⁸ This relation with what is called an *absolute future* refers to a metaphor that Levinas uses in order to describe the alterity of the Other, in this regard to that of the child. A relationship with the future is something that is beyond my grasp as a subject. Levinas writes in *Time and the Other* describing the fecundity as a way of “pluralistic existing” where the father does not lose himself while being in relationship with the child who is also complete Other.⁴⁹ With this being said, the relationship in Paternity is Levinas way of describing a relationship where both the subject and the Other completely remain as different to one another, while however having a relationship. Edith Wyschogrod affirms this conception of paternity insofar as they emphasize that paternity or “Paternal love” means to love the other as a unique one.⁵⁰ However, in the last part of the subchapter dedicated to fecundity, Levinas insists a trajectory of fecundity that in the relation between the father and the child differing from one another, there is an engendering of goodness. When the father allows the child *to be* in his own possibilities, in respect to his alterity, the child engenders the goodness he experiences from his father, and it shall in a way, pass on this goodness to other people. This is what Levinas imagines a fecundity engendering fecundity, a goodness of goodness or a gift that keeps on giving as Bernasconi describes it.⁵¹ To be clear, paternity is the establishment of responsibility between the father and the child, fecundity on the other hand is the effect of engendering goodness born out of the initial relationship between the father and the child.

Following the same paragraph in pardon, Levinas mentions that the past of the subject is linked towards me in the ethical relation with the child.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 267-269.

⁴⁹ Levinas, *Time and the Other*, 91-92.

⁵⁰ Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics*, 124.

⁵¹ Bernasconi, “Levinas’ Ethical Critique of Levinasian Ethics,” 260.

My past, my irreparable past is again connected to me once again. If fecundity is the very engendering of goodness, I interpret that function of pardon as the undoing of time is to release the subject from his past by constituting a new time, a time of goodness. As Levinas further discusses, “time brings something new to being” and the profound work of time is delivering the father from the past, and break from it. Levinas describes this an “ever-recommencing alterity.”⁵² This means to say, there is function of pardon where the subject, trapped within the violence of being a historical being, carrying the burden of his transgressions, is freed from such state. This is where hope is situated. By realizing that one can change and not to be trapped within the past is where hope manifests for the subject.

On the one hand, Robert Gibbs would describe this experience of pardon within the father and child as an “intergenerational imagery” where the child bears this imagery of his father for being related towards him, but his alterity as a child, has the capacity of retelling the narrative.⁵³ On the other hand, Peperzak would describe the act of pardon as revolt against the linearity of time where the father is trapped.⁵⁴ These interpretations emphasize the role of pardon to break the irreparable past of the subject. In paternity, a relationship is already established without our consent, just as how responsibility comes to us in a “surprise.”⁵⁵ Likewise, children cannot choose their fathers, yet at the same time, since the child is not a project of the father, a child is charged with a certain form of responsibility towards hope.

I take that the second paradox in pardon as a way of reversal. It is a reversal in the sense that we usually know that pardon is something that we give to the Other. Yet here, pardon is also something that is given unto us by the Other. By way of discussion, I explain the phenomena on how

⁵² Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 283.

⁵³ Robert Gibbs, *Why Ethics? Signs of Responsibilities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 348-352.

⁵⁴ Peperzak, *To The Other*, 198-202.

⁵⁵ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 271.

pardon works according to Levinas from the perspective of receiving it. This does not necessarily mean that seeing it from the perspective of the receiver would entail subjectivity or coming back to oneself. Like Levinas, he wonders if there is a possibility of discontinuity between the past and the I or the subject. He writes this in the preceding paragraphs before the exposition of pardon. As fallible as a human person is, it is plausible to think if there is hope for a person who is trapped within his irreparable past. A discontinuity is needed to be emphasized as Levinas asserts.⁵⁶

If we are to take this in its strict biological sense in the father and the child as Edith Wyschogrod⁵⁷ thought, the father can be pardoned of the transgression he has made in the past where it made a mark to his character. This “sinful” or corrupted past that the father endures is discontinued in the very act of the son pardoning the father. He is given another chance in life, a recommencement of a youth that allows him to embark towards a new adventure.

An example that comes to my mind is the Philippine commercial of Vicks Vaporub highlighting the story of Rhyz Hernando adopting an orphan. To summarize the story, Rhyz Hernando, a known syndicate and unemployed man in the slums was confronted with a situation where an orphan baby next door was abandoned. The endless crying of the orphan baby continually disturbed Hernando’s sleep which eventually paved way to adopting the child. The story highlights this redemptive arc of Hernando that in the coming of this orphan into his life, it became an impetus for him to change his lifestyle to give life to his child. The commercial ends with Hernando saying “*sabi nila binuhay ko siya, pero ang totoo binuhay niya*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁵⁷ Wyschogrod strictly interprets the idea of fecundity in its biological sense. Wyschogrod interprets it this way precisely because she understands the concept of fecundity as an “infinition” or a mode of production of goodness where human continuity is guaranteed. She understands the idea of pardon and fecundity as an inseparable phenomenon where pardon functions as a redemptive measure to redeem the past for the generations to come. See Wyschogrod, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics*, 125-127.

ako” (people said I gave him life, [but] the truth is, he made mine worth living).⁵⁸ When the commercial is seen within a Levinasian lens, one can see how the ethical relation and fecundity is a concretization of transcendence. The coming of the orphan baby to Hernando’s life is an encounter beyond the anticipation of Hernando, the child or the Other came in a surprise. Just like the ethical encounter, Hernando’s subjectivity is now put into question, as to whether become responsible to the child. The crying that he hears resembles the first message of the Other of “Thou Shall not Kill.” In turn, Hernando is charged with the responsibility of taking care of the orphan baby. The second paradox of Pardon here is emphasized as the very renewal of Hernando’s life that the child gives in his coming. Pardon in this sense is not necessarily characterized in the act of forgiving after an apology is given, but a form of forgiveness that reconciles Hernando’s past that eventually allow him to be a better person. While it can be argued that Hernando is not biologically related to the orphan, it raises a discussion in understanding paternity and fecundity whether in its literal or metaphorical. With Wyschogrod who understands the function of pardon and fecundity in its biological sense where she emphasizes the idea of “infinition” of goodness where paternal love as loving the Other as a unique Other produces goodness that the child bears, and how pardon redeems a past that has been corrupted. Peperzaak asserts on the other hand that there is a need to move away from the biological understanding of fecundity.⁵⁹ With Levinas as the final arbiter of this divide, he argues that while relations within the biological create a prototype of the relations, there is a need to free themselves from such limitation.⁶⁰ My position in this debate is that fecundity and pardon go both ways, and have different implication on both the strict biological and the metaphorical. It is difficult to understand the concept of fecundity and

⁵⁸ “Learning to love,” YouTube video, 4:14, posted by VicksPhilippines (21 January 2018), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vqqT9bjCgU&t=3s>>.

⁵⁹ Peperzak, *To the Other*, 198.

⁶⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 256-257.

pardon without a concrete imagery of the family as the very starting point. Just like Wyschogrod's understanding, pardon assists in the intergenerational account of goodness, the engendering of goodness from beyond my time.

And as we can see, there are certain events in the lives of families, like that of Rhyz Hernando where he stood as a father-figure to a child, his life was changed as characterized by the redemptive power of pardon. But understanding it as a metaphor would imply that Levinas uses the family as a more vivid description of ethical responsibility. When Levinas also argued that we are all "brothers" in *Totality and Infinity*, it moves away from the biological.⁶¹ Just as how one can become friends again with people we have hurt, and we can remember our transgressions in another light or "felix culpa." Indeed, pardon and fecundity apply to everyone, insofar as Levinas argues that our responsibility opens to all of humanity through the face of the Other.⁶²

PARDON AS THE GIFT OF HOPE AND THE POSSIBILITY OF REDEMPTION

That because of the effects the of Pardon promises, there is a possibility that we may think of forgiveness within the level of self-centeredness. That one may have other reasons to forgive the Other or seek forgiveness from the Other because of this renewal that pardon offers. In this regard, there is a need to qualify what it means to forgive or to grant pardon. It should be clear, that a person forgives the Other not because it comes from his consciousness or subjectivity, but it is because forgiveness is the response towards the Other who apologizes. Bernasconi inverts the Hegelian reconciliation that forgiving the Other is not due to the virtue of the one who forgives, but it focuses on the one being forgiven.⁶³ There is an

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 189-190.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 213.

⁶³ Bernasconi, "Hegel and Levinas," 66.

emphasis on the asymmetrical relationship of the subject and the Other; where the subject is responsible to the Other regardless of if whether the Other becomes responsible for him contrary to the Hegelian mutual recognition. Reciprocity is the affair of the Other as Levinas reminds us.⁶⁴ Severson would think that the need for the Other in order to forgive oneself to be liberated from my guilt is a false sense of pardon.⁶⁵ To think of forgiveness in this level means to say that when the Other has offended us, we have the Other placing us in a disposition of granting pardon towards him. It may sound as if it is a position of power, knowing that you only have the capacity to forgive as a transgressed party. This makes forgiving difficult that Levinas himself finds it difficult to forgive Heidegger.⁶⁶ To grant pardon, despite of this difficulty is a radicality that one must overcome. But to overcome our selfishness makes pardon have a significant value, while it is a response, it becomes a gift.

It is fitting to think that Levinas uses the term pardon in its French sense as something to be given. It becomes a gift that is given even to the point of not asking for it.⁶⁷ Understanding pardon as the gift of hope encapsulates the two paradoxes discussed above. As a gift, it allows the transgressor Other to return towards his humanity, and in another sense, it gives provides a breath of fresh air to the subject burdened with a corrupted past. I take this idea of gift of hope coming from Severson that the act of pardon is directed against the “irreparable past” where the subject is trapped within its confines. He reverberates Levinas in *Existence and*

⁶⁴ Levinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 98.

⁶⁵ Severson, *Levinas's Philosophy of Time*, 63, 125.

⁶⁶ Levinas' controversial statement regarding Heidegger has several answers as to why he finds it difficult to forgive Heidegger. Forgiveness has a certain dynamic within the context of Levinas' conception of politics in the entry of the Third. That Pardon within a close society between a subject and the Other disregards that of the third. Pardon becomes difficult when the third is taken into consideration. This is perhaps another reason why Levinas finds it difficult to forgive Heidegger. You can find this statement in “To the Other” from *Nine Talmudic Readings*. See Emmanuel Levinas, “To the Other” in *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. by Annette Aronowicz (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 25.

⁶⁷ Michael de Saint Cheron, *Conversations with Emmanuel Levinas 1983-1994*, trans. by Gary D. Mole (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2010), 119.

Existents that hope manifests itself as an escape from the inescapability of the present that is burdened with suffering of the past.⁶⁸ Severson then examines that it is through the function of time as sociality, the encounter with the Other where hope is found. Hope becomes a gift that one experiences from the Other.⁶⁹ It is sufficing to say that whenever one grants pardon, it resembles as a gift that is given for the Other even without the Other asking for it. For the Other who has transgressed against one, it is pardon gives him a sense of hope that he may be ethical once more.

To summarize, the realism in Levinas' ethics tells us that our everyday actions with other people reflect responsibility for the Other. Violence occurs due to man's freedom, and it is through our encounter with the face that puts this freedom into question in its spontaneity.⁷⁰ The first paradox of pardon highlights the release of man's burden from the weight of his transgression. I emphasize on the first paradox is the experience of pardon in its affective level, other than its function of purifying the past. Pardon is concretized in the face-to-face encounter with the Other. But such encounter entails an infinite demand for our responsibility. Indeed, the first message of the Other of "thou shall not kill" turns into "I am sorry" in the phenomenon of pardon, and I am elected to respond to such. Consequently, I emphasize on the second paradox is the reversal of effect in pardon where the self can be given hope. The Other can be freed from their corrupted past in forgiving them. The same can be said towards the self, where the Other's forgiveness would free oneself from one's own past. I wish to clarify however, while pardon can affect both the offended and the offender, pardon within fecundity emphasizes on the engendering of responsibility towards the child who is also an Other. This does not mean that becoming responsible for the child is a guarantee that one may be pardoned of his own past. The alterity of the child is what marks himself

⁶⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Press, 1978), 93-94.

⁶⁹ Severson, *Levinas's Philosophy of Time*, 61-65.

⁷⁰ Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 43.

separated from the father. The child is not an alter ego of the father, but the child has the capacity to pardon the father through his responsibility towards other people, in the engendering of responsibility. If the father is trapped within an irreparable past, not only can the child do away with inheriting that past, by virtue of his alterity, he can choose to become responsible for the Other as to break the continuity. Releasing the father from his corrupted past. There is a possibility of breaking generational curses and bad habits within pardon and fecundity.

Despite of the difficulty that there is in the process of forgiving, I interpret that Levinas helps us confront this challenge by reminding ourselves of our ethical nature. The responsibility to forgive is not only a sign of our capability to respond towards an Other who expresses his suffering in the face-to-face encounter, but it becomes a gift of hope that allows people to realize our humanity despite our fallibility as human beings as we release them from the burdens of the past. We are given hope by the Other to be redeemed, and to likewise realize how pardon is a gift that is simply given to the Other in their frailty.

REFERENCES

- “Learning to love,” YouTube video, 4:14, posted by VicksPhilippines (21 January 2018), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3vqqT9bjCgU&t=3s>>.
- Allers, Christopher, “Undoing What Has Been Done: Arendt and Levinas on Forgiveness,” in *Forgiveness in Perspective* (New York: Rodopi, 2010).
- Allers, Christopher, “Undoing What Has Been Done: Arendt and Levinas on Forgiveness,” in *Forgiveness in Perspective* (New York: Rodopi, 2010).
- Altez, Fleurdeliz R., “Banal and Implied Forms of Violence in Levinas’ Phenomenological Ethics,” *Kritike*, 1:1 (2007).
- _____, “Exploring Hermeneutic Possibilities of the Levinasian Texts,” in *Unitas*, 79:3 (March 2007).
- Bernasconi, Robert, “Hegel and Levinas: The Possibility of Forgiveness and Reconciliation,” in *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical Assessments of Leading Philosophers* (New York: Routledge, 2005).
- _____, “Levinas’ Ethical Critique of Levinasian Ethics” in *Totality and Infinity at 50*, ed. by Scott Davidson and Diane Perpich (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2012).
- Bolanos, Paolo A., *On Affirmation and Becoming: A Deluegian Introduction to Nietzsche’s Ethics and Ontology* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014).
- Burggraeve, Roger, *Proximity with the Other: A Multidimensional Ethic of Responsibility in Levinas* (India: Dharmaram Publications, 2009).
- _____, *The Wisdom of Love in the Service of Love: Emmanuel Levinas on Justice, Peace and Human Rights*, trans. by Jeffrey Bloechl (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2002).
- de Saint Cheron, Michael, *Conversations with Emmanuel Levinas 1983-1994*, trans. by Gary D. Mole (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2010).

-
- Gibbs, Robert, *Why Ethics? Signs of Responsibilities* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).
- Hutchens, Benjamin, *Levinas: A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York and London: Continuum, 2004), 77-78.
- Kleinberg-Levin, David Michael, "Persecution: The Self at the Heart of Metaphysics," in *Addressing Levinas*, ed. by Eric Sean Nelson, Antje Kapust, and Kent Still (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2005).
- Levinas, Emmanuel, "Diachrony and Representation," in *Time and the Other* trans. by Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1981).
- _____, "Interview with Francois Priorie," in *Is it Righteous to be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas*, ed. by Jill Robbins (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).
- _____, "Philosophy and transcendence," in *Alterity and Transcendence*, trans. by Michael B. Smith (London: Athlone Press, 1999).
- _____, "Reflection on the Philosophy of Hitlerism," in *Critical Inquiry*, 17:1 (Autumn, 1990).
- _____, "The Name of a Dog or Natural Rights," in *Difficult Freedom*, trans. by Sean Hand (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990).
- _____, "The Paradox of Morality: An Interview with Emmanuel Levinas," in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, trans. A. Benjamin and T. Wright, ed. R. Bernasconi and D. Wood (London: Routledge, 1988).
- _____, "To the Other" in *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. by Annette Aronowicz (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990).
- _____, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. by Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985).
-

-
- _____, *Existence and Existents*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Press, 1978).
- _____, *Nine Talmudic Readings*, trans. by Annette Aronowicz (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990).
- _____, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1978).
- _____, *Time and the Other*, trans. by Richard Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1981).
- _____, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969).
- Meinbach, Anita and Miriam Klein Kassenoff, *Memories of the Night: Studies of the Holocaust* (Norwood, Massachusetts: Christopher-Gordon Publishers, Inc., 2004).
- Mencias, Patrick Andre C., “Teshuvah and the Return to Goodness: Emmanuel Levinas’ Concept of Forgiveness in the Religious Dimension,” in *Philippiniana Sacra*, LVII:172 (January-April, 2022).
- Peperzak, Adriaan, *To The Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1993).
- Poirié, François and Emmanuel Levinas, “Entretiens Emmanuel Levinas–François Poirié,” in *Emmanuel Levinas. Qui êtes-vous?* (Lyon: La Manufacture 1987).
- Severson, Erik, *Levinas’s Philosophy of Time: Gift, Responsibility, Diachrony, Hope* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2013).
- Wyschogrod, Edith, *Emmanuel Levinas: The Problem of Ethical Metaphysics* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974).