

## Educational Passivity: Levinas's philosophy of moral education and the possibility of "Learning from the Other"

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### ABSTRACT

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This research, employing a conceptual-interpretive analysis, investigates the educational implications of Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy of "the Other" to identify a pathway for escaping the subject-centered and individualistic (Egological) paradigms of education. The central question of the study is: How does Levinas's transition from ontology to ethics reshape conventional paradigms of learning and the teacher-student relationship? The findings reveal that Levinas's critique of Socratic maieutics (inwardness) and testimony epistemology invites a redefinition of learning—not as "recollection" or "information transfer", but as the revelation of the Infinite and encounter with the teacher's "Height". Based on this, the article proposes a novel concept, "educational passivity", which challenges the classical dichotomy of "authoritative teacher/passive student" or "facilitator teacher/active student". In this model, both poles of the relationship engage in "infinite education" through the acceptance of "the virtue of openness" and the rejection of self-centeredness. The results indicate that implementing this approach requires transforming the teacher's role from "Facilitator" to "Disturber", designing polyphonic curricula, and shifting the evaluation system toward "response-based" assessment. The goal of such education is not to empower the subject, but to transform it into a sensitive and responsible being in the face of the Other.

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## **Intruduction**

The history of Western philosophy, from Descartes's "cogito" to Kant's "transcendental subject" and even Husserl's phenomenology, has always been a narrative of the dominance of the subject and the attempt to reintegrate "the Other" into the domain of the subject—or, in Levinasian terms, "The Same". In this intellectual tradition, knowledge is not perceived as an opening toward the strange (the Other), but rather as a process of possession and conquest by the knower (Subject). The result of this "egology" or self-centered epistemology is the emergence of a form of totality in which "the Other" attains legitimacy only to the extent that it aligns with the criteria of "I". As Adorno correctly notes, the modern world is saturated with "I"s that are constantly reproducing themselves; a situation that not only creates an epistemological impasse but also deepens an ethical crisis. The catastrophes of the 20th century and the persistence of modern violence demonstrate that the autonomous, rational subject is not necessarily an ethical subject, and education based on "self-cultivation" has failed to prevent the violent erasure of the Other.

This theoretical structure is not merely a philosophical epistemological issue but the very ground and source of a deep, irreconcilable rift in the moral fabric of the modern world. As philosophers such as Adorno, Horkheimer, and Derrida rightly recognized, the modern world is not only saturated with autonomous subjects but also these subjects, each driven by the pursuit of their own interests, wills, and desires, are constantly reproducing and reinforcing this "I" of self-assertion. This "I" that is unwilling to transcend its own boundaries. In such a situation, knowledge and reason are not merely tools for understanding the world but are transformed into instruments for its domination and appropriation. This "egology" creates a rift between subjects, between the various "I"s, such that "the Other"—another human being—is recognized and treated only as an obstacle to self-realization or, at best, as a tool for achieving the goals of "the self." The result of this perspective is that violence and aggression toward the Other, in various forms and at multiple levels, are not only organized but also "rationalized" and made justifiable.

In the wake of this long history of the subject's dominance from the beginning of philosophy to the present, ethical experience has not only been pushed to the margins but has also been reduced to a level of abstraction. Ethics, within the self-founding space of subjectivism, is often either reduced to a set of general and choice-accepting principles or understood in the form of outcome-oriented calculations as if an ethical decision were merely a rational decision that attends only to causal relationships and consequences. Within this framework, the Other does not appear as a heterogeneous, open-being but rather as an object on the horizon of my perception; an object whose value and legitimacy are conditional upon the subject's pre-established criteria. In Martin Buber's terms, in this encounter, the Other is understood as an object and holds no balance with me as a human being (Buber, 2013). This very objectification

of the Other has paved the way for its symbolic and even physical erasure. The catastrophes of the 20th century—from death camps to large-scale bombings to political-religious<sup>1</sup> violence—have shown that the rational subject, when it fails to place the Other within its own framework of understanding, can quickly expel it from the realm of humanity and then issue any decree against it. From this perspective, the relegation of ethics to a purely rational and individual matter from the subject's viewpoint reveals a significant weakness: ethics, as long as it relies solely on its own capabilities, desires, and self-fulfilling projects, lacks the power to prevent violence and may even reproduce it.

In this context, educational and pedagogical systems, following this philosophical tradition, have largely interpreted "learning" as a process of accumulating information or expanding individual cognitive abilities. In such an approach, both the teacher and the student are trapped within a closed circuit of "the self"; a situation in which the goal is to empower the subject to exert greater control over the world, rather than to face responsibility toward the Other. An education that emphasizes "self-cultivation", the development of individual intrinsic capacities, and the realization of the "complete human being" is so self-centered that it cannot place the Other at the center of attention. In contrast, the lived experience of education demonstrates that a significant portion of learning occurs when an individual encounters something unexpected, dissonant, or challenging—an event that disrupts the structure of the self and compels reflection. This experience of openness, which precedes (a priori) any cognitive process, is notably absent from many educational theories. An authentic encounter with the Other—not as a tool for teaching, but as an event that constitutes the basis of learning—opens a horizon in which, humble, and unstable learning is always subject to transformation. It is precisely at this point that the fundamental question of this research emerges: if philosophy and traditional education are built around the axis of "the self", is there a possibility of escaping this impasse? How can learning be freed from the constraints of pure "recognition" and redefined as an ethical event and an encounter with the "Other"? It appears that to answer this question, we must move from ontology to ethics.

Emmanuel Levinas's thought finds meaning in this horizon; a thought that, by disrupting the long-standing Western ontological tradition, presents ethics as "first philosophy" and emphasizes the priority of the Other's presence over any form of knowledge, experience, or will. In his philosophy, the Other is not an object of understanding or knowledge but the source of responsibility that reveals itself to me prior to any choice or will. This prior responsibility transforms the structure of learning from its foundations: learning is no longer merely a process

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<sup>1</sup> Manifestations of this phenomenon in the contemporary world, from the Rohingya genocide and bloody wars in Western Asia to systematic forms of political, sectarian, and gender-based violence, indicate a situation in which "the Other" is reduced to a level of "objectification". In this context, the subject, relying on a form of "instrumental rationality" and combining it with ideological prejudices, not only legitimizes but also reproduces the physical and symbolic erasure of the Other as a "rational necessity" or "sacred duty".

of acquiring knowledge or developing skills but an event in which I am drawn out of the circuit of self-sufficiency and opened toward the Other. From this perspective, "learning from the Other" means accepting the possibility of transformation and displacement of the subject—that is, the moment in which I distance myself from the stability of myself and allow the Other to open new horizons for me. This article seeks to demonstrate how such an understanding of learning has profound implications for education and moral education, and how it can provide a framework for transitioning from subject-centered educational models to patterns based on responsiveness, sensitivity, and responsibility. In this regard, an analysis of Levinas's primary texts reveals that learning, at its most fundamental level, is not an act of possession but an experience of relinquishing possession—an experience that contemporary educational policies have largely neglected.

To achieve this goal and facilitate this theoretical and practical transformation, the structure of this research is organized as follows: In the first stage, we will examine and analyze the philosophical origins of Emmanuel Levinas and, in particular, his comprehensive critique of the egological tradition and self-centered epistemology in Western philosophy. This stage not only clarifies the contextual foundation of Levinasian philosophy but also makes the intensity and seriousness of his critique more transparent to the reader. Next, we will analyze and examine the concept of "the Other" (*l'Autrui*) or, more broadly, "otherness" (*Alterity*). In the third stage, we will investigate the complex and intertwined relationships between learning, knowledge, and ethical responsibility within the framework of Levinasian philosophy, demonstrating that these concepts are not oppositional but rather interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Finally, we will briefly address the deep and practical implications of this approach for theoretical and practical education. The methodology of this research will be based on a conceptual-interpretive analysis of Levinas's primary texts and related studies in philosophy of education.

## **1. Conceptual Framework of Levinasian Philosophy**

### **1-1. The Intellectual Origins of Levinas**

Emmanuel Levinas is a French philosopher less known among Persian speakers, yet highly influential in philosophy, especially in moral philosophy. Seán Hand, as the editor of Levinas's works, begins his own book with the following sentence:

Emmanuel Levinas is one of the most profound, exacting and original philosophers of twentieth-century Europe." ([Levinas, 1989, v](#)).

This Jewish-born philosopher, although initially influenced by the works of individuals such as Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, and others, eventually dedicated himself to developing his own philosophy. Derrida's role in introducing Levinas to academia deserves more recognition than others. In his article "*Violence and Metaphysics*", Derrida examines Levinas's thoughts and

introduces him thoroughly. According to Derrida, Levinas's philosophy stands in contrast to the entire tradition of pre-modern philosophy and Aristotelian philosophy. Levinas proposes a "non-violent ethical relationship based on the infinity of the Other" that allows one to escape from metaphysics (Derrida, 2005, 102). To analyze the conceptual framework of Levinasian philosophy, one must focus more on how his philosophy emerged. This philosopher's moral thought originates from two sources: one philosophical and the other religious.

#### **A) Philosophical Source:**

Levinas owes a great deal to the philosophy of Husserl and Heidegger in the philosophical origins of his thought. He was a student of Husserl and completed his doctoral thesis under his supervision, titled "The Theory of Perception in Husserl's Phenomenology". Naturally, one can observe the profound influence of Husserl on him (Bozorgi, 2009). Despite the criticisms Levinas has of Husserl, he still identifies himself as a phenomenologist in method, as he states in an interview with Philippe Nemo:

It was with Husserl that I discovered the concrete meaning of the very possibility of "working in philosophy" without being straightaway enclosed in a system of dogmas, but at the same time without running the risk of proceeding by chaotic intuitions. The impression was at once of opening and method (Levinas, 1985, 28-29; Olia, 2009, 30).

The most important criticism Levinas makes of Husserl lies in the meaning of phenomenology. To summarize, in Husserl's phenomenology, the focus and importance are on meaning and the Self. In contrast, in Levinas's phenomenology, the priority and emphasis are on the Other (Levinas, 2021).

On the other hand, Levinas was significantly influenced by Heidegger. Although Levinas was a direct student of Husserl and wrote his Thesis on Husserl's philosophy, he received the most profound influence from Heidegger. It should be noted that Levinas's engagement with Heidegger primarily relates to the early phase of Heidegger's thought, prior to the famous "turn" (Kehre) he later underwent. Levinas greatly admires Heidegger's *Being and Time*, considering it one of the best books in the history of philosophy (Bozorgi, 2017). Levinas's encounter with Heidegger holds special significance in understanding his philosophy. On one hand, he describes these encounters as a kind of "shock" to his own thinking, and on the other, he critically engages with Heidegger's ideas. In his view, he is both indebted to Heidegger—especially to Heidegger's phenomenological analyses of *Dasein* in *Being and Time*—and believes that the question of *Dasein* should be set aside in favor of the question of human meaning (Olia, 2009). Levinas critically argues that in *Being and Time*, Heidegger still retains a form of subjectivity that understands and interprets *Dasein* as a state of being; thus, the most important criticism Levinas makes of Heidegger is that in Heidegger's philosophical system,

ontology takes precedence, and Heidegger places *being* and *Dasein* above all else, whereas in Levinas's view, *being* must be subordinated to human significance.

Perhaps one could summarize Levinas's critique of Heidegger as follows: the finitude and boundedness of *Dasein* can serve as a starting point for rethinking the meaning of humanity, not being and existence, which, according to Heidegger, the history of philosophy has forgotten. In other words, *Dasein* and its being-in-the-world are prior to the question of being (Asghari, 2012).

### **B) Religious Source:**

Before entering the main discussion, a brief reference to Levinas's religious background is necessary. Although some interpreters emphasize the dominance of Jewish theology in his thought and others highlight his indissoluble connection to the European philosophical tradition, for this research, it is important to highlight the distinction between the two epistemological models—the Greek and the Hebrew—in his philosophy. In the Greek tradition, knowledge is often shaped through the metaphor of "light and seeing" (*theoria*)<sup>1</sup>; a knowledge that assumes the discovery and appropriation of truth by the subject—as observer. In contrast, the Hebrew tradition relies on the metaphor of "hearing and obedience": a form of encounter that prioritizes the descent of command or demand from the Other. This shift from "seeing" to "hearing" provides the foundation for the transition from subject-centered education to education based on responsibility toward the Other; a transition that lies at the core of Levinas's theories (Peperzak, 1993).

Levinas, who was raised within the fabric of the Talmud, viewed the study of sacred texts not merely as a religious or historical exercise, but as a foundation for philosophical reflection and ethical practice. He regarded Talmudic teachings not as a mere collection of legal injunctions, but as "ethical-pedagogical techniques" that address self-awareness, shame, and primary responsibility. In this interpretation, concepts such as "inner worship" (*Avoda Shebalev*)<sup>2</sup> or "inclination toward repentance and reconciliation" are not simply acts of devotion, but ethical-pedagogical techniques that free the subject from self-centeredness and strengthen its capacity for ethical responsiveness (Matanky, 2018; Levinas, 1990b).

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<sup>1</sup> *Theoria* (*Theoria*): A Greek term meaning "seeing," "observation," or "contemplation." In classical Greek philosophy, particularly in Plato and Aristotle, *theoria* was considered the highest form of life and knowledge, in which the mind, through the observation of pure truths, attained knowledge. This concept forms the foundation of the Western epistemological model based on "seeing," which Levinas critically critiques for neglecting moral responsibility toward the Other and reducing human relationships to a possessive act (the appropriation of truth by the subject).

<sup>2</sup> *Avoda Shebalev* (*Avoda Shebalev*): A Hebrew term, "service of the heart" or "inner worship", which holds a foundational place in Jewish tradition and typically refers to prayer (*Tefillah*). This concept emphasizes piety, introspection, and emotional engagement in the spiritual relationship with God, drawing its meaning from biblical injunctions that call for service to God with one's whole being.

For this reason, Levinas critically engages with trends such as Maimonides' rationalism<sup>1</sup> or projects such as the Jewish Science<sup>2</sup>, which seek to align sacred texts with modern rational standards. He warns that a purely theoretical or interpretive reading of religious texts can erase their pedagogical dimension; because, for Levinas, the essence of religious teaching lies not in the formal formulation of propositions, but in the possibility of ethical contact and the examination of responsiveness toward the Other (Davis, 1996; Levinas, 1990b).

Among Levinas scholars, two distinguishable interpretive currents exist, both with significant pedagogical implications. One group, such as Etienne Feron, views Levinas primarily as an independent philosopher who translates religious propositions into philosophical language, making the study of sacred texts unnecessary for understanding his theoretical framework. In contrast, scholars such as Robert Gibbs, Susan Handelman, and Adriaan Peperzak emphasize that Talmudic teachings are not only the source of key concepts in his thought (such as infinite responsibility, the priority of the Other over the self, and moral subjectivity) but also shape his practical (praxiological) framework. From this perspective, the author, like some researchers, argues that understanding Levinas's pedagogical ideas without reinterpreting his Talmudic influences would be incomplete (Davis, 1996, 93–94; Peperzak, 1993). This interpretive conflict is not merely a historical or textual difference, but a methodological disagreement regarding how educational teachings are derived from philosophical and religious sources.

The application of religious-educational teachings in Levinas's thought becomes evident in addressing historical questions, such as the Holocaust. Levinas frames the concept of "forgiveness" within a dialectical framework of rethinking: on one side, those who "view forgetting as a precondition for forgiveness", and on the other, those who "neither forgive nor forget". Levinas proposes an intermediate path: "We remember in order to forget"—that is, moral memory plays an educational role that prevents the repetition of atrocities by recalling their horrors, while simultaneously opening space for interpersonal reconciliation. In this process, forgiveness is not merely a theological or historical act, but an interpersonal

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<sup>1</sup> Maimonides (Maimonides): The most renowned Jewish philosopher, jurist, and physician of the medieval period (12th century CE). His Arabic name is Ibn Maimon (ابن ميمون) (not "Ibn Rushd," which is a misattribution). Maimonides made extensive efforts to reconcile Jewish religious teachings with Greek rationalist philosophy (particularly Aristotelian thought). His famous work, "Dalalat al-Hayrayn" (دلالة الحائرين) (The Guide for the Perplexed), aimed to provide a philosophical and rational interpretation of sacred texts. Levinas opposes this rationalist approach and the attempt to understand God through philosophical reason, emphasizing instead the priority of ethics and the encounter with the Other.

<sup>2</sup> Jewish Science Project (Wissenschaft des Judentums): An academic and intellectual movement that emerged in 19th-century Germany. Its goal was to critically, historically, and scientifically study Jewish texts, history, and culture using modern university methodologies. Founders of this project believed that Judaism, like other academic disciplines, should be subject to rational scrutiny and distanced from superstition or traditional prejudices. Levinas views this project as an example of the effort to reduce sacred texts and religious experience to secular and modern rational standards, thereby neglecting the existential and ethical dimensions of religion.

educational program: the perpetrator must acknowledge and atone, while the victim must cultivate the capacity to accept reconciliation and suppress anger. This model requires practical educational skills, not merely an abstract ideal (Levinas, 1990a; Alexander, 2014).

In conclusion, this religious-philosophical reading reveals that Talmudic teachings in Levinas's thought function both as a theoretical tool for redefining subjectivity and moral responsibility and as a set of techniques and methods applicable in educational and civic contexts. This theoretical-practical overlap necessitates that educational research on Levinas be simultaneously attentive to his philosophical sources and to the structures and practices of Religious-Talmudic traditions; this becomes particularly significant when the goal is to design practical educational strategies for cultivating responsibility and reconciliation capacity in contemporary subjects. Thus, religious teachings in Levinas's philosophy are integrated with moral philosophy, providing a framework in which ethical concepts can be developed and practical ethical education toward the Other can be shaped. This integration demonstrates that Levinasian moral philosophy is not merely an abstract philosophical system, but a framework for practical moral education and social responsibility, a topic that must be further elaborated.

### **1-2. Levinas's Philosophy of the Other**

Like many other philosophers, one can divide Levinas's life into two periods: one influenced by Heidegger and Husserl, in which he critically engages with their ideas, and another in which his thought undergoes a profound turn toward independence and a deep philosophical transformation. In this latter period, Levinas's primary focus shifts to the concept of "the Other" and moral philosophy. As John Lechte notes:

His intellectual journey moves away from ontology, epistemology, or reason and reaches a point where otherness (Alterity) stands fully exposed before us. A point where the irreducibility of otherness can be recognized as valid (Lechte, 2019, 182).

Philosophy before Levinas has always emphasized the subject or the thinking subject, but Levinas shifts the focus from the subject to otherness (alterity), giving priority to the Other. The most important philosophical concept in Levinas is this distinction: the distinction between "the Other" and "the Same" (the self). From Levinas's perspective, the history of philosophy has always been directed toward "the Same", and he writes:

Philosophy seeks truth ..., But truth also means the free adherence to a proposition, the outcome of a free research. The freedom of the investigator, the thinker on whom no constraint weighs, is expressed in truth. What else is this freedom but the thinking being's refusal to be alienated in the adherence, the preserving of his nature, his identity, the feat of remaining the same

despite the unknown lands into which thought seems to lead? (Levinas, 1987, 47-48).

After sketching the general horizon of philosophy and its relationship to the philosopher, Levinas suddenly criticizes this captivating and provocative vision. He writes:

Perceived in this way, philosophy would be engaged in reducing to the same all that is opposed to it as other? It would be moving toward auto-nomy, a stage in which nothing irreducible would limit thought any longer, in which, consequently, thought, non-limited, would be free. Philosophy would thus be tantamount to the conquest of being by man over the course of history. Freedom, autonomy, the reduction of the other to the same, lead to this formula: the conquest of being by man over the course of history. This reduction does not represent some abstract schema; it is man's ego. The existence of an ego takes place as an identification of the diverse. So many events happen to it, so many years age it, and yet the ego remains the same! The ego, the oneself, the ipseity<sup>1</sup> (as it is called in our time), does not remain invariable in the midst of change like a rock assailed by the waves (which is anything but invariable); the ego remains the same by making of disparate and diverse events a history - its history (Levinas, 1987, 48).

After this, Levinas poses a question to the history of philosophy, revealing the depth of his focus on the human and the foundation of his thought. A question that reveals the nature of philosophical thought before itself.:

Autonomy or heteronomy? The choice of Western philosophy has most often been on the side of freedom and the same. Was not philosophy born, on Greek soil, to dethrone opinion, in which all tyrannies lurk and threaten? With opinion the subtlest and treacherous poison seeps into the soul, altering it in its depths, making of it an other (Levinas, 1987, 48).

Thus, from Levinas's perspective, the most significant philosophical deviation is the focus on the Same and the neglect of the Other. For this reason, he speaks of responsibility toward the Other in subsequent passages.

### **1-3. The Other in Contrast to Ontology**

Levinas clearly demonstrated that ontology does not accommodate the Other but reduces it to the Same and views it from the perspective of the Same. In other words, everything that can be said about otherness is said from the perspective of selfhood. Levinas defines this

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'ipseity' refers to the immediate self or self-presence, derived from the Latin 'ipse', a philosophical concept denoting the fundamental nature of subjectivity as the 'I' in first-person experience. It is sometimes used in psychology to describe the self as the foundational ground of all conscious experiences (Lobel, 2017).

as Totalitarianism or imperialism of the Same and asserts that previous “Philosophical knowledge is a priori: it searches for the adequate idea and ensures autonomy.” (Levinas, 1996, 14).

It can be inferred that Levinas, in critiquing Heidegger’s ontology, is searching for a new path for his own thought. He writes Despite Heidegger’s critique of metaphysics, he is still enslaved by this metaphysics (Levinas, 1987, 143).

For this reason, although Levinas is influenced by Husserl and acknowledges Husserl’s turn in ontology, he attempts to establish a different path. It seems that from Levinas’s perspective, Heidegger remains trapped in the ontological interpretation of the self (ontological-self), and Husserl, by moving beyond Heidegger, employs the ontic interpretation of the self (ontic-self) in his philosophy. However, Levinas, by criticizing both the self and the Same, turns toward the Other, and thus it can be said that he has moved beyond the conceptual framework of ontology.

#### **1-4. The Other in Contrast to Epistemology**

Levinas has not spoken extensively about epistemology, and most interpreters prefer to focus on his ethics. However, Abi Doukhan has addressed this issue in an article. From his perspective, since Descartes, there has been a traditional approach to truth. Truth, in order to be valid, must be located within the thinking subject; thus, from Descartes’s viewpoint, this thinking subject forms the context and origin of every effort to discover truth. For this reason, truth originates from the thinking subject, which exercises its freedom of discovery, law, and justification (Doukhan, 2013). This interpretation once again reveals the hidden power in the Same, a power through which the thinker, instead of dealing with truth, turns to the completeness of 'Self,' and truth itself will become that Self.

According to Levinas, subjectivism is not the knower of truth, but rather, it falls into the trap of a form of self-centeredness (solipsism) and is always at risk of constructing its own reality as truth. In other words, the Same is not answerable to anyone and has no criterion other than itself for discovering truth, and in justifying truth, it is compelled to turn inward toward its own self-assertion. Thus, what occurs within the framework of epistemology is not truth, but the Same or self. This is the truth that Levinas seeks to explain and awaken in his own generation. Therefore, to achieve authentic knowledge of being, what position must be adopted? According to Levinas, justice is the position that brings a specific mindset closer to discovering such authentic knowledge of being. For Levinas, true access to the outside can only arise from a mindset that possesses a sense of justice. From Levinas’s perspective, justice is a moral concept related to the ethical dimension of humanity; thus, he once again returns to his own position—the philosophy of the Other (Doukhan, 2013).

Levinas, by referring to the undermining of freedom and self-assertion, demonstrates the possibility of an epistemology based on the Other. Levinas writes in *Totality and Infinity* as follows:

Knowledge as a critique, as a tracing back to what precedes freedom, can arise only in a being that has an origin prior to its origin—that is created. Critique or philosophy is the essence of knowing. But what is proper to knowing is not its possibility of going onto an object, a movement by which it is akin to other acts; its prerogative consists in being able to put itself in question, in penetrating beneath its own condition (Levinas, 1979, 85).

## **2. The Other as a teacher**

### **2-1. The Possibility of Learning from the Other**

Is learning from the Other possible? This question has been debated by philosophers from Aristotle's time to the present. This is precisely what philosophers refer to as knowledge through testimony; thus, to clarify the philosophical possibility of "learning from the Other," one cannot ignore the analytical tradition's discussions on testimony, which have been well-developed. The key question in this domain is whether knowledge is a purely internal and individual achievement or whether it has social roots and arises through interaction with the Other. David Bakhurst critically challenges the individualistic view of the mind by drawing on John McDowell's arguments. From his perspective, the learner's mind does not form in isolation; rather, entering the "space of reasons" requires relying on shared rationality and trusting the Other's speech.

Bakhurst demonstrates that learning goes beyond the mere transmission of data; students, through interaction with the teacher, acquire not only propositions but also styles of reasoning and conceptual skills that they could not have created independently. In this way, epistemology of testimony establishes the first step toward overcoming solipsism (individualism) and accepting the constructive role of the Other in the process of knowledge.

However, stopping at this stage is insufficient for Levinas's educational project, as it may lead to a dangerous confusion between "information exchange" and "moral events". In Bakhurst and McDowell's model, although the Other is the source of knowledge, the relationship is still understood at a symmetrical level within the horizon of shared rationality; as if teacher and student are partners engaged in a common linguistic game of knowledge exchange. In other words, although Bakhurst's analytical approach opens the way to exiting Cartesian individualism, in his model, the Other still serves the enrichment of my knowledge, rather than transforming it through ethical encounter.

In contrast to Bakhurst, Levinas introduces a radical level of proposition transmission through the concept of "Enseignement" (Education), which transcends the epistemology of testimony. For Levinas, the Other is not merely a "reliable source" for completing my knowledge, but a "stranger" whose presence disrupts the totality of my rationality.

Thus, Education in this sense means the precise meaning of "the revelation of the Infinite"<sup>1</sup>—the reception of something that is neither within me (a Platonic critique) nor within the horizon of my identity. For Levinas, Education implies an ontological reference to "learning from the Other" and an ethical experience prior to any conscious action.

To this end, while Bakhurst guarantees the "transmission of knowledge from the Other," Levinas speaks of "ontological passivity by the Other"—a place where learning is not the addition of a proposition to one's knowledge, but the transformation of the subject's structure through encounter with the Other's Height<sup>2</sup>. For this reason, Levinas explicitly states that the Other comes from a place where I am not, bringing something I could not have found within myself (Levinas, 1979).

Thus, in analyzing the process of learning from the Other, we encounter two levels:

1. The analytical-epistemological level (Bakhurst/McDowell): where learning occurs as the acquisition of propositional knowledge from the Other, and the Other functions as a reliable source and transmitter of knowledge.
2. The ethical-ontological level (Levinas): where learning becomes the "descent of the infinite", a transformation of the self's totality and opening to the infinite.

The argument of this research is that "Educational Passivity" is precisely realized in the transition from the first to the second level—a place where the student experiences not only the "information" of the teacher, but also the "presence" and "height" of the Other as an ethical responsibility and existential challenge.

## **2-2. The Ethical Dimension of the Education of the Other**

Susan Handelman is among the first to write about Levinas's ethics in relation to education, especially in literature and religious pedagogy. She argues that Levinas's philosophy, rather than epistemology, can become the central concern of educators. Handelman demonstrates how Levinas transforms this philosophy into an educational relationship by revealing the self's relationship with the Other. From this perspective, she identifies it as "the interminability of learning"—a limitless learning that is always changing in the external and in which humans are never fully capable of complete knowledge. In this regard, the relationship of teaching-learning cannot be defined through terms like self-sufficient, protective, autonomous, or utilitarian, nor through the traditional hierarchical view of the teacher as a knower and the student as a tabula rasa. Education is an infinite relationship, and the insights gained

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<sup>1</sup> Or descent of the infinite

<sup>2</sup> The term "Height" (Hauteur) in this text is a translation of the Levinasian concept. In his works, "height" does not refer to spatial elevation or ontological superiority, but rather denotes the ethical demand of the Other, a position that places the Other in the role of a claimant and calls the subject to responsibility. This "height" is distinct from any ontic or epistemological hierarchy and must be understood as "the non-powerful ethical superiority of the Other", which serves as the basis of responsibility and ethical possibility for Levinas.

are evidence of the learner's infinite and absolute responsibility. Thus, both the teacher and the student are positioned as learners (Egea-Kuehne, 2008, 78).

Robert Gibbs similarly addresses the educational dimension of Levinas's thought. He also emphasizes the nature of the learning process. From his perspective, learning is not merely information; it is an ungraspable, demanding experience arising from the authority of alterity (the Other). Gibbs reveals that shifting the locus of education from the self to the Other makes engaging with the Other's question a priority. From his view, this encounter with the Other constantly places the learner in question and compels them to respond and justify themselves. Gibbs emphasizes that listening to the Other is the most important duty of the learner (Gibbs, 2000, 30).

This listening, the self in unpredictable ways under question, challenges it to learn how to respond to something it cannot think or create, and thus leads the learner to understand that this process is a lifelong, infinite journey. In fact, ethical education is an infinite Learning—infinite alterity, infinite commitment, infinite interpretation, infinite humility, and infinite presence within oneself toward the call to responsibility (Gibbs, 2000, 32).

Therefore, it must be said that, according to Levinas's philosophy, the confrontation with selfhood on one side and otherness on the other establishes a two-sided educational process, in which both teacher and student recognize themselves as responsible toward the Other and seek their own educational formation within the Other. In ethical education, this ethical commitment leads to receptivity toward the Other and moral propriety, because the individual moves from self-foundation and self-identity toward other-foundation and other-receptivity. Thus, it must be said that, from Levinas's perspective, the condition of being ethical is the infinite responsibility and accountability we bear toward the Other and others.

### **3. Subjectivity and the Teacher's Responsibility: From the Cartesian "I" to the Hostage of the Other**

The central commitment of education in Levinas's philosophy lies in confronting the problem of the subject's existence in relation to the Other. In Levinas's thought, the subject's existence is not understood as a self-founding "Cogito", but rather as an emergent and derivative being. In this philosophical framework, subjectivity is not a priori quality that precedes ethical relationships but is defined precisely by "responsibility toward the Other" (Chinnery, 2003; Sobon, 2018). Thus, Levinas distinguishes himself from the Cartesian "I" and Kantian "I", as well as critiques Husserl's phenomenology, to show that the subject is not an "I who thinks", but an "I who is called"—a subject that, before any awareness or will, is pre-constituted by the Other. This state, known as "Passivity"<sup>1</sup> in Levinas, refers to a condition where the subject is

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<sup>1</sup> Passivity in Levinas refers to a state of vulnerability and pre-constituted openness in which the Other precedes the subject. In this state, the "I" does not act or will, but is already addressed by the Other before any assertion of "I"—like someone who is called into being by the Other before uttering "I".

already addressed and called to respond by the Other, without any prior action or will (Levinas, 1981, 142). Therefore, it must be said that subjectivity is a responsiveness to the absolute call of the Other—a state where the subject does not appear as the active "I think", but as the passive "Here I am" (Me voici) (Levinas, 1981, 142).

On this basis, in the field of education, the student's presence for the teacher is an existential reality, a reality that shows the teacher's responsibility is only illuminated through this Meaningful presence. This responsibility is so fundamental that it imposes a weight on the teacher even before any conscious action or pedagogical stance (such as greeting, smiling, empathy, etc.)—simply through the student's presence (Sobon, 2018). Levinas explicitly states that this "The unlimited responsibility in which I find myself comes from the hither side of my freedom, from a " prior to every memory, "an" ulterior to every accomplishment, "from the non - present par excellence, the non - original, an archical, prior to or beyond essence" (Levinas, 1981, 10). This existential precedence of responsibility, as Magnis-Suseno puts it, can be summarized as: "I exist because of others" (Magnis-Suseno, 2000, as cited in Sobon, 2018). Thus, a teacher who denies this reality effectively negates their own existence, as the Cartesian principle of self-foundation is deconstructive here. Bertens summarizes this situation as: "I am responsible, therefore I am" (*Respondeo, ergo sum*) (Bertens, 1985; as cited in Sobon, 2018) (Bertens, 2019).

The most radical dimension of this responsibility is revealed in the concept of "Substitution". From this perspective, the teacher is taken hostage by the presence of students, bearing the totality of their existence, including their mistakes, negligence, ignorance, even their happiness. This absolute responsibility places the teacher in a quasi-redemptive position, as if carrying the sins of others as their own and striving to redeem them (Sobon, 2018). This state is not the result of a voluntary choice, but Levinas describes it as a "passivity inconvertible into an act"<sup>1</sup> (inevitable passivity) that transcends even the traditional philosophical concept of "Receptivity"<sup>2</sup> (Levinas, 1981, 117). This passivity is more fundamental than any act of acceptance or cognitive awareness, and it precedes even the subject's ability to receive something without actively creating it. Miller argues that the teacher only grasps the true nature of subjectivity when they accept this hostage-like condition (Miller, 1995). More precisely, the student's presence forces the teacher into an inevitable responsibility that precedes any

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<sup>1</sup> Levinas describes this substitution not as inexistence or imaginative transcendence, but as a state in which the self is emptied of its existence and gives way to the Other, a return of the self toward the Other that reveals the "exit from being".

<sup>2</sup> In philosophy, "receptivity" typically refers to the ability or state of receiving—the capacity of the subject (conscious agent) to receive, experience, or perceive something without actively creating it. Thus, receptivity means the "capacity to receive", a rooted passivity in which the subject is placed in the presence of something even before possessing the ability to receive it.

conscious decision or choice. This situation can be understood as an example of "Educational Passivity"<sup>1</sup>, a new concept that clarifies the teacher's ethical responsibility toward students. Thus, one can conclude that it is the student who makes the teacher human. Responsibility, as an existential truth, compels the teacher to always recognize the student as the "Other" (and not merely as an object), and it is this responsibility that empowers, vitalizes, and inspires the teacher (Sobon, 2018). Levinas critiques and corrects the common misconception that the teacher's responsibility arises from social contracts or personal needs (rights, etc.). He emphasizes that the origin of the educational subject is fundamentally "responsibility toward the Other", not "responsibility toward oneself". This is an educational interpretation of "responsibility toward the Other" (Levinas, 1985, 96–97). Therefore, from Levinas's perspective, the educational relationship is inherently "asymmetrical": the teacher is responsible for the student, even though the student is not necessarily responsible for the teacher. This responsibility is not a reciprocal demand, but a one-sided, absolute commitment.

This position represents Levinas's most fundamental difference from Buber. Buber emphasizes mutuality and symmetry in the "I-You" relationship (Buber, 2013), but Levinas views such symmetry as dangerous, as it risks dissolving the Other into a "totality of dialogue". In other words, in Levinasian ethics, the relationship is always "being-for-the-Other", not "being-with-each-other". This characteristic emphasizes the uniqueness and irreplaceability of the teacher's role, placing them in a position where no one else can bear the weight of their responsibility (Sobon, 2018).

In this theoretical turn, Levinas introduces a fundamental critique of the idea of the "autonomous subject", an idea that has long been one of the most central concepts in philosophy. In contrast, he emphasizes the concept of "heteronomy", an idea long forgotten that he seeks to revive. On this basis, the teacher-student relationship is not a "being-with" (mutuality), but a "being-for" (responsibility toward the Other). As Adiprasetya puts it: "I am for others, but others are not for me" (Adiprasetya, 2000, as cited in Sobon, 2018). This definition creates a unique image of the ideal teacher: someone who is self-sacrificing and generous, bearing the weight of the world's existence and carrying the responsibility of all (Levinas, 1981, 117).

Does this interpretation limit the teacher's freedom? Here, the teacher's freedom is not limited but invested in the freedom and rights of the Other (the student). In this sense, ethical (pedagogical) existence, as Zygmunt Bauman puts it, is nothing other than "surrendering to one's own freedom in the face of the Other" (Bauman, 1993, 60).

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<sup>1</sup> I define "Educational Passivity" as a state in which the teacher is inevitably, involuntarily and without conscious choice placed in the presence of complete responsibility and responsiveness toward students. This state reveals that the teacher's ethical and pedagogical responsibility originates in pre-reflective responsiveness toward the Other, not in voluntary decision or choice.

#### 4. Pedagogy of Alterity: Maieutics criticism, Dialogue, and Encounter with the Infinite

Levinas challenges the classical Socratic definition of education as maieutics<sup>1</sup> (Socratic midwifery). It must be noted, however, that his engagement with the Socratic tradition is not entirely negative; he shows affinity with the Socratic figure who, in the role of the “gadfly”, disrupts the “same” and even demonstrates fidelity to a truth beyond survival through the acceptance of death. This affinity is structural, as these acts resemble Levinas’s encounter with the “face” of the Other. However, Levinas’s fundamental critique of Socratic pedagogy targets its epistemological goal: the concepts of maieutics (midwifery) and anamnesis (recollection). In the Socratic metaphor, the teacher does not impart any truth to the student from the outside but rather helps the student retrieve what they already possess but have forgotten. Levinas argues that such an approach blocks the reception of any “Other”, as ultimately, we do not receive anything except what we already have within ourselves (Levinas, 1979, 51).

Levinas emphasizes that true education comes from outside the subject and brings something beyond the subject’s existing knowledge. As Zhao (2016) notes, education is an event of encountering something entirely new, which fractures the subject’s totality and calls the individual to responsibility. In this encounter, the teacher places the student in a situation where they face an entirely new and other matter, Shattering The closed circle of totality and bringing the infinite presence of the Other into the classroom (Levinas, 1979, 171).

This interpretation links education and pedagogy to the concept of “Revelation”—a continuous yet infinite process in which even the student’s questions become part of the unavoidable articulation of this process. The teacher must teach so deeply that students move beyond mere repetition and begin to speak, initiating listening at the point of speech. This is the timeless moment of the teacher’s past encountering the unknown future of the student—a diachronic<sup>2</sup> event (Matanky, 2018).

The inspirational influence of Levinas’s philosophy extends beyond theory; its impact can be seen in educational theories such as the “pedagogy of unknowing” and “pedagogy with empty hands” (Biesta, 2008), where the teacher sets aside their self-assured and certain attitude and opens up a space of un-knowing, allowing the subjectivity of the student to emerge.

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<sup>1</sup> Maieutics, derived from the Greek maieutikos, refers to the Socratic method of “midwifery” in which Socrates, as described in Plato’s dialogues (especially the *Theaetetus*), does not possess knowledge himself but helps others give birth to knowledge they already possess internally. This concept is grounded in the assumption that truth is already present within the subject, and learning is the process of “recollection” (anamnesis). Levinas critiques this metaphor, as he believes it neglects the subject’s dependency on the Other and ignores the presence of alterity.

<sup>2</sup> Diachronic: A term commonly used in linguistics, philosophy, and social sciences to refer to the analysis of phenomena over time, especially their gradual transformation. In contrast, synchronic refers to the analysis of a phenomenon in a specific moment or state, without direct attention to its historical development. In the text above, “diachronic event” signifies the temporal connection between the teacher’s past and the student’s unknown future, understanding education as a continuous, evolving process rather than a momentary occurrence.

This openness constitutes a critique of performative<sup>1</sup> educational systems, which reduce teaching to technological efficiency and quantifiable outcomes, limiting genuine encounters with the Other through a focus on assessment and productivity (Jourdan, 2012). Levinasian pedagogy, in contrast to such reductionism, understands the goal of education not merely as technical outcomes, but as an ethical experience and a relationship with the Other (Standish, 2001). As Levinas writes: "Teaching signifies the whole infinity of exteriority. And the whole infinity of exteriority is not first produced, to then teach: teaching is its very production. The first teaching teaches this very height, tantamount to its exteriority, the ethical." (Levinas, 1979, 171). Thus, for Levinas, education is not merely the transmission of knowledge or skills, but an ethical encounter with the infinite otherness of the student.

In this framework, "dialogue" is not a pedagogical technique, but an ethical demand that begins with the command: "You must not kill." This command transcends the physical prohibition of violence. From an educational perspective, it signifies respect for alterity, the Other's uniqueness, and the transformation of the Other—a rejection of reducing the Other to an object (Ben-Pazi, 2015). It is precisely from this perspective that Levinas warns of the "danger of pedagogical dialogue", arguing that the desire to transmit knowledge can lead to epistemic violence. When the student enters the teacher's world, their otherness is violated. This means the teacher, instead of respecting the student's inherent diversity, transforms them into a mirror for reflecting the teacher's ideas and concepts. In this way, the desire to transmit knowledge can lead to "invasion"—a process that, in an ethical and epistemological sense, erases the Other's independent existence. Such a process can ultimately result in epistemic domination, where the student becomes subservient to the teacher's worldview, thereby losing their autonomy in thought and experience. On this basis, Levinas also critiques the concept of "Umfassung" (comprehension or full embrace) in Buber's philosophy, as the attempt to fully understand the Other risks absorbing the Other into the self, thereby neglecting the Other's alterity and uniqueness (Ben-Pazi, 2015).

## **5. Parenthood and Vulnerability**

Levinas links education to the concepts of parenthood, futurity, and vulnerability. From his perspective, the teacher and parent both represent the "memory of the past," while the student and child embody the "unknown future"—a future whose ethical meaning lies in openness to transformation (Ben-Pazi, 2015). In this context, futurity is not merely a temporal extension but an unknowable reality beyond one's control, demanding ethical responsibility through the acceptance of this unknown future.

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<sup>1</sup> Performativity: A theory that posits meaning, identity, and reality are constructed through repeated social actions. In performative educational systems, this performativity becomes instrumentalized and limited, preventing the authentic emergence of the student's subjectivity.

For Levinas, parenthood is not a biological act but an ethical structure for embracing the responsibility of another's suffering. This is exemplified in the metaphor of "Phenomenology of pregnancy.," where the subject nurtures the Other within themselves without claiming ownership of their future (Ben-Pazi, 2015). This metaphor underscores an absolute, unconditional responsibility toward the Other's alterity, uniqueness, and autonomy.

Levinas also redefines fear as a "fear for the Other," contrasting it with Heidegger's fear, which is directed toward one's own non-being (Yan & Slattery, 2020). Levinasian fear arises from the possibility of inflicting harm on the Other through one's own actions. In this framework, the subject is vulnerable, but this vulnerability is an ethical virtue that destroys self-centeredness and generates ethical responsibility (Levinas, 1998, 192). Ultimately, the ethically formed subject in this tradition is one who fears for the Other, unlike Heidegger's fear, which is self-centered and tied to one's own non-being. This fear, when mastered, can reclaim one's ethical responsibility. This position not only rejects the Western philosophical tradition of courage and autonomy but also reconstitutes fear as an ethical act.

## **6. Critique of Levinas's Educational-Ethical Philosophy**

Despite the richness of Levinas's educational-ethical framework, it faces serious challenges. The lack of normative guidelines and the failure to answer the practical question "What should be done this Monday morning?" leave educators in a pragmatic dilemma (Chinnery, 2003). Furthermore, Levinas's concept of "Aesthetics of Surrender"<sup>1</sup> shifts ethical agency from autonomy to passivity and acceptance, a notion that is difficult to grasp within conventional educational frameworks (Chinnery, 2003).

Furthermore, some critics warn of the dangers of Levinas's "non-critical acceptance" (Nordtug, 2013). The idea of infinite responsibility and the "debtor's position"<sup>2</sup> can lead to two psychological harms: first, neurosis arising from obsessive guilt and the futile effort to bridge the gap between language and reality; second, the exacerbation of the "subjugated subject" (Excessive Subjection) condition for individuals already marginalized in social structures. Critics argue that an excessive emphasis on self-sacrifice and the erasure of "I" boundaries may neglect the real psychological needs for autonomy and mental health (Nordtug, 2013). Thus, although Levinas raises the most fundamental ethical questions of education, translating this "infinite responsibility" into the limited language of teachers and schools requires critical and cautious reflection. Nonetheless, he remains one of the most important critics of modern subjectivity, a path later continued by Foucault, Derrida, and others.

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<sup>1</sup> Aesthetics of Surrender in Levinas is illustrated through the metaphor of a musician accepting another's mistake to save the musical performance, emphasizing the ethical value of passivity and receptivity over autonomous action.

<sup>2</sup> Debtor's position refers to the attempt to substitute the lack of language in representing the unity of the Other, leading to a neurotic orientation where the individual obsessively bears the guilt of any gap between "Said" (what is spoken) and "Saying" (the act of speaking) (Nordtug, 2013).

## **7. Critique of Dogmatism and the Challenge of Agency**

The application of radical concepts such as "Passivity", "being a hostage," and "surrender" in the field of education has always faced a serious critical question: Does such an approach promote blind obedience, dogmatism, and the negation of critical thinking? (Nordtug, 2013). If the student must simply be a "receptor" and the teacher holds the "absolute authority" (Magisterial Height) where is the place for intellectual independence? And how can a teacher, who is in a radical state of passivity and hostage to the student, exercise the necessary agency for classroom management, evaluation, and error correction?

To address these challenges, it is essential to distinguish between "Ethical Passivity" (the acceptance of the presence of the Other) and "intellectual passivity" (the inactivity of the mind). What Levinas refers to as "receiving from the Other" does not mean passive acceptance of false statements or mental inertia; rather, it refers to the "pre-critical moment of learning." From this perspective, it can be inferred that, according to Levinas's philosophy, the subject must first receive something "other" before engaging in critique or critical thought. In other words, "hearing" (as a form of receptivity) is the condition for "speaking" (as a form of critique). A student who remains trapped in their own internal critique without hearing the unfamiliar voice of the teacher does not learn; instead, they repeat their own assumptions and cling to their self-centeredness and totalizing identity. Thus, "educational passivity" is not about devolution, Subjugation or submission, but about "intellectual hospitality" toward ideas that conflict with our mental structures. More precisely, Levinas opposes absolute Subjugation, arguing that ethical engagement with the Other should not lead to total submission or the loss of intellectual autonomy; rather, it should invite a "responsibility" in which the subject, while preserving their own unity, commits themselves to the unboundedness of the Other. In this regard, Levinas opposes any form of intellectual or political totalism that suppresses the Other, emphasizing that "hearing" and "accepting the presence of the Other" require active responsiveness, not passive obedience. This ethical responsiveness is the foundation of genuine freedom, in which the "I" finds its identity not through domination over the world, but through unconditional commitment to the Other.

On the other hand, regarding the teacher's agency, the concept of "being a hostage" should not be interpreted as the paralysis of the teacher's executive power. In Levinas's philosophy, the teacher's responsibility toward the student is an infinite responsibility that includes accountability for "growth" and "truth". A teacher who corrects a student's academic mistake or maintains classroom order to enable learning is not exercising Power or dominance but fulfilling a difficult ethical duty. In this context, the teacher's "authority" does not arise from an arrogant will to power, but from the Height (vulnerability) and commitment to the Other (the student). Thus, the teacher, in the position of Height, possesses an ethical superiority over the

Other (the student), not through power, but through Height—a form of ethical elevation toward the Other.

Furthermore, the teacher, precisely because they are the "hostage" of the student's future, has no right to abandon the student in ignorance or error. In this way, the apparent paradox is resolved: The Levinasian teacher is the most Powerful teacher, but this power is not for "self" but entirely dedicated to the Other. In other words, this power is of the nature of ethics. a height that arises not from dominance, but from ethical commitment to the Other.

## **8. Discussion and Conclusion: Toward Educational Passivity**

This research, through a critical examination of the impasses of subject-centered and Egologic (individualistic) Education, demonstrates that Emmanuel Levinas's philosophy offers a positive potential for reconstructing the meaning of education. Contrary to conventional readings that confine Levinas's ideas to the realm of abstract ethics, the central argument of this study is that the transition from the Cartesian "I" to Levinasian "alterity" necessitates the acceptance of a paradigm shift, leading to the reconstruction of a new theoretical framework in education—here conceptualized as "educational passivity". This concept is not synonymous with psychological passivity but is instead a condition for learning and an escape from the closed circle of "the same". Based on this, the findings of the research can be summarized at three levels: theoretical, philosophical, and practical.

### **8-1. From "Subject Autonomy" to "Educational Passivity" (Responding to the Crisis of Agency)**

The analyses in this article show that modern education, grounded in Egology (individualism) and the cultivation of autonomous subjects, inadvertently reproduces violence and suppresses the Other. In this tradition, the "I" is always the center of meaning, and the Other gains legitimacy only if it aligns with the standards of the "I". This study, through a critique of this approach, demonstrates that the teacher's and student's responsibility originate from a "a priori responding" (a priori responsibility). The concept of "educational passivity", elaborated in this research, responds to the false dichotomy of "agency/structure". In this model, the ethical agency of the student emerges precisely in the moment when their mental structure is disrupted and transformed by the "trace" of the Other. Real agency does not arise from complete independence from structure, but from openness to the Other and the acceptance of structural transformation.

The analysis of the educational relationship in this study goes beyond the classical dichotomy of "tradition/modernity." In traditional systems, the relationship is grounded in the teacher's authority (teacher as active, student as passive), In contrast, modern constructivist approaches with turn to student, reduce the teacher to a facilitator (student as active, teacher as neutral). However, this study argues that both approaches, despite their apparent contradiction,

are trapped in a shared presupposition: "the effort to stabilize the autonomous subject" (whether in the role of the teacher or the student).

In contrast, the "educational passivity" model transforms the structure of this relationship from its foundation. In this perspective, both poles of the relationship (teacher and student) are subjected to a form of "Passivity," but this shared condition does not lead to symmetry. The teacher, in the role of "responsibility," experiences passivity; through "self-negation" and "radical openness," they dedicate themselves to the Other, and it is precisely through this encounter that the teacher is also educated. On the other side, the student, in the role of "Listener", suspends their knowledge and self-negation, turns toward the Other.

Thus, unlike previous models that always eliminated one pole in favor of the other, here we encounter a dual dynamism in which both parties are "active," but not in the sense of domination, but rather as an effort to respond. In this context, the balance of the relationship is not maintained through social contracts (facilitation), but through the concept of "Height". The teacher is not "symmetrical" with the student, but their superiority is not of the kind of power, but of "greater responsibility." Furthermore, the openness and suspension of Knowledge Provide provide the teacher with the opportunity to redefine their own ideas in the role of the Other, as a new perspective.

Although leading social constructivist approaches (such as Vygotsky's theories) emphasize the importance of interaction and the role of the "Other" in learning, differing from radical constructivist models, the fundamental distinction of Levinas's approach lies in the nature of this relationship. In conventional interactive models, the relationship is often symmetrical and based on collaboration to build knowledge, as if the teacher and student are equal partners in a cognitive project. However, Levinas's critique points out that such equalization can reduce the height (asymmetrical power) and the transformative potential of the "Other." In the model proposed by this study, encountering the "Other" is not merely a social interaction to solve a problem, but an "asymmetrical ethical event" in which the "Other" (the teacher) holds a superior position, not in terms of political power, but through an invitation to responsibility. Ultimately, the relationship between teacher and student in this model can be understood as an "asymmetrical ethical interaction".

This model is accompanied by a delicate complexity, which can be termed "double asymmetry." On one hand, the teacher is in the position of height and moral authority, and the student must be a listener. However, on the other hand, the teacher, precisely because they are the "responsible" guardian of the student and their "hostage", is obligated to wholeheartedly attend to the student's needs and voice. Thus, the teacher's hearing of the student's voice does not arise from educational democracy or egalitarian camaraderie, but from a heavy moral duty of care. In this turn, positions are not fluid, but both parties are asymmetrically bound to the "Other": the student is bound to learning, and the teacher is bound to responsibility. This existential and conditional dependency between teacher and student is precisely the

Levinasian understanding the prior engagement of the subject with the 'Other' is a prerequisite for any ethical action. Therefore, the educational relationship model is neither the authoritarian view of traditional models nor the symmetrical facilitative interaction; instead, it is structured as an asymmetrical ethical interaction with "double asymmetry."

Thus, "educational passivity" does not mean negative passivity or blind imitation, but rather the "virtue of openness" toward the strangeness of the teacher. This study argues that as long as the subject (student) does not negate their self and does not position themselves as a radical listener, education—which is the result of interaction with the Other—will not be achieved. Furthermore, as long as the teacher does not position themselves in the role of infinite responsibility, they cannot establish a relational educational interaction. Additionally, this study shows that as long as the subject remains self-centered and does not turn toward the Other, authentic critical thinking (which requires distance from the self) will not emerge, because critique necessitates a gap that is only created through the arrival of the Other.

## **8-2. Reconceptualizing the Nature of Learning: From 'Maieutics' to the 'Revelation of the Infinite'**

The second achievement of this study is a redefinition of the learning process. Levinas, by critically challenging the Socratic midwifery (maieutics) and Platonic recollection, demonstrates that these models block the reception of truly "new" truth, as their premise assumes that truth is already embedded within the subject and merely needs to be awakened. In contrast, this study shows that genuine education arises "from outside", breaking the closed circle of totality and introducing the presence of the infinite into the educational space.

Within this framework, learning is no longer merely the accumulation of information or the development of cognitive skills, but an "infinite learning process"—an existential event in which the student encounters something they were not capable of creating. This encounter, as emphasized in the epistemological testimony, transcends the transmission of true statements; instead, it is an experience in which the teacher's "height" (asymmetrical ethical authority) invites the subject to respond and take responsibility. Thus, from the perspective of educational passivity, knowledge is not unidirectional, but an interactive process between two poles of education—the teacher and the student—both of whom participate in its formation through self-negation and infinite responsibility.

In this sense, knowledge is not an object or a collection of accumulated statements, but an intersubjective event—an event in which truth does not remain in the teacher's possession or transfer to the student but emerges between them and continues through mutual responsiveness. This betweenness of knowledge transforms it into a dynamic and open process that always goes beyond individual horizons.

One might raise the question: In the teaching of convergent subjects (such as mathematics or physics), what is this "infinite"? It must be noted that educational passivity does not mean the replacement of scientific content with moral preaching. For example, in a mathematics

class, the teacher is a Disruptor who does not confine the student to formulas but instead shows them that each scientific truth is merely a shadow of a greater reality. In this context, what the student receives from the teacher is not merely a formula of mathematics or physics, but rather "the seriousness of seeking truth," "humility in the face of reality," and "responsibility toward knowledge." Thus, the content of Levinasian learning is not the elimination of technical subjects, but a transformation of the student's existential relationship to those subjects. This relationship, oriented toward the infinite, serves as a continuous search for new meaning.

In this understanding of knowledge, learning is no longer about absorbing or memorizing pre-existing content, but rather an existential openness to the intersubjective event of truth—an openness in which the subject encounters something that is not the product of their internal capabilities and not reducible to skill or representation. In this framework, learning becomes a continuous movement that places the individual in the presence of the Other and invites them to participate in the creation of new meanings.

### **8-3. Practical Implications: Redesigning the Curriculum and the Role of the Teacher**

To move beyond abstraction and address practical challenges, the application of the "educational passivity" theory necessitates structural changes in three fundamental components of the educational system:

#### **A) The Role of the Teacher: From "Facilitator" to "Disturber"<sup>1</sup>**

Contrary to constructivist approaches that reduce the teacher to a neutral facilitator, Levinasian pedagogy positions the teacher as someone with "moral authority". The teacher must be someone who disrupts the student's false sense of security by posing fundamental questions and presenting challenging texts, confronting the student with "otherness". The teacher must shift from the role of a "midwife of knowledge" (who merely awakens the student's internal knowledge) to the role of a "the Other of Height". A teacher who is the "hostage" of the student's future has no right to leave the student in ignorance; instead, their responsibility is to "disturb the sleep of dogmatism" and "negate self-centeredness" in the student. However, the concept of the "Disruptive teacher" must not be confused with the "authoritarian teacher". In a classroom where power dynamics are at play, there is always a risk that the teacher, under the guise of disrupting the student's mental structure, may resort to arbitrary preferences or symbolic violence. The safeguard against this danger is embedded in Levinas's philosophy itself: the Levinasian teacher is not a self-serving disturber, but also

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<sup>1</sup> In this context, the term "disturber" corresponds to the English term "Disturber" (French: *Dérangement*) and is used in Levinasian philosophy to denote the "disruptive" role of the teacher. In Levinas's framework, encountering the "Other" is not a soothing act, but precisely an agent of disturbance that destabilizes the "Same" (Levinas, 1981). The teacher, in this role, disrupts the symbolic order and closed cognitive structure of the student, creating a "constructive disturbance". This concept is closely related to Jacques Derrida's idea of "deconstruction", particularly where he speaks of the "event" as an occurrence that, through its arrival, shatters expectations and creates the possibility of the impossible. Thus, the "disturber" is an agent of opening up closed horizons, not a cause of chaos.

a "hostage" of the student. Their authority is not of the kind of power, but of responsibility and service. In fact, the prior responsibility of the teacher toward the student (The Other) necessitates a shift from the authoritarian teacher to the "disruptive teacher" who is unconditionally committed to infinite responsibility. The teacher may only disturb the student's calm if this act is not for the satisfaction of their own superiority, but entirely for the purpose of "opening the student's horizon of vision". In the absence of this ethical commitment, any intervention by the teacher can lead to psychological harm; thus, disturbing is not a freely chosen pedagogical technique, but an ethical action conditional on the teacher's pure humility.

### **B) A Polyphonic Curriculum:**

Educational Content Should Not Be Merely a Mirror of Students' Current Interests or Identity (What Levinas Criticizes). The curriculum must include texts, narratives, and experiences that bring "otherness (alterity)" into the classroom—voices that originate outside the student's cultural and intellectual boundaries and challenge them. In this polyphonic framework, classroom interactions take on a different role. The shift from symmetric dialogues (aimed at consensus and uniformity) to asymmetric confrontations—where the difference and strangeness of the Other is not a barrier but a motivating force for learning—becomes central.

### **C) A Responsiveness-Centered Assessment System**

In this model, the criterion for evaluation is not the quantity of data retained (memorization) or the accuracy of predefined answers, but rather the quality of the student's responsiveness. Responsiveness here refers to the subject's ethical capacity to listen and engage with the Other, not merely to provide the "correct" answer. Assessment must evaluate how far the student has moved beyond the defensive shell of their own knowledge and offered a responsible response to the teacher's disruptive question. More precisely, the metric of evaluation is the student's openness—measuring their movement from the position of "I know" (reliance on possessed knowledge) to the position of "Here I am" (*Me voici / I am here*), indicating readiness to serve and respond to the Other.

Thus, assessment in this model is not about measuring the student's knowledge, but about inviting them to recommit to responsibility and transcend themselves. This shift reflects the inherent paradox of Levinasian ethics in assessment: how can infinite responsibility—by its very nature immeasurable—be embedded within the limited framework of school grades? The attempt to assign grades to "openness" risks reducing ethical action to a performative display aimed at earning marks. Therefore, in the model of educational passivity, the nature of assessment must transition from "quantitative measurement" to "qualitative and narrative valuation". Here, the teacher observes not the endpoint of the student's response, but the "path of their responsiveness". Assessment in this sense is not a judgment about the student, but a renewed invitation to their responsibility. Thus, assessment tools move from standardized tests toward portfolios, self-reflective narratives, and critical dialogues to determine how far the

student has moved beyond the defensive boundaries of their own knowledge and offered a responsible (not necessarily technically 'correct') response to the call of the Other.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, this article demonstrates that the crisis of modern education originates in self-centered ontology, where learning is understood not as openness, but as the process of "dominating the world" by the subject. Emmanuel Levinas, by overturning this foundation, invites us to the idea of "educational passivity". Levinasian educational philosophy, despite its practical challenges, offers a novel path to escape the deadlock of instrumental education and epistemic violence. "Educational passivity" is an invitation to reintroduce "humility" and "listening" into the heart of the teaching-learning process. In this new perspective, the outdated dichotomy of "authoritative teacher/passive student" or "facilitator teacher/active student" dissolves, making way for an infinite relationship in which both parties are engaged in a continuous process of education (Infinite Education) through self-negation and acceptance of passivity.

If the goal of traditional education is the empowerment of the subject (in the Cartesian sense), the goal of Levinasian education is the transformation of the subject into a sensitive, responsive being toward the Other. This pedagogy cultivates a humanity that understands true freedom not in solipsism or pure independence, but in the capacity to respond to the call of the Other, accept infinite responsibility, and reject the self-centeredness of the subject. Such education heralds a society in which the Other is not a threat or instrument, but a source of meaning and ethics.

On this basis, it can be demonstrated that four fundamental transformations occur in "educational passivity":

A) Transformation in the Nature of the Subject: The shift from the Cartesian subject (self-centered and independent) to the responsive subject (derived from the Other). In this perspective, human identity is not formed in the "I think" (*Cogito*), but in the "Here I am" (*Me voici*) and in the relation to the Other.

B) Transformation in the Educational Role: A redefinition of educational roles beyond traditional dichotomies. In this context, the teacher moves from the role of the "omniscient authority" to the "hostage of the Other" and "a priori responsible carrier". Their role is not merely the transmission of knowledge, but the disruption of the student's self-centeredness and an invitation to moral responsiveness. On the other side, the student ascends from the role of the "Tabula rasa (empty vessel)" to the "radical listener" and "responsible responder". Thus, the educational relationship model is neither the authoritarian view of the traditional model nor the symmetrical facilitative interaction; instead, it is structured as an asymmetrical ethical interaction.

C) Transformation in Learning: The shift from "Maieutics recollection" (Socratic midwifery) to "encounter with the infinite"; a space where knowledge is not formed within the self, but outside and in relation to the Other.

D) Transformation in Agency: The shift from "self-sufficient autonomy" to "responsible heteronomy"; an agency defined not by the power to dominate the world, but by the virtue of openness and the acceptance of responsibility.

In the end, Levinas's philosophy teaches us that the goal of education is not to empower the "I", but to cultivate a human being who dares to negate themselves in the face of the Other's face and shoulder the responsibility of the Other.

### Author Note

It is important to note that the author utilized artificial intelligence as a research assistant for editing, rewriting, and improving the structure of the text, in accordance with COPE guidelines. However, the final responsibility for the content and scientific accuracy of the material lies entirely with the author.

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