

# Preface

LEOVINO MA. GARCIA  
ATENEEO DE MANILA UNIVERSITY

“The Face is what one cannot kill,  
or at least it is that whose *meaning* consists in saying:  
“Thou shalt not kill!”

Emmanuel Levinas, **Ethics and Infinity**, 87

**A**t no other time is the philosophy of the French-Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas more relevant and urgent than at this time when the main mantra of the leader of our nation happens to be: “Kill, kill, kill!”. This extremely difficult philosophy based on an experience of the Other’s **“Face”** shows us that even before I grasp myself as free, I have already been found by Someone to inspire me to become responsible for the Other who is uniquely different from me.

Why does this philosophy appeal at a time when the major problems have to do with violence, injustice, inequality, authoritarianism, racism, sexism, ageism, etc.? It is because this philosophy is firmly based on **freedom as responsibility for the Other** instead of freedom to simply

develop my own self. Indeed, the philosophy of Levinas is first an **ethics as a desire to do the good** and be of service to the Other and Others instead of only cultivating my own self-interests.

Unlike past existential philosophies of intersubjectivity, the ethical philosophy of Levinas is intimately connected with responsibility in society and politics. In this case, Levinas not only speaks of **infinite responsibility** for the Other but also **for the Others**. It is here that Levinas' s thought becomes fascinating and challenging us to persevere in doing the "little act of goodness" to every human being, regardless of nationality, race, religion, gender, age, socio-economic status, political position, intellectual ability, etc. To go beyond these boundaries is to **truly see what is essential -- the "Face" of the Other and Others**.

For me, there is no better guide to understanding the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas than Roger Burggraeve whose friendship and kindness I am fortunate to enjoy.

### **Abstract**

In this insightful study, Roger Burggraeve the eminent specialist on Levinas shows why Vasily Grossman's masterpiece, *Life and Fate* fascinated the French-Jewish philosopher Emmanuel Levinas during the last decade of his life. According to Burggraeve, Grossman's account of Stalin's **totalitarian** State resonated with Levinas's philosophy of the **face** and socio-political responsibility. Burggraeve envisions as his task to show the inextricable

link between **ethics, politics** and **responsibility in society**. He accomplishes this in three symphonic movements. In a first movement, he describes Levinas's quest for an alternative foundation for society beyond **being**, the **otherwise than being**. In a second movement, starting with the other of the Other, the *third party*, he stresses Levinas's insistence on the ethical necessity of justice and the State. This is where Grossman's account of the dark side of the State becomes thought-provoking for Levinas. In a third and final movement, Burggraeve brings out how Levinas surpasses every social-political regime by means of the **human rights** of the vulnerable Other(s) and by means of the "**small goodness**" which lifts the socio-political system into the Infinite and into the religious realm.

**Keywords:** *small goodness, ethics, social-political responsibility, being, otherwise than being, third party, totalitarianism, human rights*