



Research Paper

The Place of God in Moral Life from standpoint of Levinas

Mahmoud Abbasi*¹ , Muhammad Asghari² 

¹ PhD in Philosophy, Tehran, Iran

² Professor of philosophy at university of Tabriz

*Corresponding Author: Mahmoud Abbasi
Address: Tehran, Iran

Email: abassimahmoud90@yahoo.com
Tel: 09196507665


[10.22080/jre.2024.28022.1220](https://doi.org/10.22080/jre.2024.28022.1220)
Received:

September 5, 2024

Accepted:

November 21, 2024

Available online:

December 1, 2024

Keywords:

"human", "Other", "God",
"moral life", "sense of duty",
"infinite responsibility"

Abstract

In this article, we are trying to examine God and his place in Levinas's moral philosophy, which is based on another concept. For Levinas, the other is not a passive person, but an active person whose face indicates messages and moral commands, and upon receiving these messages and moral commands, a person feels the duty to consider himself accountable and responsible to the other. . The continuation of this accountability and responsibility leads to a moral life. But the question is, what is God's position in the structure of Levinas's moral philosophy? And what is it based on? And in other words; What are the components of religion in the structure of Levinas's moral philosophy? Levinas believes that when a person encounters another, he finds an inner desire and attraction towards him. This inner desire and pull towards the other, which originates from man's desire for infinity and perfection and God, is a fundamental and metaphysical desire and ultimately leads to the moral relationship and interaction of man with the other and God in a moral life. In the moral and divine life, man finds his true identity, which is a moral and divine identity, and by cultivating his moral talents, he steps on the path of becoming infinite and attaining God's perfections.

philosophy has often been a kind of ontology. Ontology does not come to terms with the other and constantly tries to reduce it to the same and to place either the same or the other within a totality that has nothing beyond it. From the perspective of ontology, the other or the other is a break from the same, and this separation is resolved through the absorption and dissolution of the other into the same. The other or the other goes beyond our understanding, and our encounter with the other is formed not in understanding but in a feeling of closeness. Levinas believes that the other or the other is irreducible; because this other represents God. Therefore; it is necessary in this article to pay attention to the position of God in relation to the structure of Levinas's moral philosophy and to examine the components of religion in his moral philosophy.

2. The role of God in moral life

The desire for infinity and the desire for perfection are two distinctive characteristics of man. These two characteristics are the driving force of man so that man can ultimately have a desire for God. The desire for God for man is in a way a desire for morality and a moral life. In fact; the desire for infinity and the desire for perfection for man indicate a moral life. Man first finds moral responsibility towards others

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Understanding Levinas's ideas depends on understanding his critique of the entire cycle of the history of Western philosophy. One of Levinas' fundamental claims is to go beyond ontology, which has been a fundamental characteristic of the history of philosophy from Plato to Heidegger. He believes that Western



and God, and this moral responsibility indicates a moral life.

In a moral life, man considers himself accountable to God and has moral responsibility. In a moral life, man develops his moral talents and steps on the path of becoming infinite and realizing perfection. Man's connection with God is necessary for the realization of a moral life; man cannot live a moral life alone. It is as if God, through another, by being present in the field of man's gaze, conveys moral messages and commands to him, and man is also responsible for receiving these moral messages and commands from God and manifesting them in his behavior. God is like the sun that illuminates man with the light of morality and frees man from the darkness of his own preconceptions and worldview.

3. Components of Religion in Moral Life

When a person encounters another, the other person, as a speech or language, calls upon the person to respect the other and behave ethically with him. When a person encounters another and this call arises, the person develops a desire for a relationship with God, which stems from his desire for infinity and perfection. The person's desire for a relationship with God leads to moral interaction between the person and the other, and its continuation leads to a moral life, through which the person treats other people and God with the utmost morality and respect. Therefore, in Levinas's thought, the following components can be listed for religion in a moral life:

3-1) Infinite Responsibility

From Levinas's perspective, man, in his neighborhood with the other and in his relationship with God, always considers himself responsible to him. A responsibility that calls man to answer. Man does not avoid answering when facing the other and in his relationship with God. He is in front of the other's request and always bears the weight of responsibility before God, and in this very responsiveness, he perpetuates his humanity. This unconditional and endless responsibility is only the responsibility of man and does not include the reciprocal responsibility of the other or God.

Because being human is the very act of going beyond oneself, placing oneself before the other and being responsible before the other and God. Therefore; "My responsibility [man] includes not only my own past, present and future actions, but also the past, present and future actions of others, and this other includes not only those we know but also those we do not know, past and future.

3-2) Authority

From Levinas's perspective, authority means accepting a mission that only man can respond to, and being free means only doing what no one else can do. Authority before the other and God is a kind of surrender. Otherness is man's response to God and precedes the autonomy of human authority. While man acknowledges that he exists and is responsible, he also accepts that human authority is preceded by duty before the other and God. Man has will and authority, and he understands the meaning of his authority based on his encounter with the other and in relation to God. In other words, human authority takes on meaning in the face of human accountability and responsibility. Human authority is not limited in the face of the other, but rather acquires an additional meaning that indicates human responsibility before God.

3-3) Sense of Duty

In the structure of Levinas' thought, the human sense of duty does not mean that general rules and laws have been established or discovered by human reason and in this situation, man has a duty to act in accordance with them, but rather, for Levinas, the human sense of duty means, first of all, accountability and responsibility towards others and God. The concept of sense of duty in Levinas' thought implies that man considers himself accountable and morally responsible to God to the same extent as he feels duty towards God. In fact, the human sense of duty implies his accountability and responsibility. This sense of duty does not have an external origin, but rather an internal origin that is formed in man when communicating with God. The human sense of duty has a moral basis and means that man, without considering any goal or end in himself, feels obligated to behave respectfully towards God and considers himself



accountable and morally responsible towards Him.

4. The role of freedom in realizing the truth of religion

In Levinas's moral philosophy; human freedom and liberty are determined based on the presence of the other and God; in such a way that man has freedom and liberty if he faces the other and God and considers himself accountable and morally responsible to the other and God. Human freedom and liberty also do not mean that man is free; accepts the other and God or accepts moral accountability and responsibility to the other and God; rather, human freedom and liberty mean that man objectifies accountability and responsibility to the other and God.

This meaning of freedom and liberty is different from the meaning that the general public pays attention to. The general public thinks that accountability and responsibility to the other and God is a kind of limitation that degrades freedom and liberty; because when a man becomes accountable and responsible to another human being and God, he accepts a kind of obedience to the other or submission to God. While in Levinas's thought, this is not the case; Because Levinas believes that freedom and agency are objectified precisely because of accountability and responsibility towards others and God. Thus; Levinas's man does not have freedom and agency alone, but when he is confronted with others and is close to God, he acquires his freedom and agency. In more precise terms; man has agency simply because he is accountable to others and God, or man has freedom simply because he is responsible to others and God.

5. The role of the sense of duty in realizing the truth of religion

The sense of duty of man towards others and God can be considered one of the most important concepts in Levinas's moral philosophy. The sense of duty for man is not simply a non-binding feeling, but rather a feeling accompanied by an obligation that makes man accountable and responsible towards others. When man is confronted with others and discovers God, he realizes that the face of the

other is like a speech or language that carries moral messages and commands, and by receiving these moral messages and commands, man feels a duty to be accountable and responsible towards others and God. Man's accountability and responsibility towards others and God is not due to compulsion, but man feels a duty to be accountable and responsible towards God. The relationship between man and others is realized in a moral life based on man's sense of duty towards others and God. When man is confronted with others, he cannot be indifferent or resist others; Because the face of another, as a speech or language, calls upon man to be responsive and responsible towards others and God, and man responds to this call with his own free will and, by accepting accountability and responsibility before God, places the ethical approach at the forefront of his mind.

6. Conclusion

In the structure of Levinas's philosophy of ethics; "Other" is considered at the center. By paying attention to the other, Levinas distances himself from anthropocentrism in the traditional sense that has a long history of philosophy. For Levinas, the other can represent God and is therefore a moral agent. When a person is confronted with another and sees the face of another, he realizes that the face carries moral messages and commands, and by receiving these messages and moral commands, a person considers it necessary for him to respect the other and ultimately God and behave morally with him. Man fundamentally has a desire for a relationship with God. This desire for a relationship with God, which arises from man's desire for infinity and perfection, causes man to behave morally when confronted with another. This desire for a relationship with God, which is in a way a fundamental and metaphysical desire, lies in the nature of man. This fundamental and metaphysical desire awakens in man when he comes into contact with another. Before encountering another, man is merely a cognizer and tries to examine all the various matters and issues with an ontological and epistemological approach, and then he brings them under his control and subjugation in order to coordinate them for his own welfare and interests. When man comes into contact with another and finds a



desire for a relationship and connection with God, he realizes that he must be responsible towards God and adopt a moral attitude. Considering that man has a desire for infinity and a desire for perfection, he develops a moral

attitude towards God. Man, with a desire for a relationship with God, steps on the path of becoming infinite and perfect. Thus, man, with a desire for a relationship with God, adopts a moral attitude.