



Deep ecology and the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas: the importance of moving from biocentric responsibility to environmental justice

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ABSTRACT: Environmental theory and practice can benefit greatly from Emmanuel Levinas' non-ontological philosophy of the Other in order to address the current global environmental crisis. From this viewpoint, this article focuses on 2 major positions within deep ecology. We discuss the significance of transitioning from one of them, which represents biocentric responsibility, to the other, which seeks to achieve environmental justice by challenging the hegemony of institutionalised environmentalism. In Levinasian terms, this is represented by moving from the anarchic realm of ethics (face-to-face) to the totalising realm of politics (humanity), where the naked face of the Other becomes visible in the presence of a Third, and decision-making and concrete disputes resolution becomes necessary. Within this framework, historical and current inequalities compel the global North to degrow in order to allow the Others to weather the consequences of resource overconsumption and inequality.

KEY WORDS: Otherness · Ethics · Third party · Critical theory · Latin America · Environmental politics

1. INTRODUCTION

The French-Lithuanian philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995) addresses Western philosophy based on modernity's universal Being, in a critique of its totalising ontologism. We find a parallel between Levinas' assertion that the I/Other escition is a necessary component of Western modern rationality and how, according to critical theory of deep ecology, it is also the seed of the subject/object and society/nature escitions (Agoglia 2011). The former causes the totalisation of the world and the unjust vulnerability of the Other, while the latter is the basis for instrumental dominance over nature, accompanied by an

unbridled economic growth and technological development on an otherwise biophysically constrained planet, leading to the current socioenvironmental crisis.

Given this point of convergence, we propose to use Levinas' critique of modern ontologism and his philosophy of radical alterity to interpret ecological theory in its most critical aspects. We will discuss the otherness of the environment, the responsibility that the environmental crisis has imposed upon us, and the importance of considering a third party — or the Third — in the pursuit of environmental justice. We will discuss the implications of applying Levinas' philosophy to the environmental debate and the main

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differences between 2 opposite positions within deep ecology. One of them stands closer to a radical biocentrism and the other to a counter-hegemonic dispute against institutionalised environmentalism. We attempt to elucidate in Levinasian terms the potential political ramifications that both positions entail.

We will focus on Levinas' works *Totality and infinity* first published as *Totalité et Infini: essai sur l'extériorité* in 1961 (Levinas 2007), *Otherwise than being or beyond the essence* from *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* 1974 (Levinas 2006), and *Entre nous: on thinking-on-the-other* from *Entre Nous: Essais sur le penser-à-l'autre* 1993 (Levinas 1998). We will also review some of the numerous studies that address his philosophy in order to discuss environmental issues, whether they focus on animalist ethics (Davy 2007, Guenther 2007, Atterton 2011, Larios 2020) and/or ecologist theory (Llewelyn 1991, Leff 2004, Atterton & Calarco 2010, Edelglass et al. 2012, Herzog 2013, Ale 2016, Palacio 2018, Barzola-Elizagaray et al. 2023).

The cited works mainly discuss Levinas' ethical considerations. His politics have not received enough attention in environmental literature, primarily because Levinas himself did not examine them thoroughly (Faure-Quiroga 2015) and was occasionally evasive and ambiguous when questioned about it (Castro-Serrano 2014). We will emphasise the importance of political dimension and justice when addressing environmental issues, offering an interpretation from a Latin American perspective.

2. THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS AND DEEP ECOLOGY

The first United Nations Environmental Summit was held in Stockholm in 1972, the same year the Club of Rome published the report 'The limits to growth' (Meadows et al. 1972), putting the environment on the international political agenda. Since then, this field of study has grown as a result of the contributions of the various researches that addressed it. Discussions and solutions for the socioenvironmental crisis have been developed with input from different academic, institutional, and social actors. Each, however, has a unique set of interests and perspectives about what should be done. As a result, the environmental crisis is framed as a field of conflicts in which one can distinguish primarily between (a) an institutionalised environmentalism, driven by Earth Summits and the official international agenda, and supported by large sums of money and technological and scientific developments, and

(b) a deep or critical ecology, supported by various branches of alternative scientific development and social movements (Devall & Sessions 2001, Naess 2005, Agoglia et al. 2014).

The report *Our common future — call for action* by Brundtland (1987), Agenda 21 by the United Nations (1992), and the numerous international agreements that followed the Rio Earth Summit from 1992 established the dominance of institutionalised environmentalism that had emerged in the 1970s. Following this, the concept of sustainable development — which considers environmental protection in relation to social and economic growth — was accepted as a normative principle on the official international agenda. This sector's solutions centre on technological advancements to address issues such as ozone depletion, resource depletion, carbon emissions, excessive pollution, and so on, all of which are consequences of the system's current functioning rather than causes of all of our problems. Measures such as recycling, alternative energy, electric cars, and bio-fuels do not seek to reduce consumption patterns, but rather to benefit them by buying more time. Devall & Sessions (2001, p. 43) write:

'In this worldview, the Earth is seen primarily, if not exclusively, as a collection of natural resources. Some of these resources are infinite; for those which are limited, substitutes can be created by technological society (...) Humans will continue to dominate Nature because humans are above, superior to or outside the rest of Nature. All of Nature is seen from a human-centred perspective, or anthropocentrism'

According to Naess, who coined the concept of deep ecology in 1973, the ultimate goal of this shallow measures is to secure 'the health and affluence of people in the developed countries' (Naess 2005, p. 7). On the other hand, from the perspective of the deep ecology movement, this environmentalism fails to challenge the model of unrestricted growth based on market logic, as well as the unequal distribution of ecological benefits and harms, which are the root causes of all social and environmental problems (Agoglia 2012). These, the real threats to our existence, are Faustian technological development, limitless economic growth, or the modern instrumental rationality of nature's dominance (Riechmann 2005a).

In contrast, deep ecology's concerns 'touch upon principles of diversity, complexity, autonomy, decentralization, symbiosis, egalitarianism, and classlessness' (Naess 2005, p. 7). It does not see changing and overcoming the socioenvironmental crisis without a radical transformation of the dominant economic order's values and production relations (Devall & Sessions 2001, Leff 2004). 'The foundations of deep

ecology are the basic intuitions and experiencing of ourselves and Nature which comprise ecological consciousness. Certain outlooks on politics and public policy flow naturally from this consciousness' (Devall & Sessions 2001, p. 65). This theory aims for 'political-economic decentralisation and greater population control over production and consumption strategies, underpinned by a participatory and horizontal debate of the social bases' (Agoglia et al. 2014, p. 226). According to Devall & Sessions (2001, p. 66):

'Western culture has become increasingly obsessed with the idea of dominance: with dominance of humans over nonhuman Nature, masculine over the feminine, wealthy and powerful over the poor, with the dominance of the West over non-Western cultures. Deep ecological consciousness allows us to see through these erroneous and dangerous illusions'

When first introduced, the concept of deep ecology was posited as a branch of philosophical ecology. Over time, it evolved into encompassing a number of movements from different origins and disciplines, with a critical and transformative perspective on how to address emerging environmental issues by changing the system bases.

One of the central tenets that deep ecology has developed around and has been sustained over the years is the concept of 'biocentric equality', in which the human species is just one of many that inhabit the planet. And, because all species rely on one another for survival, we should strive to coexist as harmoniously as possible with them. As it progresses, the biocentric debate expands from how to meet human vital needs such as food, water, and shelter to include other human needs or rights such as love, play, creative expression, intimate relationships with landscape and other humans, and even the need for spiritual growth (Devall & Sessions 2001).

The difficulty of achieving these goals in a harmonious manner opens up philosophical debates and political ramifications within the same deep ecology movement. In this regard, the movement we can now consider does not respond to a uniform theory, but rather constitutes a contested field in and of itself. It includes many different worldviews, cultures, regionalities, rationalities, disciplinary fields, and interests. For the valuative transformation of social and socio-natural relations, there is a spectrum of discourses with divergent praxis. On one end of the spectrum, there is a rejection of national and international institutions in favour of creating equity and sustainability outside of them, whether through the development of new community relations that are in tune with nature or through participation in struggles against capitalism's expansion

over nature. Its supporters can choose to join or not, and participation is based on shared ideologies. As a result, different heterogeneous groups, which may or may not agree with one another, are agglutinated in this position. Each is pursuing small or medium-sized objectives, with little to no massive and organic social cohesion beyond a certain amount of overlap or interaction (Leff 2004). It is hard to provide concrete examples of this position because we are discussing extreme positions and every particular situation has its grey areas, but we could include to this end some ad hoc civil assemblies gathered to confront polluting developments or companies, some isolated communities that organise themselves around specific beliefs and practices, also some environmental non-governmental organisations.

On the other end of the spectrum, we find some green parties, social or ecological movements that support candidates in determined circumstances to participate in the State. This position seeks a counter-hegemonic debate of the economic model's fundamental tenets by occupying the institutions that it uses to impose them. Although it is based on similar principles to the other position, it has a strong institutional component that emerges to challenge the massive reach of institutionalised environmentalism. This position engages in institutions and political roles, leading movements and legal quests within the State, with the environment as a topic, but interconnected to a broader agenda that, at times, does not prioritise it when social needs are jeopardised. According to this perspective, the State is required because it is the structured monopoly of the common goals and with centralised actions can reach all society as a whole. In turn, processes and changes are more intricate, gradual, and occasionally regressive than expected from the opposite end of the spectrum.

At their core, both extremes share the goal of living in harmony with nature and becoming more egalitarian among people in a new socioeconomic system based on deep ecological principles. However, some philosophical differences between them, as well as the political consequences they produce, must be comprehended.

We find that Levinas' categories can help us understand the fundamental differences between these positions, because of his unique and disruptive view of the world and Western philosophy. Simultaneously, we benefit from these subtle differences in environmentalism in order to discuss the application of Levinas' ideas to a profound interpretation of the consciousness that lies at the heart of the current environmental crisis.

3. PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF LEVINAS

Levinas' interpretation of Western philosophy deconstructs the Universal Being's bases that ontological philosophy has sought since its inception. As an archetype, the Being totalises reality; it is the one who tells the tale of the world around it, understands it, arranges it according to its individuality and, finally, dominates it. This tale incorporates the multiplicity and diversity of the world and orders it into the monotony of its monologue. The knowledge that occurs with the subject/object encounter provides its primordial relationship with everything that surrounds it. Later, from this relationship of understanding, ontological ethics' guiding principles are deduced. According to Marcos (2019), this characterises the Being as a conqueror rather than a knower because it first absorbs within itself, then rearranges and commands the coexistence of various beings. Levinas asserts that this Being is evil because, in its eagerness to embrace (to know) everything, 'it lacks limits' (Levinas 1987, p. 51). And, as we will explain, they are a prerequisite for the ethical coexistence with the Other, who lives beyond the limits of the I.

Therefore, rather than pursuing knowledge for humanity's sake, modern rationality consists in the imposition of a Totality that incorporates and homogenises the different, the multiple, and the diverse in the universal (and univocal) story of Being. Establishing Western ethics as the dominant and guiding principles of the world, as seen through the eyes of the Western subject. The I (Self) thematises the Others and creates a representation to make them fit into its own story, internalising their exteriority. According to Levinas, 'ontology, which reduces the other to the same, promotes freedom; the freedom that is the identification of the same, not allowing itself to be alienated by the other' (Levinas 2007, p. 42). However, the I is dynamic: 'is not a being that always remains the same, but is the being whose existence consists in identifying itself, in recovering its identity throughout all that happens to it (...) The I is identical in its very alterations' (Levinas 2007, p. 36). Ethics is thus built from ontological philosophy by the logical deduction of imperatives that make a subject knowledgeable and the universalisation of those principles to all Others.

Contrarily, in Levinas' non-ontological philosophy, ethics comes before knowledge, which derives from it. The Being is no longer seen as the source, epicentre, and purpose of subjectivity, and its initial connection to the Other is considered one of responsibility

rather than of understanding. Levinas uses the metaphor of the hungry, the orphan, the widow, or the stranger (the foreign) to illustrate how responsibility arises from the Other's absolute vulnerability. As a result, the responsibility of the Self, which is immemorial in the sense that it precedes both its own consciousness and even the *a priori* itself, constitutes the I from outside its ipseity (experiential self). In other words, the subject is responsible for the Other before his apperception and before any free-willed action that the subject takes. Therefore, responsibility is not the result of the Self's deliberate attempt to accept and manage the effects of its prior actions. Levinas (1998, p. 150) writes:

'Here I am, in this rejected responsibility thrown back toward someone who has never been either my fault or my concern, toward someone who has never been in my power, or in my freedom, toward someone who doesn't come into my memory. An ethical significance of a past which concerns me, which "has to do with" me, which is "my business" outside all reminiscence'

The Other, the absolute other, 'always comes from a past that was never my present' (Levinas 2001, p. 115). It is the I's absolute exteriority; it manifests as a face from the immemorial past and, furthermore, it resists incorporation into the ontological representation of the Being's present. Because the instant the Other is thematised, it ceases to be an Other; at that point, it is merely a projection of the Self onto the exteriority that affects it. I experience an epiphany when the Other's hungry and naked face suddenly and profoundly appears in front of me. This is a fundamental idea because it marks the beginning and the end of my relationship with the Other. It marks the beginning because it is the first sign I have of the face, and it marks the end because it only tells me that it is vulnerable and commands: 'You shall not commit murder' (Levinas 2007, p. 199).

I am unable to represent the Other through the Face because it has no content and only communicates a sense of obligation that ethically requires me to assume responsibility, as if the Other were the master and lord of my subjectivity. In the words of Levinas (2007, p. 75):

'The nakedness of the face is not what is presented to me because I disclose it, what would therefore be presented to me, to my powers, to my eyes, to my perceptions, in a light exterior to it. The face has turned to me and this is its very nudity. It is by itself and not by reference to a system.'

'(...) To recognise the Other is to give. But it is to give to the master, to the lord, to him whom one approaches as "Thou" in a dimension of height'

Due to the unquestionable, unavoidable, and unappealing responsibility, the subject's identity is then

constructed as being subordinate to the Other, who is his master and lord, his 'pregnant mother'. Because of this, the ethical relationship already limits the Being's individual freedom, which, in this instance, develops after his apperception. The Other 'has the face of the poor, the stranger, the widow, and the orphan, and, at the same time, of the master called to invest and justify my freedom' (Levinas 2007, p. 251). In this sense, justifying my freedom means questioning it, and asking for explanations rather than taking it for granted as in the ontological metaphysics of unlimited Being. My responsibility conveys an existence that emerges already obligated, that 'places the centre of gravitation of a being outside of that being. The surpassing of phenomenal or inward existence does not consist in receiving the recognition of the Other, but in offering him one's being' (Levinas 2007, p. 183).

As a result, my freedom is constrained by the Other's vulnerability, rendering me helpless and defenceless in the face of my responsibility. This phenomenon, developed primarily in Levinas' latest works, is known as substitution, in which I take the place of the Other in its vulnerability (Levinas 2006). In these works, this concept replaces responsibility and becomes a sense of self-accusation, eliciting remorse in the Self that 'gnaws away at the closed and firm core of consciousness, opening it, fissioning it' (Levinas 2006, p. 125). This turns 'responsibility against my will, that is, by substituting me for the other as a hostage. All my inwardness is invested in the form of a despite-me, for-another' (Levinas 2006, p. 11).

Once Levinas has defined the face-to-face ethical relationship, he takes a significant step forward in his effort to think through the implications of this absolute responsibility when ethics is applied to society, that is, when ethics is extended beyond the face-to-face dimension. To accomplish this, he employs the concept of the Third (or Third Party)—the other of my Other who is also my neighbour and also calls to my responsibility (Levinas 2006). The Third is all of humanity, all of my neighbours, who are all accountable to one another. It is not just a numerical difference, but a shift in scale: the Other affects me in the order of face-to-face, the Third in the contemplation of humanity. The former is always accompanied by the latter, who 'looks at me in the eyes of the Other (...) the epiphany of the face qua face opens humanity' (Levinas 2007, p. 213).

The appearance of the Third limits the infinite responsibility posited by Levinas in his ethics because the univocal face-to-face relation is extended to all of humanity. There would be no doubts if only the Other

existed because my relationship with it would be unambiguous, but the Third makes me equally responsible to countless neighbours to whom I owe the same care. This puts me in conflict and prompts me to question and reflection (Levinas 2006). 'What if one Other makes war on the other Other? Can the ego defend the Other against attacks from an-Other? If so, can the ego use violence, even kill an-Other in defence of the Other?' (Simmons 1999, p. 93). This questioning awakens my rationality and gives rise to the theoretical: the Third introduces thematisation, coexistence, and the comparison of what is, in principle, incomparable. Intelligibility of systems and orders, as well as intellect, understanding, and intentionality, all emerge along with judgement, decision making, and action (Levinas 2006).

This summarises the Levinasian philosophical turn. Whereas ontology is based on spontaneous, free-willed action and derives ethics from the Self's fundamental understanding of the world through reason and deduction, Levinas states that reason only comes as a derivation of my fundamental ethical responsibility with the Other, and my will and actions are constrained and questioned constantly by my obligation to it. With the Third, the asymmetric relationship that had subjected me to the Other has now been transformed into an equality of all others, including myself, into a We, and inaugurating the pursuit for Justice. According to Levinas (2006, p. 158):

'The relationship with the third party is an incessant correction of the asymmetry of proximity in which the face is looked at. There is weighing, thought, objectification, and thus a decree in which my anarchic relationship with illeity is betrayed'

However, such justice is founded on and detaches from responsibility without degrading the I's obsession (Levinas 2006). The introduction of a Third implies a restraint of all my actions in response to my others in the realm of possibility and the calculation of what is actually feasible in a given circumstance. In the words of Levinas (2007, p. 300):

'In the measure that the face of the Other relates us with the third party, the metaphysical relation of the I with the Other moves into the form of the We, aspires to a State, institutions, laws, which are the source of universality'

From Our equality through justice arises the need for the State and politics. The realm of politics, then, is the realm of decisions about my responsibilities to my neighbours. According to Simmons (1999), Levinas employs the Third to transition from the anarchic realm of ethics to the totalising realm of politics. But each is required by the other: politics requires restric-

tive control from ethics to avoid tyranny, and ethics requires politics to reach those who are more distant than face-to-face.

3.1. Levinas and the environment

We argue that Levinas' work contains fundamental tools to comprehend the breadth and depth of deep ecology's task. In spite of this, it is important to note that he never explicitly addressed the environmental issue in his philosophy and was reluctant to accept that nonhuman beings had faces in a philosophical sense (Davy 2007, Atterton 2011, Larios 2020). However, he left some questions unanswered so that his interpreters and followers could develop and debate their own ideas about how to approach environmental issues based on his philosophy.

The problem of considering nonhuman beings' otherness was presented to Levinas, who stated in an interview that there is no face in nonhuman beings, though an ethical relationship with them is possible through analogy: if we can show sympathy and compassion for them, he stated, it is because we transfer human suffering and ethics to them (Bernasconi & Wood 1988). According to Atterton (2011, p. 646), Levinas' position, therefore, is that 'any putative rights animals may have, are to be interpreted as *prima facie* and thus subject to being overridden by competing and compelling human rights and duties.'

The Others can only be human, according to Levinas, because the interpellation of their face comes to me through their speech, their own thematisation of the world that contradicts mine: they interrupt the Being's monologue, its narrative, with a different one (Davy 2007). Instead, 'things' exist solely for our interpretation, and the changes in our thinking that they reveal to us are simply modifications of the Self that arise from itself. That is why it has been said that environmentalism does not easily coexist with Levinas' philosophy (Herzog 2013), whose ethics, while responding to social needs, never integrate them into the image of holistic interdependence that is at the heart of the environmental narrative.

Furthermore, if all my otherness is also responsible for each other, then nonhuman beings should be able to be responsible for their neighbours to be considered Others. However, the same debate arises when we consider future generations as moral subjects (Riechmann 2005a), indicating that it is part of the complex conflicts of our time's environmental ethics and must be considered.

The environmental crisis has made traditional ethical formulations, which were created for a close-knit community and embodied in the very nature of our species, obsolete. Today, taking into account how our actions affect our (close) neighbour, contemporary, and congener is insufficient because oftentimes the Others we need to consider are invisible — invisibilised — or can be found in a far-off location, belong to a future generation, or even be of a different species. Because of the complexity of thinking about our responsibility with these new non-neighbour, non-present, or nonhuman alterities, as well as the need to imagine and thematise them *in absentia*, we are forced to develop a geographical, social, temporal, and specific long-range morality (Riechmann 2012).

Therefore, attempts to apply Levinas' philosophy to environmental concerns must depart from his writings but can serve itself from his philosophical principles and logical structure. There are 2 primary methods that commentators and interpreters of Levinas have employed to do this. Larios (2020, p. 7) states:

'The two ways in which commentators have attempted to apply Levinas to environmental questions have been either through an expansion of the applicability of the face of the Other or a political reading in which concern for the non-human enters through the political opening of the third'

In the following sections, we will discuss the 2 positions within deep ecology as derived from each of these ways. We connect the biocentric concept to the idea of an infinite responsibility for the environment, and we will explain the progress towards considering environmental justice as the limit of that responsibility through the political openness of the Third.

3.2. Expanding the Face's applicability

As previously stated, the face accounts for the Other without providing any reference or image behind it; it is completely naked and unintelligible. It has an intimate influence on us, but it eludes our comprehension, thematisation, and representation. It has an impact on our here and now, but it is completely diachronic, being both closer than our ipseity and further than our imagination can conceive. Its meaning is unassailable and unappealable, causing an obsession within the Self. 'The total passivity of obsession is more passive still than the passivity of things' (Levinas 2006, p. 177). The face is pure expression, signifying the world through the language of its nakedness and compelling me to be-for-the-other (Levinas 2006).

However, Levinas is ambiguous about the relationship between word and expression. On the one hand, he asserts that 'the event proper to expression consists in bearing witness to oneself, and guaranteeing this witness. This attestation of oneself is possible only as a face, that is, as speech' (Levinas 2007, p. 215). And later he (Levinas 2007, p. 262) clarifies that:

'Signification is not added to the existent. To signify is not equivalent to presenting oneself as a sign, but to expressing oneself, that is, presenting oneself in person. The symbolism of the sign already presupposes the signification of expression, the face. In the face the existent par excellence presents itself. And the whole body—a hand or a curve of the shoulder—can express as the face'

Davy, who maintains that nonhuman beings have faces in the Levinasian sense, then claims that expression is more than just verbal. 'Whether given in words or other outward expression in the composition of the features, it means something apart from what one conceives about it' (Davy 2007, p. 49). The face should be understood, then, as a metaphor rather than being taken literally. 'Insects, plants, and other nonhuman Others are vulnerable to human violence directly as well as through pollution. Can they not also signify their need?' (Davy 2007, p. 51). If it is their vulnerability rather than the emission of words that matters in the expression, then 'a nonhuman Other can oblige oneself in ethics' (Davy 2007, p. 51). This way of interpreting Levinas' thoughts can find support in his following words (Levinas 1998, p. 104–105):

'In my analysis, the Face is definitely not a plastic form like a portrait (...) At the outset I hardly care what the other is with respect to me, that is his own business; for me, he is above all the one I am responsible for'

Therefore, the face of the Other transcends my idea of it: if the curve of a shoulder can express as much as the face, a leaf or an insect also could. That we cannot hear their call is more a marker of our limitations than of theirs (Davy 2007).

The impossibility of articulating language or the absence of face as characteristics of an already themed Other are not arguments to discard the otherness of nonhuman beings, since we can also see their faces expressing their vulnerability to human violence (Faria 2023). In the Face of the Other who suffers, 'to hear his destitution which cries out for justice is not to represent an image to oneself, but is to posit oneself as responsible' (Levinas 2007, p. 215).

Levinas states that 'To ask *what* is to ask *as what*: it is not to take the manifestation for itself (...) He to whom the question is put has already presented himself, without being a content' (Levinas 2007, p. 177). The question 'Who is it?' presupposes a presence to which

it is addressed: this presence is the Face, which is prior to any question and answers none. That is why Davy (2007) states that thematising the Others according to their intelligible properties (for example, that they are human or that they can speak) does not decipher their meaning, but, rather, masks their Faces. This way, the capacity for language or speech could not be taken in a way that would make it exclusive to humans, thus expanding the potential to find 'a nonhuman ethical agent or patient' (Larios 2020, p. 2).

But pushing the idea even further, one could argue that they would not have to be living beings either to have a Face: a complex entity such as the environment could constitute an alterity (Leff 2004) if it's able to express its vulnerability. In that case, the environmental crisis that burst into global consciousness in the 1970s, interrupting modernity's monologue of unlimited progress and imposing an irrefutable responsibility on us, would be equivalent to the epiphany of its Face.

4. INFINITE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

The environmental crisis, as a civilisational crisis, implies a disruption of the dominant historical rationality of Being. It reveals the failures of Modernity as a totalising project, and represents an unavoidable and unappealing disruption of the monopolised story of universal history. A world-system crisis such as this is a rare circumstance in which 'an historical system has evolved to the point where cumulative effect of its internal contradictions makes it impossible for the system to "resolve" its dilemmas by "adjustments" in its ongoing institutional patterns' (Wallerstein 1991, p. 104). Its sudden appearance in our collective consciousness, combined with its refusal to be contained by the dominant totalising discourse (Leff 2004), allows us to interpret it as a Levinasian epiphany, a shift in the composition of contemporary subjectivity that affects our ethical responsibility. The current human subjects live in discomfort as a result of their guilt, hostage to a world in crisis for which they are not individually responsible, despite the fact that we are collectively.

Instead of succumbing to the weight of overwhelming responsibility, institutionalised environmentalism adapts and incorporates new circumstances into its previous mechanisms in order to maintain instrumental rationality. Thus, market niches are inaugurated with new goods that replace the previous ones: electric cars, recycling tools, biofuels, solar panels,

wood from implanted forests, eco-friendly certificates, etc. All new products that relieve the consumer's individual conscience and deploys techno-enthusiastic escape mechanisms (denials): faith is placed in the possible future development of new (digital, bionic, genetic, energetic, or aerospace) technologies that will arrive hand in hand with the market as humanity's salvation (Riechmann 2004).

Critical ecologists take on this responsibility, proposing new types of relationships between society and nature in response to the vulnerability that has suddenly surfaced and demands our attention. The epiphany of the face — in this case, the epiphany of impending environmental collapse — transforms our society's existence, instilling us with a remorse that grows stronger as we become more committed and fulfil our individual responsibilities. The socio-environmental crisis exemplifies our inability to comprehend the phenomena that affect us. It demonstrates Western society's Self's inability to understand the world in its complexity. As Levinas puts it (Levinas 2007, p. 208):

'The Other remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign; his face in which his epiphany is produced and which appeals to me breaks with the world that can be common to us, whose virtualities are inscribed in our nature and developed by our existence'

Jorge Riechmann declares in 'A vulnerable world' that 'the "new" vulnerability of the world dramatically challenges us as moral agents' (Riechmann 2005a, p. 18). Our ethical response to this call takes the form of responsibility towards the Other who subdues us. However, under this premise, the ethical call is met in various ways by environmental movements, academic sectors, society as a whole, countries, and international organisations.

In the face of the planet's vulnerability, we are compelled to an infinite responsibility that, because it is anachronistic and anarchic, awakens in us an obsession (Simmons 1999). This awareness of having been offered-without-any-holding-back leads to 'not finding any protection in any consistency or identity of a state' (Levinas 2006, p. 75). I am always uncomfortable and want to flee, trying to fulfil a responsibility that keeps slipping away from me. In the grip of the obsession, I am constantly in remorse, in the accusative form, pursuing an unattainable atonement. Subjectivity expresses itself as '*here I am*, answering for everything and for everyone' (Levinas 2006, p. 114), accused within my innocence and without the possibility of declining that responsibility.

When this obsession pervades ecological thought, it manifests itself as a subjectivity forced to redefine

itself around the imperative to 'save' the planet, even if it means at the expense of humanity itself — or a large part of it —, embodying Levinas' defencelessness of the Self in the order of face-to-face that derives from his concept of 'substitution'. This position within deep ecology is formed by specific sensitivities that transform one or a few elements or principles into an imperative or a way of life. As a result, social organisations typically advocate unequivocally and without reservation for one or more ecological principles, leaving no room for grey areas. This, however, only affects the consciousness of individuals or small groups who share the same sensitivity and epiphany, leaving everyone else outside and as an accomplice of the enemy.

This position is a type of radical biocentrism that, while wisely extending the Face of the Other to the environment and recognising a responsibility for the World (Ale 2016), removes the human from the moral and teleological centre of ethics, but does so with contempt, in a 'despite-me, for the other' attitude. It builds a morality of rejection of existing social forms and promotes isolated community organisations with a certain homogeneity, agreements, or common goals. This type of consensus-groupness resembles a Heideggerian mode of coexistence in which they commune with themselves (Heidegger 1997). Such an arrangement assumes synchronised projects and similar mentalities, which do not pull inclusion in these ideal forms from the entire society, unless subjecting entirely to them. On the other hand, in the concepts of 'society' or 'people', a plethora of diverse and divergent interests and opinions must inevitably interact, where my possibilities of being affect those of others and vice versa (Han 2020).

The radicality of this criticism can be seen in its political proposal, which consists of civil disobedience and retreat from institutions and State, leaving these groups 'lacking the means to generate a generalised process of social and institutional transformations' (Leff 2004, p. 399) and, finally, leaving those mechanisms up for grabs. This position rejects the political unity characterised by the concepts of people and sovereignty, as well as the representative democracy that presupposes them, in favour of the concept of the multitude, as embodied in an absolute democracy capable of including it (Mouffe 2008).

Returning to the sentiment of 'saving the planet', the great biologist Lynn Margulis, proponent of endosymbiont theory and the Gaia hypothesis, strongly criticised this sensitivity in the mid-twentieth century, for the vanity it conceals Margulis (2002, p. 135) writes:

'The human movement claiming responsibility for the living Earth is hilarious, the rhetoric of the powerless. The planet looks after us, not the other way around. The arrogant moral imperative that drives us to try to guide a capricious Earth or heal our sick planet demonstrates our enormous capacity for self-deception. Rather, we must safeguard ourselves against ourselves'

Two conclusions can be drawn from Margulis' text:

(a) the ultimate goal of environmental care is to provide habitat and well-being for humans, rather than the planet, which does not need us; and (b) the planet's apparent vulnerability exposes our own, revealing some sort of Levinasian substitution. We have become hostages, forced by our responsibility to the World-Other to give up our bulimic lifestyles in order to survive (Riechmann 2014).

It is also worth noting that the spread in society of the desolation brought up by an always remorseful Self, guilty beyond any possibility of atonement, is, to some extent, functional to institutionalised environmentalism because it shifts responsibility to the individual and away from those who are truly (causally) responsible for environmental problems. In this sense, radical biocentrism's rationality, despite its outspoken opposition to these causes, does not pose a genuine challenge to the official agenda. In the words of Galeano (1997, p. 9–10):

"'We are all responsible", claim the voices of universal alarm, and the generalisation absolves: if we are all responsible, no one is (...) But statistics confess. Data, hidden under all the blabber, reveals that twenty percent of humans commit eighty percent of the aggressions against nature, crime that murderers call suicide'

This position of radical biocentrism always places the committed subject politically outside and morally above any force that operates from the State, regardless of social or environmental advances or setbacks. It conceptually unifies otherwise antagonistic administrations or agendas, whose political praxis deviates from their own *a priori* conception of the ethical imperative. In response, they withdraw, 'breaking the institutional channels of intermediation between individuals and the State' (Leff 2004, p. 399). An absolute democracy is difficult to imagine in society as a mere voluntarism of anarchic individuals or multitudes, all of whom will inevitably have divergent and contradictory interests and mentalities.

In this sense, we understand that deep ecology must critically reflect on these positions before transcending them. Without dismissing the indisputable responsibility for humanity and the planet, we believe that the face-to-face dimension is insufficient for surviving the environmental crisis. We agree with Perpich (2012), who claims that when viewed through

Levinas' philosophical lens, environmental issues belong in the realm of his politics rather than his ethics, which always rely on inadequate analogies.

5. EXOGENOUS CRITICISM

Before delving into environmental justice, it is necessary to define what we mean by Levinas criticism and where we stand. To begin, we must acknowledge that the field of criticism is, by definition, theoretical. That is, it exists in the realm of reason, which, according to Levinas, emerges with the inclusion of the Third and the need to weigh responsibilities and differentiate between possible courses of action. Politics, unlike the ethical ideals that guide it, is concrete and circumstantial; it operates on the level of ambiguity, contingency, and contradiction.

As a result, the rational approach to one's imperfection falls under the purview of theory. When a fact is questioned or justified, it implies that it is not accepted as a given, as irreversible, but as an impediment to the subject's spontaneity of free action. To require theoretical justification or reason, the spontaneity of the action must be inhibited, that is, questioned or criticised.

The critique begins with self-questioning: 'knowing becomes knowing of a fact only if it is at the same time critical, if it puts itself into question, goes back beyond its origin' (Levinas 2007, p. 82). However, Levinas defines self-criticism in 2 ways: as a discovery of one's own weakness or as a discovery of one's own unworthiness. The first manifests as a consciousness of failure; the second does so as a consciousness of guilt.

The consciousness of failure comprehends the Western ontological tradition. It questions the fact as an impediment to my spontaneity, but this assumes that the latter is not questioned. The spontaneity of freedom is thus conceived as the norm itself, rather than as a subject of norms: it does not create theory or truth, but rather assumes them (Levinas 2007). It is predicated on prior knowledge of the world and views failure as a misalignment in that knowledge that must be corrected. The Self can justify itself by adhering to a totality, becoming the master while retaining its freedom.

On the other hand, as a consciousness of guilt, criticism calls into question spontaneity from outside theory, from ethics. It is concerned with the fact's intelligibility, with its theoretical justification, but 'for an obstacle to become a fact that requires a theoretical justification or a reason, the spontaneity of the action that surmounts it had to be inhibited,

that is, itself put into question' (Levinas 2007, p. 82). And it is the encounter with the Other that calls my freedom into question; it is at this point that my moral conscience emerges. When criticism manifests as a sense of guilt, the Self's shame about itself limits freedom. The Other imposes itself as a constraint on my liberty.

Thus, when Riechmann (2014) claims that the global ecological crisis is Enlightenment's great failure, we interpret him to mean that modern rationality has reached an impasse in questioning the facts, consequence of spontaneous action, without questioning the freedom of the I itself. When it comes to dealing with the environmental crisis, the West is at a loss for solutions because all actions freely implemented only serve to hasten the collapse (Riechmann 2019). This author gives an ethical critique, which forces us to go beyond the foundations of the rationality that caused the crisis. Riechmann (2014, p. 297–298) argues:

'The appalling tragedy of our time is that today there are better conditions than ever for everyone (...) to live a good life, but the majority is excluded from it, and levels of social inequality—abnormal and historically unprecedented—continue to rise (...) These are Modernity's "broken promises"'

The discovery of unworthiness, which funds theoretical inquiry, is vastly different from the discovery of weakness, which corresponds to modernity evaluating itself from within its own rationality. With the consideration of the fact and the concern for its comprehension comes the need to explain and limit spontaneous action.

The environmental principle that embodies this limitation is the precautionary principle. Though widely accepted, even by institutionalised environmentalism, it has little actual influence on how environmental issues are handled or how global economics and technological developments are conducted (Bermejo-Luque & Rodríguez-Alcázar 2023). This principle stipulates that any novel technology or economic action must be avoided until there is scientific certainty regarding the cumulative and long-term effects that it may have on the environment or on human health. That is to say, we must abstain from carrying out new possible impacts on Earth until we have enough proof to show otherwise, because our knowledge is limited and we have the potential to cause harms that we cannot foresee or control once unleashed. We must have much stronger justifications for techno-scientific developments that depart from the models or guiding principles of nature than for those that follow them (Riechmann 2014).

This principle suggests an ethics of imperfection and a concern for comprehending the potential effects of our spontaneous (free) actions. For instance, if a market needs to quickly launch a new product to meet demand but is unsure of the effects it may have, it should first carry out all necessary tests to ensure the product is safe for the environment. This means that rather than reacting quickly to overcome obstacles, action is forced to be justified beforehand, to pause, and to consider ethical implications. Precaution is the attitude of acknowledging an immemorial responsibility prior to any action in one's relationship with the world—with the Other and the Third.

But this is a principle that no one follows entirely. In exchange, there are others that are prescribed by institutionalised environmentalism that led the politics of countries and the demands to companies like prevention, progressivity, ecoefficiency, carbon emission reduction, energy transition, recycling, reforestation, and so on. Paradoxically, the countries in which these principles are promoted and demanded are mainly responsible for the environmental crisis we face (Riechmann 2014). And they have deduced these principles from their new understanding of the world after discovering the failure of their previous system. The imperative of sustainable development has replaced the previous modern imperatives of progress and development. Western universal Being has mutated into an eco-friendly Being but still remains the same totalising and thematising Self of modernity. Once it discovered its failure, it has deduced new imperatives and extended them as prescriptive to all humanity.

As we will discuss in the following sections, this constitutes the new monologue of modernity in the form of green capitalism. It is imposed on other countries as the new ethical principles to follow in order to be committed to save the world, but because they are deduced from within the same rationality that produced the environmental crisis, they haven't stopped the deepening of our problems. One of the reasons is that they are thought from Western civilisation's Being and exported to all Others, instead of limiting themselves to let exteriority express its own thematisation and its own adequate solutions.

We think of Levinas' politics from the epistemological perspective of criticism described above, where the discovery of unworthiness drives the transformation of reality, i.e. theoretical development and concrete actions motivated by an exogenous ethical responsibility directed to pursue Justice for society and environment. That is why we have reserved the

concept of environmental justice for the second position, although everyone that ascribes to deep ecology has justice and biocentric equality as a goal. Our argument states that the true pursue of this goal, as inferred from Levinas' philosophy, cannot be attained without advancing to the realm of politics and the counter-hegemonic dispute of the State and institutionalised environmentalism, without seeking it for the entire humanity. Clarifying the different epistemological options that we encounter in the field of deep ecology enables us to enhance ecological thinking and find solutions to the environmental crisis. The Third and the justice, in this case environmental justice, are the Levinasian components that aid us in moving towards more complex proposals.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: THE REALM OF DECISION

'The transition from the I to the We does not operate meteorically as an extermination of individualities, but as a reaffirmation of these in their collective function' (Perón 1949, p. 21).

When we discuss environmental justice, rights of any subaltern being must be taken into account, including those of nonhuman and culturally inferiorised beings (human alterities) (Palacio 2018). The world cannot be ecologically sustainable if it isn't socially just, because these problems are connected by their shared cause. The resolution of the environmental crisis and the pursuit of social justice must go hand in hand. The key to protecting other living things is not so much to discuss a particular legal strategy, as it is to first create an internal transition in the moral, sensitive, and political realms, which then makes space for the necessary administrative tools to do so. In order to produce truly significant changes in the environmentalism of the 21st century, it necessitates, according to Riechmann (2005b, p. 23):

'Starting from corporeality, vulnerability, sociality, and human dependence rather than just rationality and language in order to correct prior biases. To see ourselves as moral agents, we must first recognise that we are social mammals'

Designing new systems with the concept of socio-environmental justice in mind requires the development of guiding principles that satisfy the many demands placed on the State while avoiding becoming imperatives. Following them will make it possible to address each emerging environmental conflict while taking into account its unique characteristics. Palacio (2018, p. 227–228) states:

'On the edges of justice are the grey areas of law and ethics that intersect with the actual circumstances of a vulnerable life. Thus, the problem of life's vulnerability is displayed in a vast theoretical domain whose margins are praxic as they regulate attitudes and deeds'

In order to consider the environmental issue from a political perspective, it is necessary to constantly question the suggested actions from an ethical standpoint, acknowledge that the field of action is contradictory, contingent, and imperfect, and work to make it better.

Giving moral consideration to new alterities broadens the range of potential relationships while also launching a theoretical debate about novel moral implications. There is one question that keeps coming up: Are there others with higher and lower hierarchies? Although no hierarchy could be established as a universal rule, it must be taken into account contingently. It is not possible in ethics, but it is common in politics when one is forced to choose what to prioritise due to circumstances.

Is it appropriate to forbid the use of a particular resource that endangers a family's or a community's ability to survive? And if it affects a company's profitability? Which weighs more, the growth of a community or business, or the preservation of a native ecosystem? And of an agroecosystem? Which should a government prioritise: social equality or the preservation of diversity? Political sovereignty or green technology transition? These types of inquiries cannot have a single, universally applicable solution; rather, each one must be considered separately, weighted, and resolved individually. As we have established, the face does not command according to intrinsic properties. In the words of Perpich (2012, p. 72):

'What is obligatory is that I treat humanity in myself and in others always as an end and never only as means. But if nothing and no one in particular is that *by which* or *in virtue of which* a face commands, then how can the content of obligation be determined?'

This highlights the significance of politics, justice, and, ultimately, a State built on care for the Other and a persistently critical ethic (Palacio 2018).

But once again, if the Environment-Other were my only interlocutor, I would only have obligations consistent with the biocentric position. However, since there is a Third in the world — the rest of society, the underprivileged, and the marginalised — it is imperative to find justice among them (or rather, among Us). The Third's 'claim for a response relativises the absolute justification of the Other's claim' (Lányi 2022, p. 95). I must judge, where before I only had to accept responsibility, to prioritise and contradict in

the imperfect realm of politics (Palacio 2018). The concern for (environmental) justice must then be expressed focusing, in particular, on the idea of equality, but 'always starting out from the Face, from the responsibility for the other' (Levinas 1998, p. 104). That is why, when addressing environmental issues, one cannot depend on deterministic principles imposed from one Self to the whole world, to be applied onto every circumstance and every country.

7. ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: HISTORY AND POLITICS

When speaking of environmental justice, 'it is necessary to allow judges, institutions, and the State to live in a world of citizens, and not only in the order of face-to-face' (Levinas 1998, p. 105). However, the legitimacy of the State must be assessed in relation to its interaction with people: 'a State in which the interpersonal relationship is impossible, in which it is directed in advance by the determinism proper to the State, is a totalitarian State' (Levinas 1998, p. 105). According to Levinas, a portion of State-authorised violence is acceptable, but only insofar as it serves the justice-related purpose of comparison, which entails giving to one while withholding something from another. When the responsibility to others forces a decision about how to better distribute some scarce resource, for example.

This is different to the violence of exclusion and marginalisation that condemns others for benefit of the Self. For instance, when polluting companies from wealthy northern nations set up shop in impoverished southern nations in an effort to safeguard their own environment but end up causing harm to others elsewhere. Or when a southern economy decides to use its natural resources to reduce inequality at the expense of causing environmental damage. Which is correct in each case? It depends on circumstances and history.

That is why, when pursuing justice, Levinas emphasises the historical component. Self-criticism is insufficient when I am politically required to defend one against the other and, instead, it is necessary to assess the interactions that have already occurred between them in the past (Halls 2012). Levinas (1998, p. 195) writes:

'What have they already done, to each another? For me, it would be to fail in my first-personal responsibility (...) were I to ignore the wrongs of the one toward the other (...) It means not ignoring the suffering of the other, who falls to my responsibility'

Enrique Dussel, a Latin American philosopher and father of the Philosophy of Liberation, believes that when seeking justice, Levinas must concretise the Other. This must be accomplished through analogy by assigning entity and highlighting the various manifestations of the Being/Other dialectic opposition: at the geopolitical level (developed/underdeveloped, centre/periphery), at the national level (elites/people, bourgeoisie/workers), at the erotic level (male/female), at the pedagogical level (elitist culture/popular culture), at the religious level (spirituality/fetishism), etc. (Dussel 1975). Dussel (1975, p. 8–9) states:

'Levinas ultimately describes a first experience: face-to-face, but without mediation. "The Other" questions, provokes, cries out... but nothing is said, not only of the conditions of knowing how to hear the voice of the other, but above all of knowing how to respond by a liberating praxis (...) to their demand for Justice'

Affirming the Other solely as an individuality is insufficient; it must also be 'conceived of as a cultural and historical totality, that is, as a geopolitically defined other' (García-Ruiz 2014, p. 783). Dussel has moved from face-to-face to thematisation, piercing Levinasian philosophy. Starting with the primordial ethics of the Other, he has arrived at representation, comparison, and, finally, justice. His emphasis is on politics, on the Other with the Third, and on the development of a philosophy that will aid in the achievement of historical justice and the liberation of the historically oppressed. In politics, 'the otherness of the other requires mediations and comparisons; the figure of the other must be concretized within a historical Totality: the State' (García-Ruiz 2014, p. 783).

That is why, when analysing the actions required to reduce environmental or social impacts, deep ecology must consider each country's and people's history and responsibilities. Exporting unsustainability cannot lead to sustainability, especially in a world that has transposed its biophysical boundaries in unprecedented ways (Riechmann 2014). The suffering and pollution caused by some nations in their pursuit of wealth and development must be considered, especially since they can currently maintain their standard of living thanks to the latter's (unwilling) environmental subsidy.

We should thematise this Being/Other dichotomy in accordance with Dussel's instructions. The first group of countries could be called 'ecocide countries' because their cumulative impact on the planet, as measured by metrics like the ecological footprint, exceeds their own biocapacity while depleting that of other countries, despite advances in eco-efficiency

and green technology. Rather than preventing environmental collapse, its economic and technological systems aggravate it. This harsh thematisation seeks to establish the magnitude and responsibility that each side possesses in the current world. Simultaneously, attempts to replace traditional ones, such as developed/underdeveloped or central/peripheral, denigrate the latter and fail to adequately define historical roles in the global environmental crisis. Riechmann (2014) develops the concept of environmental space in a similar manner, though his thematisation lacks some heft. The moral of this geopolitical depiction could be summarised in the words of Herrero (2014, p. 234):

'If it is not possible to extend the average material consumption levels of the people of the global North to all those who inhabit the world, access to decent living standards for a large proportion of the population will necessitate both a drastic reduction in consumption by those who exert more material pressure on the territories with their lifestyles as well as a fair redistribution of wealth'

The series of measures and treaties that have been promoted and even imposed on (almost) every country since the beginning of institutionalised environmentalism constitutes a new hegemonic discourse that has been constructed since the 1970s by ignoring other initiatives and discourses from the so-called developing countries (Estenssoro 2014). They are all presented as global environmental solutions, becoming modernity's new monologue, to which all parties and States must agree, or face economic and political consequences.

Mitigation measures prescribed in 'ecocide countries' (though not always followed) do not work in 'non-ecocide countries' because they originate in Western civilisation's ego and are imposed on Others' realities 'for their own good'. The institutionalised environmentalism applied to non-ecocide countries—the historically hungry and naked, the barbarians of the modern age (Barzola Elizagaray et al. 2023)—has the effect of ontology reducing the other to the same; it is the conqueror Being, engorging exteriority into its own thematisation.

As Levinas said, the same is essentially identification within the diverse, or history, or system. So, it is impossible for it to go against its own inwardness: 'it is not I who resist the system, (...) it is the Other' (Levinas 2007, p. 40). The groups historically labelled as barbarians, now characterised as non-ecocide countries, exhibit some characteristics required to break the cycle of environmental crisis so ecocide countries could benefit from retreating, limiting themselves, to try and let the Others survive and, maybe, even learn from them (Barzola-Elizagaray et al. 2023).

8. CONCLUSIONS

As the environmental crisis worsens and the human and nonhuman spheres collide, new ethical alterities emerge and call upon our responsibility, as we move towards a long-range morality. Our task, as academic ecologists, is to continue expanding our understanding of the environmental crisis and to seek better and more feasible solutions to it. We believe that Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy has a lot of potential to challenge dominant ideologies and institutionalised environmentalism, which imposes its political agenda without really solving anything. Furthermore, this philosophy establishes the foundation for the development of an ecological political theory that seeks a just and sustainable society for the historically marginalised.

The withdrawal from State institutions in pursuit of an ethical or intellectual purism that assumes infinite environmental responsibility precludes a collective political construction of justice based on the Third's consideration. There is no specific political project in Levinasian philosophy, but it does contain 'critical argumentation that is convincingly committed to State institutionality and democratic legality' (Faure-Quiroga 2015, p. 60).

Based on this conceptual framework, we argue that environmental issues correspond entirely to the political level (Perpich 2012), both because their concerns extend beyond the level of face-to-face interaction and because they demand both deliberate and necessary action as well as a halt to modern rationality's spontaneous, uncontrolled actions. Ethics must be the foundation of politics, but if the discussion is limited to ethics, we will never be able to find the urgent, global solutions we require. Many academic fields and social movements place a greater emphasis on the internal coherence of speech than on the scope of the measures implemented. They justify their refusal to cooperate with the State and its policies by pointing out that it never achieves the theoretical ideal they defend, and this way they avoid the murky world of political ambiguity and contradictions.

Beginning with a critique of dominant rationality, both studied positions within deep ecology seek a shift in values in the relationships between capitalist and consumerist production. However, a key distinction between them is the praxis that produces either massive advancements that affect the entire population or small-scale, radical changes. Ethical coherence and radicality oppose political inclusiveness and scope.

Because we are on the verge of a global environmental collapse, the first option is insufficient because the magnitude of the necessary changes is simply too large for voluntarist and anarchic action. In an ideal world, all States would abandon green capitalism's imposed agenda in favour of deep ecology. It has been forgotten in recent years due to the dominance of multinational corporations, digital platforms, and financial economics, but in the years 2020 and 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic made the importance of the State and its reach visible once more. When it became necessary to return to pre-modern measures like soap, sewing, and social isolation in order to collectively address the threats we faced, National States were in charge to ensure—for better or worse—their implementation and the assistance and supply for the population (Ramonet 2020).

The necessary transformations will be impossible to achieve without collective, active, and organic projection, as well as political and economic sovereignty. In order to do so, we need a 'frontier humanity' (Riechmann 2004, p. 69) whose subjectivity, unlike that of modern unrestrained Being, is built under the 4 ethical limitations that Barzola-Elizagaray et al. (2023) recognise: (a) the acceptance of individual mortality, (b) the responsibility for the Other and the Third, (c) the finitude of the environment, and (d) entropy and the precautionary principle.

Cornelius Castoriadis asserts that democratic politics must 'make citizens free to enable them to set, individually and collectively, their own limits' (Riechmann 2004, p. 157). Self-restraint is a disputed concept, often disliked for being a restriction of freedom (Lányi 2022). However, following our discussion under the Levinas framework, we understand that freedom is not a limitless spontaneous action of the Self. In this context, the policy of Self-restraint is not only environmentally necessary, but coherent with the ethical call to which politics must answer.

In Levinasian terms, Castoriadis' assertion may sound more compelling: coexistence with the Other places restrictions on our freedom that we neither choose nor can refuse, and going beyond them is a way of killing the Other. This is particularly true in a biophysically saturated world where every action has an impact on other parts of the planet and future generations. If ecocide countries do not reduce their impact, non-ecocide countries will remain impoverished and unequal; if states do not coordinate measures to redistribute environmental benefits and drawbacks to people's well-being, the world will become uninhabitable.

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