

Ethics in a Future Technological World: A Levinasian Reading of Part One of Goethe's Faust

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ABSTRACT

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The subject of this article is an inquiry into the possibility of ethics in the future technological world. This investigation proceeds through a Levinasian reading of the first part of Goethe's drama Faust. According to Levinas, the "Other" constitutes the very condition for the possibility of ethics. For Levinas, the "Other" is absolutely foreign and infinite; hence, the subject bears an infinite responsibility toward the "Other". The face of the "Other", Levinas argues, is that which calls the subject to responsibility even unto death, thereby transforming the subject, in effect, into an object. Yet, in the world to come, the encounter between subject and "Other" will be profoundly mediated by technology. This article suggests that the three elements, subject, "Other", and technology, can be corresponded to the three figures of Faust, Margarete (Gretchen), and Mephistopheles in Goethe's Faust, thus enabling a renewed interpretation. Furthermore, by analyzing technology as that which claims to reduce the "Other" to the "Same", this article proposes that in order to safeguard ethics in the future world, we must move beyond the prevailing, dominating technology and establish a new technology - one whose essence is non-dominating and which honors things in their inherent-being.

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Intruduction

Who or what is the "Other"? The history of the problem of the "Other" in philosophy likely dates back to the early days of Christianity; it was then that the absolute and transcendent "other than me" entered human thought, defining itself as "pure alterity":

O Lord, there is none like thee ([First Chronicles, 17 ,20](#)).

This pure alterity cannot be appropriated; in other words, it will never become the "Same": "And he said, thou canst not see my face ([Exodus, 33 ,20](#)).

Instead, man must submit to His command unto death and sacrifice himself unconditionally:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service ([Romans, 12 ,1](#)).

Following medieval Christianity, and as a result of the growing importance of "man," the problem of the "I" came to the forefront of attention. However, one must wait until the early 19th century for the re-emergence of the "other than me." The first formulation of the concept of the "Other" in modern philosophy belongs to Hegel. In the dialectic of the Lord and Bondsman, Hegel considers the encounter with the "Other" to be the result of human self-consciousness. In Hegel's view, the encounter between two self-consciousnesses is violent and leads to a war for recognition. In this war, one appropriates the "Other," and the matter is settled. Although the idea of the "Other" as something appropriable may seem desirable on the surface, according to Emmanuel Levinas, the 20th-century French philosopher, it is impossible, and the foundation of ethics is rooted in this very impossibility. Levinas, who on one hand is an heir to the Jewish tradition and on the other has drawn from the wellspring of phenomenology, particularly the philosophy of Heidegger, builds his philosophy based on the concept of the "Other."

The concept of the "Other" has always been relevant not only in philosophy but also in the world of literature; among the works in which the concept of the "Other" can be traced is the play *Faust* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, the 18th and 19th-century German poet. In the first part of this play, Goethe depicts the tumultuous relationship between Faust and Margarete (Gretchen), a relationship mediated / obstructed by a demon named Mephistopheles.

But what is the relation of our world to the concept of the 'Other'? The study of the status of the 'Other' and, consequently, of ethics in today's (and future) world, a world whose fundamental characteristic is its technological nature, has not yet been as much of a subject of work as it should be. Hence, in this research, we intend to raise the question of the possibility of ethics in the future world through a Levinasian reading of the first part of Goethe's *Faust*. This research is established around three specific questions: First; how can we provide a

Levinasian interpretation of Goethe's Faust play? Second; how does technology play a role in the relationship between the subject and the 'Other'? And third; how can ethics be preserved in the future world? To answer these questions, we must first look at Levinas's philosophy.

1. Ethics in the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas

1-1 The revival of subjectivism and the birth of the 'Other' as the infinite

The twentieth century begins with fierce attacks on subjectivism. Freud, by raising the issue of the 'unconscious' and the fact that the source of many human motivations and behaviors is hidden from him, effectively invalidated the autonomous subject governing itself. Heidegger, by introducing 'Dasein', transferred primacy from consciousness to being. Foucault, with his symbolic announcement of the 'death of Man', heralded the end of subject-centricity. And Derrida, by proposing 'metaphysics of presence', sought to decenter the *res cogitans* (thinking thing).¹ In the midst of this, however, Levinas believes in a return to subjectivism. He considers subjectivism to be the foundation of the idea of the infinite and the entry into the realm of the 'Other' (Levinas, 2011, 26-27).

Nevertheless, the Levinasian subjectivism is different in many respects from previous examples. As Levinas himself emphasizes in *Totality and Infinity*, this subjectivity possesses neither the characteristics of the wholly concrete, nor the characteristics of the wholly abstract; it is neither Descartes' *res cogitans*, nor the Kantian subject or Hegelian consciousness (Levinas, 2011, 301). Levinas's subject is a vulnerable, embodied, passive subject, immersed in the world, heteronomous, and responsible. In Levinas's subjectivism, what becomes most important is the sensitivity of the subject; and this is a characteristic that has entered Levinas's view under the influence of phenomenology and existentialism. Levinas, in his book *Proper Names*, writes about the importance of sensitivity in contemporary thought:

Sensibility is no longer an imperfect mode of thought dependent on false illusions. It is not even considered a passageway to rational knowledge anymore. Under the influence of Bergson's thought and especially phenomenology, sensibility has gained a fundamental originality. Any rational structure receives its manner and the very dimensions of its architecture from the sensory experience it claims to surpass. We must renew our covenant with this initial experience, with this pre-predicative substratum (Levinas, 1996a, 110).

¹ In his philosophy, Descartes recognizes three substances: God, the soul or *res cogitans* (thinking substance), and the external world or *res extensa* (extended substance). Descartes establishes the soul as the foundation for knowing the other two substances, and thus the modern subject is born as a singular and autonomous element.

According to Levinas, the subjectivism hitherto has diminished sensibility and enlisted it in the service of consciousness. He writes in *Basic Philosophical Writings*: "Philosophical thought reduces the subjectivism of subjectivism to consciousness" (Levinas, 1996b, 83).

Also, in this regard, Levinas writes in *Totality and Infinity*: "Is the subject only a subject of knowledge and power? Can it not be understood otherwise?" (Levinas, 2011, 276). Levinas aims to bring the self-enclosed subject confined to consciousness into the sensitive realm of this world. In the opinion of Richard Cohen, this emphasis by Levinas on the subject's sensibility is more fundamental than Heidegger's descriptions in *Being and Time*. Cohen writes: "One of the important discoveries of *Totality and Infinity* and Levinas's earlier works, reflected more broadly in *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, is that the meaning of sensibility [as the concrete existence of the human] is deeper than that upon which Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, describes corporeality [in terms of being-in-the-world], anxiety, and the historical connection with being... [For Levinas] subjectivity is founded on the axis of the sensing of sensations" (Levinas, 1998, xiv).

Now we must see what the consequences of the emergence of this sensitive subject could be. As stated, the Levinasian subject is not an absolute consciousness like the Hegelian. Nor is it situated in individuality like the Cartesian thinking substance. And it does not, like the Kantian subject, entirely engage itself in the formal limits of reason. Therefore, with the elimination of attributes such as absoluteness, individuality, and abstractness, a new realm gradually reveals itself before the subject. This realm is the realm of the "Other" or the "alien." The Cartesian thinking substance, the Kantian subject, and the Hegelian spirit, due to their individuality and totalizing drive, essentially do not recognize the "Other." The "Other" only gains meaning when the subject enters the concrete world, or, in Levinas's terms, when the subject is a subject that gets hungry (Levinas, 2011, 134).

According to Levinas, the subject apprehends the "Other" at various levels. Levinas introduces things with the French word *autre*, meaning the "not-the-same." The not-the-same is not the true "Other"; rather, it is something that is absorbed into the subject. But that which stands opposed to the not-the-same, and is in fact the central focus of Levinas's discussions, is the *Autre* or the "Other" in the true sense. The "Other" is that realm with which the subject is completely alien and can never become one. Levinas places phenomena such as death, time, sexual relation, and the father-child relation in this category. These relations ultimately culminate in the relation with the other human, whom Levinas calls the "absolutely other." Thus, it can be said that for Levinas, "subjectivity is both the beginning and the end of the essence of the other" (Levinas, 1998, 10). In other words, it is the "Other" that determines the subject.

According to Levinas, the encounter with the "Other" gives rise to ethics. The "Other" calls into question my absolute spontaneity and my self-sufficient being, and ethics is precisely this

situation or experience. In other words, the "Other" makes me understand that it also exists and that this being matters. The "Other" imposes itself upon me, and I affirm this being-imposed-upon as respect for it. In the words of Richard Cohen, "the otherness of the 'Other' puts forth ethics as the eminence of the 'Other'" (Levinas, 1998, xii). Sean Hand points out that Levinas, in explaining his conception of ethics, would sometimes use the colloquial expression "après vous" ("after you"), which is used in everyday courtesies—for instance, when two people arrive at a doorway at the same time (Hand, 2009, 2). This phrase is perhaps too commonplace to, at first glance, reveal the respectable dimension of the "Other"; however, it in fact indicates that a human being, in the most ordinary moments of their life, even when they are apparently not engaged in thought, has already accepted the "Other" as the condition for the possibility of ethics.

But as mentioned, Levinas uses the attribute "absolute" to describe the other human, and it is precisely here that the "Other" appears in the role of the infinite. As Peperzak and Critchley note in their introduction to Levinas's article "God and Philosophy," the idea of the infinite first appeared in 1957 under the influence of Descartes's ontological argument in the Third Meditation from the *Meditations*, and it came to fruition four years later in the book *Totality and Infinity* (Levinas, 1996b, 129).

In fact, Levinas's initiative is that he finds his own idea of the infinite within the core of Descartes's discussions concerning the "objective reality" and "formal reality" of the concept of God. In the Third Meditation, Descartes concludes that it is impossible for something to arise from nothing. He also concludes that whatever is more perfect, that is, contains more reality, cannot proceed from something that is less perfect (Descartes, 2008, 29). Descartes states his final conclusion as follows:

If the objective reality of any of my ideas is of such a nature that I clearly perceive that it is not in me either formally or eminently, and hence that I myself cannot be the cause of it, then it necessarily follows that I am not alone in the world, but that some other thing which is the cause of this idea also exists (Descartes, 2008, 30).

Therefore, Descartes concludes that since I have within me an idea of an absolutely perfect being, the existence of a being perfect in every way necessarily follows. However, the most important characteristic of this absolutely perfect being, for Levinas, is its otherness. According to Descartes's belief, the subject cannot be the source of everything within it. In other words, by depicting an absolutely perfect being, Descartes calls into question the spontaneity of the subject; and this is precisely what Levinas says about the relation between the subject and the "Other." Hence, Levinas believes that the idea of an absolutely perfect being is, in truth, like a welcome to the "Other" (Levinas, 2011, 84). On this basis, Levinas extends the idea of the

infinite "Other" beyond the boundaries of thought. The infinity of the "Other" is a situation that in no way becomes an object of the subject's knowledge. Levinas writes:

Certainly, the relation with the infinite cannot be expressed within the framework of experience. For the infinite transcends the thought that thinks it. But if experience precisely means the relation with the absolute 'Other,' that is, a relation with that which always transcends thought, then the relation with the infinite completes experience in its truest sense" (Levinas, 2011, 25).

Based on this, the type of relation the subject has with the infinite 'Other' is not of the order of knowledge, but rather a kind of desire and attraction towards it. Levinas, in his conversations with Philippe Nemo, refers to this matter and states:

For my part, I think that the human relation with the infinite is a kind of desire or longing, not a kind of knowledge or cognition... Desire is insatiable. Desire, in a way, feeds on its own hunger and is intensified through its own satisfaction. Desire is like a thought that thinks more than what it thinks, or more than that about which it thinks. Without a doubt, desire has a paradoxical structure, but its paradox is no more severe than the paradox arising from the presence of the infinite within a finite act (Levinas, 2008, 108).

1-2 The "Face" of the "Other" as the Apprehension of the Subject's Infinite Responsibility

The encounter with the "Other" takes place through the Face; it is the Face through which I apprehend the infinity of the "Other." Levinas's discussion here is, of course, not a phenomenology of the face, since fundamentally Levinas does not believe in the phenomenal appearance of the face in the ordinary sense and considers the face invisible because it is the dimension of the alterity of the infinite "Other" (Levinas, 1998, 191). The encounter with the face is not an everyday encounter, of the sort where one might be preoccupied with the "Other's" hair or skin color; it is far more authentic than that. The Face is fundamentally not an object of perception. The Face, in the Levinasian sense, does not correspond to phenomenon and appearance; rather, it is always beyond them. The Face is the primary and most exalted manifestation of the "Other." Consequently, while it signifies the majesty of the "Other," it is also poor and destitute. Levinas says: "The first issue is the uprightness of the face, its defenselessness, the nakedness and defencelessness of the skin of the face. The skin of the face is the most naked and the most destitute of human parts. The face is the most naked, though its nakedness is dignified and pleasant. The face is also the most destitute. A kind of inherent poverty exists in the face; man's effort to hide this poverty by putting on a countenance, by posturing, confirms this point. The face is defenseless and exposed to threat; as if it were

inviting us to an act of violence. At the same time, the face is that which forbids us from killing" (Levinas, 2008, 100).

Furthermore, Seán Hand writes regarding the face: "Levinas's account of the face as the apprehension of the moment of facing the infinity of the 'other', which goes beyond the physical world, is significant. The unguarded presence of the face renders futile any attempt on my part to reduce the 'other'. The face is that which constantly places me in the ethical test of relating to the 'other'. And thus, it places an infinite responsibility upon me. This is the ethical dimension with which Levinas is concerned" (Hand, 2009, 36-37).

Therefore, the encounter with the face is immediate and ethical (Levinas, 2008, 99); that is, it provides the condition for the possibility of ethics. In Levinas's view, the face is not something one can evade or feign ignorance towards (Levinas, 1996b, 143). The face draws the subject towards itself and engages him like an unsolvable enigma. The message the face holds for the subject is precisely the subject's lack of independence and the pure, unconditional truth of the "Other." The face expresses the infinite "Other" (Levinas, 2011, 66), and it is, in fact, this expression of the infinite "Other" that rises up before the subject, or, in Levinas's terms, "resists my power" (Levinas, 2011, 197) or, as he states elsewhere, "calls my freedom into question" (Levinas, 1990, 294).

As stated, Levinas believes that the first word of the face is the command "Thou shalt not kill." But this claim by Levinas itself contains two essential points. First, the face and speech are connected (Levinas, 2008, 102); in other words, the face speaks. The face speaks to me and, in return, expects a response from me. It is in this way that the subject is responsible for the "Other," and this responsibility is infinite. "The first thing the face asks of me is commitment and responsibility" (Levinas, 2011, 201). The subject cannot ignore his responsibility towards the "Other" (the face of the "Other") (Levinas, 2011, 218-219). The responsibility Levinas speaks of is not an assigned or incidental responsibility that can be revoked; the subject is inherently responsible for the "Other." The subject's responsibility is an eternal and perpetual responsibility, and it is through this responsibility that the subject becomes a subject. In this regard, Michael Morgan writes in his book *Discovering Levinas*: "Levinas is not merely saying that the subject is responsible for the other; more precisely, he is saying that subjectivity or being a subject just is responsibility" (Morgan, 2007, 158).

Here, the adjective "infinite" removes the restrictions and contingencies imposed upon responsibility. Based on this, the subject's responsibility is no longer confined to their own actions but also encompasses the actions of the "Other." The subject is responsible both *for* the "Other" and *for* the "Other's" responsibility; in other words, I am guilty for what I have not done. Regarding this, Levinas gives an example from Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov*: "We are all guilty of everything and for everyone, and I more than all the others" (Levinas, 2008, 113). The phrases "everything" and "everyone" besiege the subject. From a

Heideggerian perspective, one could say this "all" pertains to the essence of Being. Consequently, the subject is responsible before Being, and this responsibility is anterior to any covenant or contract. I am responsible not by my thought, will, or desire, but by my very being. However, this responsibility is not of a kind that the "Other" is aware of or, so to speak, grateful for; the issue is not at all about the reciprocal behavior of the "Other." What is important is that *I* am aware of this responsibility. The responsibility of which Levinas speaks has absolutely no aspect of quid pro quo or self-interest; this is not the responsibility commonly understood but rather a kind of sacrifice and self-sacrifice—a sacrifice that expects no material or spiritual reward. The subject sacrifices solely because they are immersed in the infinite realm of the "Other." Yet, this sacrifice is not out of choice but out of duty and responsibility; it is as if the subject is utterly ready to serve the "Other." Since this service arises from an infinite responsibility, the greater one's sense of responsibility, the greater their sense of guilt becomes. This circle of guilt is so vast that one can never escape it, and it perpetually expands further. Thus, the position Levinas delineates for the subject and the "Other" is like that of master and servant; no matter how hard the eager servant strives, they cannot fulfill their service. Yet, this sense of responsibility is such that it places the subject in a position of vulnerability; the subject's eyes are burned by the infinite light of the "Other," and yet the subject remains, and becomes even more, eager to behold the "Other." In this way, the subject is engaged in total self-sacrifice; this total self-sacrifice, however, draws the subject into the realm of passivity. This passivity is prior to the subject's activity, initiative, choice, and will; from this perspective, it can be said the subject is fundamentally in a passive state, in other words, before the subject is a subject, it is an object (Morgan, 2007, 157). And ethics takes place in the condition of the subject's thing-hood; the subject surrenders itself absolutely to the absolute "Other" like an object. Therefore, ethics has no limits; there is no expediency that can push the ethical imperative aside; in other words, ethics is valid unto death.

2. A Review of Goethe's Faust

2-1 The Morphology of Part One of Goethe's Faust

Goethe's play *Faust*, in its first part, delves into the depths of the human soul, its boundless desires, and their ethical consequences. The story begins with a Prologue in Heaven, where the Lord and Mephistopheles, a cunning and cynical devil who appears as the spirit of negation and is ever in search of corrupting humans, wager over Faust's soul (Goethe, 2014, 11). Faust, a weary and despairing scholar who, after years of studying philosophy, law, medicine, and theology, feels he has comprehended nothing real and has reached the brink of suicide (Goethe, 2014, 15), makes a pact with Mephistopheles so that in exchange for his services, should he ever reach a moment of complete satisfaction, he will surrender his soul (Goethe, 2014, 67). Mephistopheles takes Faust on adventures, including to a witch's kitchen which holds an elixir

of love and youth (Goethe, 2014, 85); there Faust drinks the love potion and sees a vision of ideal beauty, which prepares the mental groundwork for the encounter with Margarete in the subsequent part of the story. Faust then meets Margarete (Gretchen), an innocent and simple girl from the lower class of society (Goethe, 2014, 93).

Faust becomes infatuated with Margarete and requests Mephistopheles to help him attain his beloved. The relationship between Faust and Margarete begins with the aid of Mephistopheles. Mephistopheles provides magical jewels so that Faust can capture Margarete's attention. Faust secretly places the jewels in Margarete's house. However, Margarete's mother, who considers ill-gotten wealth to be corrupting, donates them to the church (Goethe, 2014, 129); but Mephistopheles brings even finer jewels once more and takes Faust to the house of Margarete's neighbor, Martha, so that he may meet her there (Goethe, 2014, 131). Shortly after, they go out onto the street, Faust draws near to Margarete amorously and promises that his soul and heart will belong to her forever; Mephistopheles, however, hears these vows and mocks them (Goethe, 2014, 138).

Gradually, the relationship between Faust and Margarete deepens; they arrange secret meetings in Martha's garden; there Faust takes his pleasure from Margarete and declares his love for her (Goethe, 2014, 144), yet this passionate love soon turns into catastrophe. In order to be alone with Faust, Margarete gives her mother a sleeping potion provided by Mephistopheles and unintentionally kills her (Goethe, 2014, 157). Then, a short while later, she becomes aware of her illegitimate pregnancy and thinks with regret of the fate of other girls (Goethe, 2014, 157); the ill repute of Margarete spreads through the town and reaches the ears of her brother Valentine, a soldier of the guard. In later parts of the story, Valentine confronts Faust. They draw swords on each other, and Faust, with the help of Mephistopheles, kills Valentine (Goethe, 2014, 163).

Following these events, Faust and Mephistopheles leave the city and go to the mountains. Margarete also drowns her illegitimate infant and descends into madness (Goethe, 2014, 191). Soon after, Faust learns of Margarete's imprisonment and attempts to save her. Mephistopheles misleads the jailers so that Faust can enter and bring his beloved out. But Margarete, now repentant and seeking divine salvation, refuses and bids Faust to leave. Faust and Mephistopheles flee the prison at the last moment. At that very moment, a voice from above declares that Margarete is redeemed (Goethe, 2014, 195).

2-2 Character Analysis

2-2-1 Faust

Faust is, in truth, modern man; a human who, despite centuries of experience and knowledge acquisition, and in spite of his victories and advancements, still does not feel happiness. Faust, at his first appearance, in his initial monologue, points to this fact:

Oh God, how hard I've slaved away, / With what result? Poor foolish old man, / I'm no whit wiser than when I began (Goethe, 2014, 15).

Modern man, the one who brought rationalism to its peak and brought about the industrial revolution, the very same one who colonized and ignited the fires of devastating wars, has now reached a point where he feels dissatisfaction with his own condition. He, in Nietzschean terms, has succumbed to nihilism and finds no way out of it. Faust, in his place, expresses his condition with these words:

I awake each morning, how? Horrified, / On the verge of tears, to confront a day / Which at its close will not have satisfied / One smallest wish of mine, not one. Why, / Even the hope of a bit of pleasure, some pleasantness, / Withers in the atmosphere of mean-spirited fault-finding, / My lively nature's quick inventiveness / Is thwarted by cares that seem to have no ending. / And when the night draws on and all is hushed, / I go to bed not soothed at last, but apprehensively, / Well knowing what awaits me is not rest, / But wild and whirling dreams that terrify me (Goethe, 2014, 55).

Faust cannot simply disregard all that he has left behind, all that experience and knowledge, and return to a pre-modern life. On the other hand, he cannot be hopeful about the future either. In such a situation, only a miracle, or in other words, a fundamental rupture, can show the way. This miracle for Faust is the appearance of Mephistopheles. Faust knows that Mephistopheles is a deceitful demon, yet he agrees to wager his salvation and eternal damnation in exchange for attaining a moment of genuine feeling and true satisfaction. In this regard, we cannot consider Faust as deceived; he consciously treads the path of the demon in the hope of being released from the dead end of meaninglessness.

2-2-2 Mephistopheles

Who, in truth, is Mephistopheles? In his first encounter with Faust, when he emerges from behind the stove through the smoke, he says:

“Why all the racket? What's your wish, sir?” (Goethe, 2014, 48).

The true identity of Mephistopheles is concealed within this simple sentence. Accordingly, the best description of Mephistopheles's identity should be this: he is the one who serves Faust so that his desires, as far as possible, may be fulfilled. This service is sometimes simple and trivial; such as summoning demonic spirits to entertain Faust (Goethe, 2014, 51), sometimes slightly more complex; such as procuring jewels for Margarete (Goethe, 2014, 97), and at times utterly bewildering; such as preparing an elixir for Faust's rejuvenation (Goethe, 2014, 85). Now, if we consider Faust in his true identity, namely modern man, then Mephistopheles, that miraculous helper, would be the essence of technology. Technology, since it is inherently

related to *technē* or “art/craft,” always has a subtle and ingenious solution at hand in order to “make,” and through this, it becomes related to *poiēsis* or “creating/bringing-forth.” This is the very point that Aristotle also refers to in Section 1140 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (Aristotle, 1999, 88). However, the relationship between *technē* and *poiēsis* is not a fixed and constant matter. *Technē* is craft and skill, and in other words, is rooted in knowledge acquired beforehand. Hence, *technē* remains oriented towards the past, whereas *poiēsis*, since it is mental creation and invention, faces the future. Therefore, *technē* and *poiēsis*, while giving rise to each other, also negate each other. This situation compels us to move beyond binary logic and to map this relationship within the Hegelian triadic logic. Accordingly, the thesis is *technē*, which has a practical aspect and is past-oriented; on the other hand, the antithesis is *poiēsis*, which has a theoretical aspect and is future-oriented. Now, their synthesis must simultaneously possess the characteristics of both, meaning a kind of “making” that has both a practical and a theoretical aspect and, alongside its relation to the past, is also oriented toward the future. To find this synthesis, we must return to the Indo-European root of the word *technē*: *teks*. This word means “to weave” and “to fabricate” and simultaneously encompasses both practical and abstract activities¹ (Pokorny, 1959, 1059-1060). Hence, we can say that technology is indeed a kind of weaving; technology interweaves existing possibilities like warp and weft to bring about humanity's ultimate “sovereignty”, for it is only through dominion over “everything” that humanity finds the meaning of the “meaningless” and thus escapes the clutches of nihilism (this is an illusion that modern humanity is caught in). But dominion over everything will never be realized because the possibilities, or metaphorically, the threads on technology's loom, are limited. Consequently, technology cannot achieve its inherent goal of establishing human dominion over “everything.” Technology incessantly weaves, yet its fabric cannot satisfy humanity's infinite desire. There is always an “empty place” that technology has failed to fill. Hence, in Kojevian terms, we can say that technology is that negating/transforming activity which can never satisfy the desire for dominion over everything. This unfinished negation preserves desire as an eternal void and in this way, itself becomes the reproducer of the “meaningless.” Technology claims: “I have filled all the empty places, except this one.” Unaware that “this one” is in truth a product of technology itself as unfinished negation. In this way, *teks*, which was previously thought to be all-encompassing, encounters its inherent limitation. Here, based on Hegelian logic, we must posit an antithesis for *teks*. But what is the antithesis of practical and abstract weaving-fabricating? Let us seek the answer on the horizon of Heidegger's thought; in his book *Contributions to Philosophy (Of the Event)*, Heidegger speaks of Restraint (*die Verhaltenheit*), which calls humanity to silence and contemplation.

Silence and contemplation that arise from the encounter with the question of Being (Heidegger, 1989, 14). Therefore, if *teks* and, consequently, technology, are an unceasing effort

¹ Words such as *texere*, *text*, *texture*, and *textile* are all derived from the same root, *teks*.

to seize everything, then deliberative self-restraint, in contrast, steps aside and lets things be in their suchness. The synthesis of these two conditions ultimately leads to a mode that, although it involves a poiesis-making like technology, is not totalitarian. This phenomenon can be compared to poetry and art. Poetry and art are that kind of poietic-making which respects the selfhood of things and harbors no desire for domination.

2-2-3 Marguerite

Marguerite emerges as the Levinasian ‘Other’ of Faust. Faust, who is modern man, in his relentless pursuit to satisfy his unlimited desires, first sees Marguerite on the street and perceives her as a beautiful and conquerable object, as where he says:

Pretty lady, here’s my arm, would you allow me to see you home? (Goethe, 2014, 93).

This initial encounter shows the subject's attempt to reduce the ‘Other’ to a part of his own world and to disregard her as the dimension of the absolute. But Marguerite offers an irreducible resistance. She has an innocent face that, with its vulnerability, calls the subject to recognize his infinite responsibility; a responsibility that Faust, immersed in his pact with Mephistopheles, is unable to accept, and instead, turns Marguerite into an instrument for pleasure. In the scene of the witch's kitchen, where Faust drinks a love potion and prepares himself to conquer a woman, this reduction of the ‘Other’ becomes more apparent, for that woman appears not as an independent being, but as a mirror for Faust's desires: "One more look in the mirror, let me, that woman was inexpressibly lovely!" (Goethe, 2014, 92).

Although Faust claims to love Marguerite, he never recognizes her as the dimension of the absolute, that for which he would sacrifice himself unto death. Faust repeatedly abandons Marguerite in her suffering. Through this action, he demonstrates that the ‘Other’-oriented ethics of modern man is only valid insofar as it serves his will (to dominate everything).

3. Towards an Interpretation

Now, let us reinterpret the story from Levinas’s perspective. Faust wants to turn everything—in other words, the “Other”, into the “Same.” This is precisely what modern man does. By de-othering the “Other,” man attempts to overcome the meaninglessness of the world. One manifestation of this effort is technology. As mentioned earlier, the character Mephistopheles plays the role of technology in Goethe’s play. Mephistopheles first creates the illusion in Faust through temptation and then by facilitating certain matters, making him believe that he can ultimately dominate everything and seize that moment of pure pleasure. However, reaching the desired end requires traversing a path. It is not as if everything falls into place with a snap of the fingers. Faust must ride on horseback through mountains, travel to distant taverns, associate with witches, love, kill, and so on, until he finally captures that lost desired object, or in

Lacanian terms, the object petit a.¹ This suffering and hardship are, in fact, the very suffering and hardship that modern man endures through technology, in the hope that one day he will ultimately achieve happiness.

However, Margaret's entrance into the story marks a turning point. Margaret, this absolute "Other", initially has no interest in Faust, and Faust's attempts to possess her remain futile. But with Mephistopheles' help, Faust finally succeeds in winning Margaret's heart. The beginning of Margaret's attachment to Faust, which takes place in the garden scene, is the very moment when the burden of infinite responsibility towards the "Other" falls upon Faust's shoulders. It is precisely from this point that Faust's escapes begin. The "Other" imposes itself upon the subject as the necessity of sacrifice unto death, but the subject cannot endure it. This inability to endure responsibility arises from two sources. First, the "Other" will never become the "Same." In other words, the alterity of the "Other" always remains; thus, Faust's initial desire for domination over "everything" remains unfulfilled. The second factor in the subject's inability to endure responsibility, however, relates to the role of Mephistopheles, technology. Mephistopheles has created the illusion that he can lead Faust to his ultimate desire, provided that Faust accompanies him. Faust's commitment to Mephistopheles prevents him from devoting his entirety to the "Other." In fact, there is no entirety left to devote to the "Other." Similarly, modern humans are so immersed in technology that even if they wanted to, they no longer possess the possibility of understanding the "Other" as absolute alterity. Technology has enlisted them in its service, dragging them from one realm to another. Under such conditions, the possibility of any form of ethics is negated.

4. Will There Be a Place for Ethics in the Future World?

Just as Mephistopheles in Goethe's play acts as the intermediary/barrier in the encounter between Faust and Margaret, technology also appears as the intermediary/barrier in the encounter between the subject and the "Other." This essay argues that this situation will have three major consequences.

A. Face-to-Face Encounters Will Diminish:

One of the functions of technology in today's (and future) world is to significantly reduce the need for humans to encounter other humans. Online banking, virtual stores, social networks, medical applications, and so on, all render us needless of facing the Other; the face. From Levinas's perspective, however, this undermines the subject's understanding of the infinite dimension of the Other. A subject who cannot look into the "face" of the Other will be unable to hear the command "Thou shalt not kill" emanating from the face. In such conditions, the

¹ The object petit a. In Lacanian thought, desire is always lack. But humans want to overcome this lack. Therefore, they are always in pursuit of that thing which fills desire as an empty void. The object petit a, of course, can never be grasped.

subject encounters not the abyss of the "Other" but a "screen." Yet, where exactly lies the difference between a screen and a face? Perhaps one of the most fundamental characteristics of the face is its secrecy.¹ The face, due to its excessive secrecy, its excessive depth, is revealing. This situation can also be observed in the first encounter between Faust and Margaret. What initially moves Faust is the beauty of Margaret's face (Goethe, 2014, 93). This face is so secretive that, at first glance, it reveals the infinite dimension of the "Other" and captivates Faust with Margaret. In contrast, the screen is revealing. The screen displays everything it contains at the very first glance. But precisely for this reason, due to its excess of revelation, it becomes secretive.² In Goethe's play, nowhere is Mephistopheles's face mentioned. It is as if he has no face at all, and instead possesses a screen where everything is instantly evident. In other words, the screen leads not to the infinite dimension of the "Other" but only to a "limited" set of data.

B. The Face is Reduced to a "Profile Picture":

Following the reduced need to encounter the "Other," a new phenomenon emerges: real faces turn into "aestheticized" profile photos. However, the crucial characteristic of a profile picture is that, while it belongs to the "Other," it does not reveal that absolute otherness. In other words, it is not what it claims to be. From this perspective, a profile picture is a "counterfeit thing." But what will be the consequence of facing this counterfeit thing? If we accept Levinas's view that the face confronts us with the absolutely foreign dimension of the Other, and if we also accept that this absolute foreignness is the foundation of ethics as infinite responsibility towards the "Other," then what a counterfeit face does is nothing other than undermining responsibility. Since a profile picture is not truly a face, while claiming to be one, it evokes a certain sense of responsibility, but not to infinity. This very fact misleads the subject. They feel responsible, but not enough. Just as Faust feels responsible for saving Margaret from prison, he enters the prison and tries to bring her out with him. Yet, in the end, when he learns of Margaret's resolute decision to accept punishment, he chooses life over death and abandons his beloved.

C. The Illusion of Possessing the "Other" Emerges

When the "Other" is reduced to a profile picture and a mass of "data," the subject gains the ability to possess them. The subject believes they have transformed the otherness of the "Other" into the "Same." This brings them pleasure. Henceforth, the subject prefers to interact with the virtual version of the "Other" rather than facing the real one. The virtual version feels safer to them. However, this apparent security comes at the cost of the decline of ethics.

Nevertheless, there is still hope for the realization of an "Other"-oriented ethics in the future world, provided that modern humanity's understanding of technology undergoes a

¹ The face, at first glance, has a definite form. This definite form is repeated in all human beings, and this very repetition acts as a veil.

² The abundance of information on the screen renders that information, those words, invisible.

transformation. As previously mentioned, dominating technology must give way to non-dominating technology. In that case, the "Other" will once again ascend to the status of absolute otherness, and Levinasian ethics will become possible.

Conclusion

Ultimately, based on the arguments presented, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Goethe's Faust can be reinterpreted through the lens of Levinasian philosophy. In this reading, Faust represents the modern subject, Mephistopheles represents dominating technology, and Margaret represents the "Other" of the modern subject.
2. The placement of technology as an intermediary/barrier between the subject and the "Other" will have three fundamental consequences: a. Face-to-face encounters will diminish, b. The face will be reduced to a profile picture, c. The illusion of possessing the "Other" will emerge. This situation undermines Levinasian "Other"-oriented ethics, which is founded on understanding the "Other" as absolute otherness and, consequently, on infinite responsibility toward them.
3. Despite this, we can still hope for the realization of an "Other"-oriented ethics in the future technological world. This essay argues that if humanity abandons dominating technology and instead embraces non-dominating technology; a technology based on recognizing the inherent being of things, the dimension of the "Other" as absolute otherness will once again be acknowledged.

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