
II. UNMASKING SOCIAL REALITY

Personal Identity: From Belonging Toward Responsibility

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Abstract

Traditionally, we identify ourselves by our belonging to the Whole—of the Cosmos, Nature, Society, State, Community, Family, etc. But following Levinas' philosophy, this paper discusses responsibility as another kind of personal identification.

Key words: identification, otherness, rights, community, ethics, politics

Personal identity as belonging to the totality

In Early Modernity people began to identify themselves by their belonging to society as a totality. They wanted to overcome provincial borders following the new sense of cosmopolitanism, that is, of universality. There was a demand to grasp what was common among all people on the planet and to extend this humanness over the whole of humanity. The universal nature of man was identified with Reason. But to recognize those rules which can sustain the tests of universality and which in this way are reasonable is a task originally condemned to failure. In fact, universal citizenship means extra-territoriality and extra-temporality. The requirement for universality implies rejecting particular claims linked with time and place. For the particular claims are restricted in space and time but pretend to be everlasting and unbounded and such claims contradict both each other and the proclaimed common interest. But the postulate of human nature, which consists in the universality of reason, was compatible to the ambitions and actions of the modern State leading war against the local authorities

who mediate between State power and individuals.

Universality itself or civilization (where civilization is understood as striving for the ideal of universality) has protected itself by self-empowerment distancing and excluding those who have not been sufficiently universalized (civilized) or in exercising pressure and coercion over them. And when the standards of universalization have already been accepted and the empowered central authority has become aware of being unchallenged, it has started to maintain a different policy and to allow inclusion and recognition of earlier excluded and unrecognized ones in order to avoid criticism of intolerance. Usually, this new task has been performed through integration and/or pluralization techniques.

The principle of universal participation, which earlier had been maintained by overcoming a lot of barriers to underestimating various local and particular differences, now starts to look like the principle of totalitarianism or the totalitarian State. It has been blamed by many for all evils in public life since it uniforms, homogenizes, and excludes. It has been believed that this principle can be improved relying on variety and even that it can be substituted with the principle of pluralism. However, no matter what the new freedom, diversity, tolerance and respect to differences the pluralistic attitude brings, as a negation of unity, it is only a reaction “led by the nose” by the discourse favoring unity. Pluralization opposes totalization by implying it. The diversification and recognition of the differences happens at the background of universalization and usually establishes a second reflective level of the discourse, which cannot avoid acknowledgment of totality posed as a basis. Diversity itself, as a philosophical category and pluralism as principle, acquire sense thanks to the criticisms against the Whole. Pluralism itself is a negation of identity, of unified principle, of universality, but exactly as a negation, as a simple reaction, it is its hostage - negation is always dependent and derivative. Pluralism does not leave the borders within the Whole; it lives in the shadow of the notion of totality.

The epoch of Modern Times proclaims inclusion of everyone into citizenship and equality of all citizens in the State. This has been completed primarily via neutralizing differences. Many see the hidden basis of this

view in the market tendency to ascribe quantitative expression to qualitative characteristics by evaluating them. Qualitative differences are reduced to their money equivalent so that the natural movement of capital leads to neutralization, homogenization, unification, etc. But today a critique of uniformity has started, in spite of this still active tendency, due to the logic of capital, which is the same no matter where the capital is invested. The critique stresses that the common rules and laws before which all are equal (as it was suggested during Early Modernity), do not take into consideration individual and group peculiarities. It is clear that differences are of prime importance for market consumption and since the markets are already global today, newer and newer differences emerge. In the globalizing world, politics and culture of differences oppose culture and politics of uniformity and want to put it aside. Actually however, as Zygmunt Bauman emphasizes, globalization goes hand in hand with localization¹.

In the globalization process, the first evidence which comes to the fore is the opening of identities and liquidizing of the whole. Individuals and groups are understood not as a steady closet, whole and defined by the individual or/and group characteristics fixed forever, but rather as identification processes. They are thought of as constructed, as more or less changeable and temporary “identifications”.

It is true that contemporary communities in a much higher degree than in the past, have as their principle pluralism. They are multiracial, multinational, multicultural, multiethnic, etc., so it is possible to claim (although with hyperbole) that communication within them does not differ significantly from the communication outside. But in this condition of pluralism, and we can add of fragmentarization and hybridization (in Late Modernity) as well as of homogenization and unification (in Early Modernity), the universality as an emblem of humanity in humans if not outdated, at least is not sufficient. It is perceived that the particular differences are of enormous importance and cannot be neglected. Most of our contemporary social problems concern exactly policies and culture of difference. A direct reference of the individual to the social entirety ignores

¹ Zygmunt Bauman. *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), p. 2.

the mediating role of communities and the irreducible difference of individuals.

In Modernity efforts were directed first of all to discovering what was valid for “everyone”. In Postmodernity this main opposition “individual-society” is preserved but an attempt is made to restore as the rights of various particular communities and groups so the rights of the individual uniqueness which in the previous epochs had been underestimated or denied in the name of defending the totality.

The advantages and the disadvantages of social and political discourse of a pluralistic society are explicated and seen in the unabated debate between liberals and communitarians. Proceeding mainly from empirical observations both camps admit that the universal point of view does not pay attention to particularities and diversities and in this way is utopian and leads to illusions. Besides, it is unjust and namely here unfolds their critical pathos. People inevitably consider the emerging problems and participate in the course of events under the influence of their life experience and their perception in the social surrounding. They are formed in the process of socialization in different groups and communities. Their history is that unconscious, as Bourdieu calls it, which manifests itself publicly as different habitual practices. The differences are not only a result of the oppositions of interests and applications of different tactics of self-defense but are an effect from a different past, culture, status, forms of communication and functions in society. All these factors determine different understanding and evaluation of social relationships and order, different motivation of their social and political activities.

But if we have a preference for differences, this means to fall into the trap of fragmentation. Exactly that causes trouble for liberals and communitarians - what they want is to avoid it at any expense. In fragmentation and heterogeneity, again and probably even stronger than in the unification, we face the exclusion of individuals and groups defined as different in relation to the norm determined by certain powerful interests portraying themselves as “common” and even “universal”. In the pluralized society people are not forced “to develop, civilize, and improve” according to a given standards in catching up with “more developed, civilized, and

more advanced” groups and societies but are allowed “to be as they are”. However, a significant part of groups - if not *de jure*, and least *de facto* - occupied the weaker position, the marginalized one, that of the minority suffering of being ignored or/and deprived, often repressed, with no right of say as well as deprived of number of other rights. In a pluralized, fragmented and atomized social milieu, the stronger groups are privileged ones (as clearly is the case with the debate on minority rights, women and children rights, etc.). Both positions on citizenship - the liberal and communitarian - insist that it is necessary to taking into account the individual and group needs and desires because recognition of being moral obliges to organize group and individual interests according to the common good so that everybody to get a chance for participation. As Bourdieu critically points out, the monopoly of the universal continues to gain supporters and to legitimize itself by the values of neutrality and universal recognition.

However, the old issue about monopolizing the right to speak on behalf of the group and about the privileged position appears immediately here. Even when the stress is not laid on “common goal”, “welfare of society”, “belonging of everyone to the group success”, but on the differences where everyone can contribute to some common work, shared task, carrying out the project due to their peculiarity or procedure rules of representation, civic community is constituted once again through the common for all of them. If we abandon that commonality, it is not clear how it is possible to conceptualize and apply a justice principle. Unavoidably a question arises whether, why, and how people should be treated differently, as well as the opposite question - whether, why, and how people have to be subsumed under a common denominator?

A major deficiency both of the communitarians and liberals appears in their definition of social connection as unification or opposition based on individual and/or group interest (when individuals and groups themselves are in advance considered as monads, although not solipsistically encapsulated, but open to the conversations). The problem is that they believe their conversation is always mediated by the common. Social connection is considered first of all as belonging to a class on the base of

common characteristics, that is, as a relationship with the others with whom one feels and/or identifies as similar or “the same as they are” unlike “the others” - the other group, the other race, the other culture, the other party, nation, etc., in relation with whom their essential difference is stressed. It is believed that exactly due to this similarity and/or difference people recognize each other and group in solidarity or enter into conflict. The essentialist approach is kept when the individuals and groups are defined by their common features or their similarity (that is, by the principal which they carry) even if it is insisted that their group belonging is an issue of free choice (liberalism) or of interactive recognition (communitarism). It is possible to object that the essentialist-approach alternative is sought in defining individuals and groups within a network of relations and not as substances according to some principal (repetition, universality, law, similarity, etc.). It is stated that the social processes generate some ensembles and disperse some others, but in such a way a common nature of the individuals and groups acquired forever and indispensably is not created. However, the assumption that essence is not pre-determined and fixed but acquired and transitory like roles which we play or the task of self-creation which everyone assigns to himself alone, does not break with the substantialistic approach. Within this process of unceasing self-constitution and self-affirmation, people are free to select the group which they belong to and accordingly the qualities which they possess, but such type of self-determination is not explicitly linked with the opposition between “mine” and “foreign”, “own” and “other”, my rights against yours. This is also the issue about identification through property (my own and that of the other) and, then, this is the issue about participation (part, party, partition, particularity) in dividing or in creating totality. In this way, although essence is not, as Heidegger puts it, facticity and thrownness, but openness and strives to make your existence into what you really are, here besides the old conflict of universal-particular, that is, part-whole, another one is added, namely the issue of the Self and the Other (others). In such a way, a categorization emerges forward which in a sense is more fundamental than the distinction universal-particular or general-specific. Both theoretically and practically universal-particular distinction already

implies the separation of mine and alien. Within the whole, even when it is taken in the process of becoming, alienation from what is mine and difficulties in the integration of the other (the acceptance and assimilation of the alterity or, at least, the tolerance in the sense of indifference to alterity) raise barriers in front of communication and interaction. In philosophical terms it seems that such a category of otherness is the one that creates the problems.

The question is that both communitarians and liberals define alterity not as otherness or difference *per se*, but in relation to a principle (norm, majority, law, etc.) or through mutual measurement (which also implies an accepted common standard, common measurement unit even when role of such a tool is plaid by one of the elements in the relationship in order it to be imposed as a measure upon the other). Since the others are originally excluded from the class of the same, it is very difficult to find afterwards the route back to accession and inclusion in an extended area, no matter whether this is a community of representation, recognition or joint practices. This only shows that neither those liberally inclined, nor the defenders of the community have broken their connection with early modern thinking. Such a conclusion is valid as for ones who today intentionally support the continuation of the modernist project, so for those who most aggressively oppose it. The intention of engulfing the alien and its integration into a whole with which the Self is identified has been preserved by many even today. It appears in the discourse of Modernity and reaches its most thoughtful defense in Hegel's philosophy when the Other is assimilated by the identity of opposites (differences), as this has happened *de facto* in society. Those who oppose this assimilatory approach reach at most neutrality toward alterity, tolerance toward the alien, and, finally, indifference toward difference. Today, diversity is encouraged, on the one hand, but on the other, based on the preliminary contradiction of positions, an attempt is made again - through dialog, consensus, tolerance requirements, human rights protection, recognition, etc., to collectivize the differences through their unification into a common whole and through the fusion of horizons. Well, sometimes open minds are inclined to abandon fusion which, in their opinion, is not obligatory; let the differences remain

differences and the others remain other; let's enjoy diversity and get delighted with multi-coloredness, but only on one condition: the difference does not cause problems and complies with the universal legislation and the Constitution accepted "on the behalf of everyone"!

Personal identity by taking responsibility

It seems that the serious philosophical critique of universality and identification through belonging to the whole comes rather not from the critique of totalitarianism as it is usually done in the field of politics, but from another direction - ethical grounds. As Bauman summarizes, the question is first of all that Modernity's moral impulses and restrictions have been neutralized and perceived as irrelevant and the opportunity to commit inhuman deeds has been provided to men and women without their feeling inhuman at all. By the overview of the bibliography on this issue, it can be observed that contesting the modern ideals in the perspective of antinomies of Postmodernity, attention of the most philosophers and theorists circle around ethical topics.

In this paper, a view on identity is implied, which is not based only on belonging of the individual to the whole but on the responsibility of the Self toward the Other. The Self is in a process of identification by the responsibilities one assumes. Moreover, one not only assumes the responsibility for his own comportment but for the comportment of others as well. This implies a new understanding of subjectivity and freedom as well as of protection of human rights - not on the basis of our group or individual selfishness, but primarily as responsibility for the rights of the Other. It is not a question about the responsibility that is sought after the deeds have been committed as it is done in reflection and in the verdicts (for instance in the Court), but rather as a sensibility and thinking over what my action would mean for others in my contact with them. One would be right to point out that exactly this is the Kantian approach to universalization because it requires the maxim of my behavior to take in consideration the others in advance in order to be posed as the universal law of action for everybody. The significant difference consists in the fact that while Kant starts with the Self, here it is suggested beginning with the Other. Obviously, in such a perspective it is impossible to get rid of rethinking communication and

dialog, justice and law, morality and citizenship. It is important to grasp this change of perspective, which can be summarized with Levinas' words that "We" is not the plural of "I" because the Other is not a "second I". He exists by himself and is meaningful by himself and is not just bearer of the meaning that I ascribe to him. We can also add that the Other is not taken negatively as an adversary, competitor, limit, and barrier in front of my freedom but is viewed positively. The positive value of the Other is not calculated regarding the opportunities he opens to me, i.e., he is not assessed by the instrumental thinking that reduces the Other to an object useful for me. The Other is not an object at all but a collocutor.

It is also necessary to rethink the notion of community as it is already assumed that:

1) Community is not produced by the multiplication of transcendental subjects whose being common consists in their constitution as self-consciousness by "I think, accompanying all my representation";

2) we do not respect the Other in the community for the sake of an abstract humanism, that is, according to the universal law (Kantian imperative) but according his empirical and historical presence in his entire particularity and, even more, in his entire singularity. In the Early Modern Philosophy and in German Idealistic Philosophy the alien particularity appears as limit of mine;

3) Community is not the universal substance/subject, that is a historically formed totality where self-consciousness is a differentiation which actually is not differentiation because any differentiation is posed by this absolute subject as distinction of Self from itself (Hegel).

Liberals and communitarians have been trying to oppose these forms of the understanding of human community and coexistence beginning with empirically present differences in order to find theoretical and moral and/or juridical ground for their reconciliation. Both liberals and communitarians want to see a partner in the Other, although he is my limit. We should not forget that while Hegel has interpreted in various ways reconciliation, it is a final accord still in Hegel's philosophical symphony. But even in their noblest and most generous motivation toward the Other aiming at ensuring the recognition of the otherness - the main goal of their efforts, the liberals

and the communitarians at best allocate for the Other a place right next to me, “side by side with me” (which, of course, is not below or behind me). Unfortunately, the final justification of their efforts is egalitarianism. They believe that the differences have to be reduced to mutual recognition where equal opportunities for the individual and, accordingly, group autonomy are achieved. The idea that the Other is the superior in relation to me (or us) is not allowed because automatically, almost instinctively, he is identified with the postulating a relationship of domination and submission. Just the opposite, here Levinas’ position is supported claiming that the Other is the one to whom my existence is in service (even in the cases when I intentionally don’t want this) and this type of relation is a caring for the Other and not slavery to the Other. In this way, self-existence which is “for the Other” receives a social dimension and social identification. I become Self thanks to the responsibility to the others. In this way sociality transcends state of nature, and meaning transcends meaninglessness. The Other here is Transcendence, but “*is not transcendent because he is free to the same degree as I am; just the opposite, his freedom is superiority.*”² The Other’s freedom is not a restriction of my own freedom, as is thought in the interpretation of community as totality and in the theory of social contract. In the whole of the community or society, according to the common individualistic-atomistic image, the less restricted by the others one is and, accordingly, the more restrictions he can impose on others, the freer he is. Freedom defined as independence from the others - from their customs, beliefs, prejudices, communal biases, and, in general, from tradition - springs up in the dawn of Modern Times in order, later, to unfold into the autonomy theories where the subject determines by himself the law which is going to obey. But since the whole is always limited, everyone within its limits experiences the other as a restriction and a barrier. In such a way, an autonomous will is necessarily opposed to the other ones. The more independent an individual is, the more capable of accomplishing his goals he is, the wider is the scope of his activity, and more successful is his self-realization. But since the opposite party, the other individual, the competitors also strive for maximal realization within the space of their

² Emmanuel Levinas. *Totalite et infini*. (The Hague: Kluwer Academic, 1971), p. 86.

interaction, the expansion of the one confronts with the similar attitude of the Other. Freedom of the one is a necessary obstacle for the freedom of the Other and vice versa. Still, as a merit of contemporary neo-liberal and communitarian conceptions, it should be pointed out that they aim at stressing - at least theoretically - the relations of cooperation and not of competition.

It seems like the category “freedom”, understood as autonomy, should be deprived of the privileged status it has acquired. The notion of heteronomy is thrown overboard since Kant on. In this essay, Kantian definition of self-determination is rethought for the sake of restoring rights of heteronomy. The autonomy of the self is understood in a different way - as a response to the heteronomous demand on the side of the Other. It would be more precise to say that exactly the protection of the freedom of the Other, of his right to be himself authorizes me to act in my capacity of an autonomous subject, yet to act questioning the power of domination, calling me to justice, appealing to responsibility; that is, “to respond to the other because of the Other”. My comportment receives its meaning and direction not first of all in accordance with the law that the Self imposes on himself but in response to the presence of the Other. Otherwise, freedom would be a foolish spontaneity, caprice, arbitrariness and/or would wander under the guise of instrumentalizing others. Even Kant’s categorical imperative cannot serve as a cure against these two malicious mutations. If Kant’s imperative requires universalization of the maxim which I follow, and if it appears as expression of my pretension that it is the rationality of human nature in general, this means that it has to be extended over the others as a valid to the same degree as for them. However, such a pretension of declaring of universal moral legislation, imposed on the others on my behalf, is rather dangerous. It is necessary to introduce a preliminary consideration of the demands and conditions of others and choosing motives of my behavior according to them not just in their capacity as noumenal beings but in response to their otherness. It is a question about how this kind of consideration is possible and/or realistic. If we assume, as it is proposed here, that autonomy ought to be a response to heteronomy - of heteronomy identified with the appeal on the side of the Other, who questions

spontaneity of my will, then the question arises whether to abandon any normativity and the very notions of freedom and justice in the way they are understood according to Kantian interpretation and, more generally, as it is in the modern discourse. Is not the principle defending the personal autonomy of all individuals the primary condition for any legislation and any justice? We are answering these questions negatively. However, not abandoning these categories and their current interpretation is not the intention of this paper, but their new understanding. Constitution of togetherness as an interpersonal relation precedes its restructuring into unity. Unity implies sameness or uniformity according to a certain principle of categorization, while togetherness is established thanks to differences, which exist still before assembling into unity. Furthermore, unity itself could impose a new tyranny, that of universality, homogeneity and depersonalization. However, facelessness could be overcome if the resources of unity could allow the Self to support the Other in his otherness and not to struggle with him. Thus, through cooperation and the responsibility for the Other, the Self could discover itself and to reflect over itself. But this return to itself would be then not a self-purpose but rather “a by-product”. Then, the identification of the Self is neither an imposition over the individual from outside of belonging to a group, nor an arbitrary choice, but is taking responsibilities for the others.

Before participating in a hierarchy or the organization of the police, we participate in interpersonal relations that are primary in comparison to institutionalized links. The original necessity for a communication among the different individuals (for instance, between a child and an adult, employee and employer, salesperson and client, doctor and patient, etc., and not only between those who have equal status of free citizens and right-holders) is a necessity determined exactly by their difference. Since the one needs the other they meet. The one is necessary for the other because he has what to give him taking into account his specific condition of the one, who needs advice, service, protection, security and so on. Exactly the difference creates the original community between them. Due to repetition, regularity, and normalization of this kind of links (which always begin and are implemented on personal level but bear consequences not only for the direct participants);

that is, thanks to institutionalization, the relationship is extended and modified reaching the status of universal rule, that is, the status of right in the totality of community. Namely the relation between the One and the Other attains the scope of an institution; from this moment on, it can favor but also can betray its function and to begin impeding these kinds of contacts.

Responsibility as an asymmetrical and non-reciprocal relation between the Other and me

The pioneer in the notion of togetherness that gives priority to the interpersonal relationship is probably Martin Buber, whose main topic, as is well known, is the dialogue. We have a lot of reasons to call pre-Buber philosophy monological. While the new tendency he started stresses the dialogical character of human history and culture, the main movement of monological life is reflection when the Self has withdrawn into itself. As Buber mentions, although the difference of the other touches my soul, it is not in my soul, so that to allow differences is to exist only as experience of the other, only as “a part of myself”. For philosophy based on the dialogical principle, I-You relationship is primary regarding I-It relationship and meeting the other is the event, which poses the beginning of their togetherness. Only later, this event moves reflection of the Self in such a way as I-You to be transformed into I-It relationship.

Within the tradition of the older idealistic philosophy where the subject-object relationship is the only background on the stage, the object (It) has unclear status: it is transcendent in relation to the cognizing Self, but on the other hand, due to the activity of consciousness, is transformed into immanence, into an entity of consciousness, into representation. This ambiguity has served as a ground for creation various theories about subject-object relationship; in any case, it is taken as a model for any monological philosophy. In these theories, any thinking and movement of the Self is encircled around himself, being reflection and self-reflection, and language is only an additional factor, which is viewed only in its capacity of a means of expressing and objectifying internal experiences. But Martin Buber, in his philosophy of dialogue, views language and communication in a different mode. The most important for the word is that it is an appeal to the Other as to “Thou”. The I-Thou word creates the world of connection

while the I-It word is the world of experience. Experience is the world of the Self; it is “in the Self”, and not between the Self and the world because “*The world has no part in the experience. It permits itself to be experienced, but has no concern in the matter. For it does nothing to the experience, and the experience does nothing to it. As the experience the world belongs to the primary word I-It*”³. While the event of the I-You meeting, being according to Buber a reciprocal communication, is incommensurable with the action of cognition.

For Levinas, who continues this new understanding of language, experience, and sociality, Buber is exactly the philosopher who discovers this strange overturn of the intentionality of cognition in communication. The basic I-You word is the pre-condition for appearance of any language; I-It relation is derivative and in its relativity is incommensurable with the first one. Translating Buber’s terminology, we could say that in the dialogical trend of philosophizing subject-subject relationship both precedes and exceeds (chronologically and logically) subject-object relationship. However, such a translation is not entirely adequate. In order to understand what its deficiency consists in, it is necessary to keep in mind that dialogue is not a reciprocal relationship between equal subjects. This is Levinas’ lesson that there is no equality between I and You. Most probably, this very expression I-You is inappropriate. The link between the Other and me begins exactly because of the original inequality and difference. For Levinas, all social links spring from the moral relationship between the Other and me, which is asymmetrical and non-reciprocal. This is true even when, like in tyranny and despotism as well as in all other forms of violence toward the Other, morality at first glance is rejected in this asymmetry and non-reciprocity. Moral responsibility in its most extreme and hyperbolized form is the substitution of the One for the Other. The most fundamental difference between the Other and me, the Difference from which all other differences spring, consists exactly in my extreme responsibility, which never ceases to take into account the otherness of the Other. The moral Self does not cease to ask (put into question) in what sense, how, and why the Other is other, and how to meet his otherness (which would mean questioning my own

³ Martin Buber. *I and Thou*. Translated by Ronald Gregor Smith (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark), p. 5

identification as a simple entity or affiliation). This moral relationship of responsibility, according to Levinas, weaves the very woof of the togetherness.

For Levinas, my identity is not due anymore only to my participation in the space of community, but to my identification (my being assigned) as extraordinary and indispensable bearer of the responsibility for the Other (and the others). The Self takes the responsibility - because it falls upon him - without expectations of reciprocity, mutuality, or reversal of the relationship (although of course, this can happen but is not primarily in an interpersonal connection; sometimes, it is relied on taking the risk and responsibilities should be compensated by the State, thanks to the traditions and customs, and so on). Togetherness does not imply equality neither multiplication and assembling of in-different to each other, although similar, elements in a certain conglomerate based on their likeness, but implies not-in-difference of the one to the other exactly because they are not equal, tantamount, and reciprocal in the originality of social interaction.

In the dialogical trend of philosophizing, there are other branches besides the one which is linked with the names of Buber and Levinas, but, as a rule, they remain in the orbit of totality. I have in mind Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics, where Hegel's logic is restored to a great degree and preference is given to creating a common horizon in dialogue or, let's say, the theory of communicative action of Jurgen Habermas relying on consensus. Although they highlight the openness of dialogue, the classification of these paradigms still follows the old manner, namely part-whole, i.e. particular-universal presupposing unity and totality as the highest achievement. Mine-alien relationship substitutes the relationship between the Other and me. The individuals, then, receive the status of elements or the stages in a process of conversation and only through the result receive their adequate meaning. Buber's view in this respect concerning "*that powerful modern point of view, according to which in the last resort only so-called objectives, more precisely collectives, are real, while significance is attached to persons only as the workers or the tools of the collectives*"⁴ is fully applicable in this case.

⁴ Martin Buber. *Between Man and Man*. Translated by Ronald Gregor Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 83.

Just the opposite, here it is argued that individuals have significance that is created within communication without relying on the teleology of unity. The beginning of communication is the Other (and not the Self, and not each one of us, not the universal being) and he has significance which is not derived from his belonging to the whole; he himself makes this social whole possible, understandable, important. The Other and the Self play entirely different roles in the drama of joint human existence.

Following Levinas' works, it is possible to show a new perspective in understanding personal identity that is not focused on the self-reflection of the thinking subject but on "responsibility of the one for the other". This is an asymmetrical relation of the one to the other and not just a common characteristic possessed "by nature" or a priori in the same degree by all individuals in the genus. In order to transform the asymmetrical and nonreciprocal relationship into symmetrical and reciprocal, it is necessary for the Third to appear. Then, it is possible to speak about a public and common relationship between them. With the presence of the Third next to the Other the question of institutionalization and justice arises, which is central for any humanistic discourse and for any society. The Third here is a name "for everyone", for the third persons who are excluded from the immediacy of the connection establishing the close space only between two collocutors.

The Third implies mediation. As we know, this area has been discussed at least since Hegel's time. Hegel himself had reached the point to proclaim that any immediacy is actually mediated, that is, immediacy is always delusion when it is taken as a bare result and not in respect of the method which led to it. It is necessary to restore the rights of immediacy not qua *cognitive category* of sensibility as traditionally conceived but qua *moral category* about the original (moral) relationship to the Other. In general, the point is made here that morality as a responsibility for others is the "alpha and omega" of human existence, even when everything in the human world is directed against morality and people wonder why they need morality at all. But the question here is that morality is not on the level of needs which we can satisfy or leave unsatisfied; we are accustomed to hearing that morality is a high spiritual need. In this essay morality is viewed not as a certain moral

codex, different in different communities and epochs, but as responsibility which is the root of any “togetherness”. Society as a whole with all its structures, institutions and relations would die without morality. Justice, before becoming a category of social philosophy, is a moral category absolutely necessary in the vast space populated by others more or less remote. They are a multitude, sometimes entirely alien, unfamiliar, anonymous, and the responsibility in this context is carried out only by establishing and sustaining just institutions throughout the whole society. Justice stops to be justice if we cease asking anymore if justice is just enough, that is, how it is related to the moral saintliness.

Conclusion

While in Early Modernity priority was given to cognition, production, and creativity, in Late Modernity or Postmodernity much more attention is paid to communication and its forms. The question is not about one of these moments to be excluded according to the scheme “either-or” (either communication, or activity) but to analyze their role in creation and recreation of social relations. Of course, thanks to their activity, people produce the conditions of their lives, their institutions, and themselves and in turn ensure the reproduction of the social whole. But we support the view that the communication, determining motives and meanings of human actions, is primary in respect to instrumentality and purposefulness of actions and interactions. Before being objectified and transcend himself by his actions one becomes aware of the existence of Transcendence, including the transcendence of the objective world, thanks to the meeting of “the otherness of the Other”, wherein lies the source of any understanding.

Being aware as a finite creature, one always wants to relate to a reality exceeding his own limits. Going back to various epochs, we can see how the individual has identified with the totality exactly because it always overcomes the framework of his opportunities. He has perceived himself as an element in its structure and as subordinated to its universal laws, even if, as it is in Kant and in many other philosophies after his, the individual himself is proclaimed to be the law-giver although not to the pre-given, but to the humanly constituted and constructed totality. Any such totality has always been thought

and is thought by its universal laws and principles - natural, moral, social, etc. - but thought by whom? By man identifying himself with Reason assuming the position of Objective observer who has taken the throne vacated by God. This is the early modern position. Still, Kant warned us in his *Critique of Pure Reason* about the transcendental illusion which we create unavoidably. This is the illusion according to which we can be encompassed thanks to our constitutive capabilities and principles of the totality of experience. Further on, it can be added, in the language of Marx' critique of German classical philosophy, that people have actually shared the unity of reality, i.e. its universal laws universalizing their own representations and concepts. Or speaking in Pierre Bourdieu's aphoristic language, the universal is always an object of universal reverence.

However, since the belief in the universal has become problematic, since (according to Buber) the individual feels "cosmically and socially homeless", since there is no hope that by objectifying himself the individual will transcend himself toward universality, the question of Transcendence and transcending is extremely palpable. The whole history of the modern West is considered to be the destruction of piety before Transcendence by destroying Transcendence itself. The trouble is that the legitimacy of the universal norms, imperatives, laws, etc., (which actually have been extrapolation of human limits - of certain private interests, prejudices, beliefs, and convictions) is put into question. The particular (expanded to the universal, the totality) has been taken for this or that absolute. This paper claims that true transcendence is not primarily the totality with which one is correlated as a subject with object and into which it is finally absorbed, but rather the other person. Transcendence of the external world - that of nature, community, society, culture artifacts, etc. - appears and is understood thanks to the correlation of the Self with the transcendence of the Other.

In the attempts to articulate this connection, of the greatest importance is Emmanuel Levinas' thought. We have awarded him with this merit of discovering for philosophy the original identification of the subject, which is neither reduced nor derived from the affiliation to and participation of the individual in a certain social whole. Rather, communion of the individual to the community and society is due to this asymmetrical and non-reversible

link of the Self with the Other where the clue for his identification lies.

In this essay an approach is offered, where in order to understand the whole, intersubjectivity is taken as the point of departure. It proceeds not to the totality as the final end but to the Other in his otherness. The totality is put in service to the Other - not to the man in general, not to one's own Ego, but to the Other. The Self and the Other are not on equal terms. The Self has always been, as Levinas puts it, one responsibility more than the Other. The responsibility for the Other is constitutive for the responsibility of my Self, while the responsibility of the Other to me is his own business.

The totality (State, society, community) receive and materialize their meaning if the Self, who embodies them as "an individualized society" (according to the famous phrase of Pierre Bourdieu), comports responsibly to the Other. This means that, only by the responsibility of the Self, the Other gets the opportunity to be a Self regarding the Third. Only with the appearance of the Third the public character of relations is possible, their institutionalization, and their transformation into "right for everybody". But we must not forget that the institutions and the social mechanisms in general - as any technique - are under human supervision. The state machinery, as any other public organization, is necessarily personalized in order to function. The Self is exactly this personification: a subject carrying on his shoulders all authorizations, competence, and knowledge, etc., which the organization bestows on him. But in order for the Self to be a Self, he uses the resources at his disposal in order to respond to the others. The spare elements which in a given situation are under the Self's control have to be used, but not just caring after oneself, that is, for one's own needs, interests, biases, etc., but because of the Other. The human link between the other and me begins with the word and its beginning is the appeal on the side of the Other even if he is silent. But the Self responds to this appeal not just in word but in deed. The sense gives motive to actions and meaning to practices, which from this moment on are relevant for the Third and for each one. Only in this way, in general terms, they become relevant for the totality of the state, for society, and for the community in which we partake.