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Radix, Matrix: **The Third Body in Levinas's Ethics**

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As one speaks to stone, like
you,
from the chasm, from
a home become a
sister to me, hurled
towards me, you,
you that long ago,
you in the nothingness of a night,
you in the multi-night en-
countered, you
multi-you –

Paul Celan¹

In Emmanuel Levinas's ethics of ethics, the position of the Third is rather ambiguous, which results in the attitude that involves a large dose of suspicion.

As it is generally known, for the author of *Totality and Infinity* ethics can be thought exclusively as the relationship above or beyond the separation between a subjectivity and another subject-

¹ *Poems of Paul Celan*, trans. Michael Hamburger (London: Anvil Press Poetry, 1988), p. 187.

tivity, the Other, obliging the former to forfeit his or her egoism in responsibility for the Other, in the relation without contact, which breaks the wholeness of ipseity, or “mineness,” and opens it up to transcendence that goes beyond Being as a system of general dependences we encounter in the world or as the world. The very principle from which such ethics starts — that I am the Other’s servant or hostage — is here the an-archic lack of ground, resulting from its being immemorial: the mute call of the Other that, for Levinas, appears as the Face, comes from before memory, from before any knowledge. But it is also the truth of Being that transcends Being infinitely as metaphysics of the Good. “The locus of truth is society,”² says Levinas, meaning the ethical absolute relation, and not the impersonal appearance of Being, which places the Neuter dimension above the existent, the singular subjectivity. All the above leads to the understanding of ethics that begins from the relation that is unequal, yet not based on force: the “power” of the Other over me is his or her powerlessness; I am unconditionally obliged by the Other because he or she suffers and only I can relieve the suffering. I am elected and this makes me unique; it is not because of my ipseity that I am singular but because of the Other’s call that relieves me of myself as ipseity; I am truly, that is, ethically myself when I am neither myself nor for myself, but when I am for the Other.

Such thinking starts with radical inequality which has to be retained at all costs, if ethics is to stay operational. Yet, in order to take place, it has to be granted by transcendence, by the metaphysical dimension beyond history as politics and economy.

[T]o say that the other can remain absolutely other, that he enters only into the relationship of conversation, is to say that history itself, an identification of the same, cannot claim to totalize the same and the other. The absolutely other, whose alterity is overcome in the philosophy of immanence on the allegedly common plane of history, maintains his transcendence in the midst of his-

² Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), p. 101.

tory. The same is essentially identification with the diverse, or, history, or system. It is not I who resists the system, as Kierkegaard thought; it is the other.³

History, the favourite field of Levinas's arch-adversary, Hegel, is a great leveller of singularity which ethical thought elevates above the immanence of *Geschichte*. Within history all differences are correlated into a system that develops itself on the way to its own fulfilment, where every difference is only local and to be overcome sooner or later. Such a system loses from sight that which is most precious for Levinas: radical alterity that cannot be surmounted, or the surmounting of which is unethical. For Hegel, history is always true, right and good, notwithstanding the suffering it inflicts on its subjects: the particular, which is contingent, has to be levelled — *aufgehoben* — for the absolute, which is general and necessary, to triumph. The system justifies by its laws the crushing of singularity in the name of the universal. Such thinking is the product of reason which works only by generalisations: singularity is made by it into a concept (representation) and therefore divested of its particularity becoming *replaceable*.

The same rules operate on the parallel levels of politics and economy. My absolutely singular relation with the Other, which does not allow any generality to slip in, is forfeited and our places become interchangeable: my goodness to the Other, which shunned reciprocity, ceases to be unconditional. Within the realm of politics I am obliged to the Other only in so far as he is obliged to me. What has happened here is of course the aforementioned generalisation of the individual, which lays at the foundations of liberal societies. The secret perpetrator of such conceptualisation is, however, neither I nor the Other but the Third — in order to abstract the Other from its absolute singularity I have to compare him to the Third and put them on equal footing; only then can I become another instance of this same generic term "Man." Such is the origin of the whole sphere of politics, relaying on the rights that are created by subsumption of the irreplaceable singularity

³ Ibidem, p. 40.

under the Notion: the same rights for everybody understood as the replaceable instance of humanity.

This, however, is completely at odds with Levinas's ethics which speaks about unconditional surrender to the Other without expectations of reciprocity — I am ethical only insofar as I resign my rights completely and become the Other's hostage. All systems that allow any degree of generality, that is, comparability (and any system — an aggregate of ordered elements — in order to be a system, has to do it) break the basic law of ethics by means of introducing the Third. Yet, how can the Good leave the realm of utopia and become at least something like the regulative idea, if it does not want to "compromise," if it wants to maintain the absolute separation between the Other and the Third? (Can it be that my neighbour is the Second? But such a notion is wrong: the Other as incomparable cannot bear any number.) Moreover, is not the insistence on absolute ethics and refusal to distinguish between different kinds of politics (e.g. democratic and authoritarian) as equally totalitarian unethical? Doesn't it perversely suggest that the worse the system the better it is for the practice of ethics, that is, infinite sacrifice for the Other?⁴

Levinas tries to assuage this paradox by introducing the Third as the Other of the Other. Insofar as he or she is the external point of vantage on the relation between the ethical subject and the incomparable Other, the Third is the envoy of generality, since he or she watches the relation from disengaged perspective and sees only the symmetry of related subjects partaking in the whole as the system. If, however, we change the perspective and treat the Third as the Other of the Other (therefore the potential recipient of infinite surrender), he or she will appear as the emissary of thought marked by absolute relation yet not indifferent to (political) justice and, therefore, somehow limiting ethics: I cannot expect reciprocity from the Other — even if he mistreats me I still have the obligation towards him — but what happens to such obligation if the Other makes the Third suffer?

⁴ Małgorzata Kowalska, *Dialektyka poza dialektyką* (Warszawa: Aletheia, 2000), p. 147.

The poor one, the stranger, presents himself as an equal. His equality within this essential poverty consists in referring to the third party, thus present at the encounter, whom in the midst of his destitution the Other already serves.⁵

I am unequal as far as the Other, who calls to me from his or her heights, is concerned, but, paradoxically, the unconditionality of the call is a vehicle of our abyssal equality: since the Third is the Other of the Other, I and the Other are equal in our inequality to our Others. Yet, these Others are never the same — even if he or she becomes the same person our relationships with him or her are absolutely singular and incomparable. Such equality is strangely unequal, in spite of the fact that it somehow limits the unconditional obligation. The “chain” of responsibility, however, never closes, it will never become a circle — I cannot expect. I cannot even think, that the responsibility I offer will sooner or later be given back to me on the basis of “structural necessity:” if ethical injunction is the generally binding principle I will also, in due time, become a beneficiary of its grace. Thinking thus is confusing the plane of law, that is, generality and system, where the rule of structural necessity operates, with the plane of ethics, which is always singular, discontinuous and futureless. The ethical answer to the call of the Other is simply “here I am” and knows nothing of the law.

As we have mentioned earlier, the “place” ethics comes from is situated beyond Being. The Good enters history in order to judge it.

If subjectivity cannot be judged in Truth without its apology (in apology I affirm myself in responding to the call of the Other), if judgement, instead of reducing it to silence, exalts it, then there must be a discord between the events and the good, or, more exactly, events must have an invisible meaning which only a subjectivity, a singular being can determine. To place oneself beyond the judgement of history, under the judgement of truth, is not to suppose behind the apparent history another history called judgement of God — but equally failing to recognize the subjectivity. To place oneself

⁵ E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity...*, p. 213.

under the judgement of God is to exalt the subjectivity, called to moral overstepping beyond laws, which is henceforth in truth because it surpasses the limits of its being.⁶

History is an indifferent and immanent system in which apology is silenced and what is considered good is only “what is the case,” therefore the truth which can judge history and give its due to apology can only come from outside history, from transcendence, also called by Levinas judgement of God, which rends the fabric of the immanent “objective” laws and presents them from the perspective of infinity, that is, the Other. Such is the work of the Good.

Yet, as we have noticed, the practice of absolute goodness — unconditional surrender to the Other — has already been conditioned by quite historical circumstances of the Other not hurting his or her Other; and there are more uneasy issues related to the problem of historicity, which are raised in some quarters. For instance: is it accidental that, in Levinas’s oeuvre, the otherness of the Other is rendered by the term “*illeity*”?⁷ Is it possible, while discussing ethics in religious (although not theological) terms, to avoid certain gestures that all monotheisms hide? For the sake of brevity we will only refer to one example.

Jacques Derrida, in his reading of Levinas entitled “At this very moment in this work here I am,” interrogates a certain permanent slippage in these texts, taking as his example Levinas’s discussion of paternity: why is it that, when he speaks about paternity, the child is always a son, and never a daughter? Or why is it always paternity for that matter?

For Levinas, the son is a specific example of the Other who is and, at the same time, is not me. We would have to come back to this untypical relation to question it later on. For the time being what interests us is the ubiquitous masculinity of the offspring. The line of defence could, of course, be that the Other in its ethical dimension is not yet sexed, and that “son” or “he” names just

⁶ Ibidem, p. 246.

⁷ *Il* is the masculine personal pronoun in French.

a neutral child, sexually unspecific. Yet, why is ethical difference sexually indifferent? And is it just neutral to mark as masculine something that is there prior to sexual differentiation? If one calls the Other “he” while in fact the Other is sexually neutral, one, just as well, has to be prepared to call the Other “she.” For Levinas, however, the personal pronoun of the Other is also a name to call out to transcendence whose other name is God. Is he then prepared to use the feminine pronoun in such a situation, to address God as a woman? One may have grave doubts about it. Moreover, if the masculine is treated as tantamount to the neutral, isn’t it true that such a gesture makes the feminine secondary? Since sexual difference and the feminine are both made into secondary characteristics, ultimately femininity gains subordinate status.⁸ Derrida writes:

Since it is under-signed by the Pro-noun He (before he/she, certainly, but it is not She) could it be that in making sexual alterity secondary [it] becomes [...] a mastery, the mastery of sexual difference posed as the origin of femininity? Hence mastery of femininity?⁹

Can one honestly claim that history is absent in the relation with the Other constructed along such scenario? In the name of neutrality, Levinas privileges masculinity and masters the feminine, assigning to it the subsidiary status that the (neutral!) Third had in our earlier discussion of it. And we should bear in mind that such Third was treated as potentially dangerous for ethics precisely because of its neutrality. Yet here also, as it already happened, the Third may come back with a vengeance: the secondary status of the feminine, the fact that it escapes the Other, makes it the Other’s Other¹⁰, alterity to the second degree, and therefore in need of possibly greater respect, or at least the same, if the respect of ethics is infinite. (Is there only one infinity? In paternalistic

⁸ Simon Critchley, *The Ethics of Deconstruction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 134.

⁹ Jacques Derrida, “At this very moment in this work here I am,” in *Re-Reading Levinas*, eds. Robert Bernasconi and Simon Critchley (London: Athlone, 1991), p. 42.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 43.

monotheism: surely yes, but what about maternity in this respect? We cannot pursue these questions here.)

One may be drawn to ask further questions in that vein, as they have been asked by many¹¹, and it is not by accident that the most convoluted and unsatisfactory fragments of *Totality and Infinity* concern woman, Eros and fecundity, or that *Otherwise Than Being* shifts its point of interest to maternity while Eros largely drops out of discourse. However, leaving the questions concerning the feminine to those more passionately concerned with the subject, we would rather go back to the child.

In a situation such as paternity the return of the I to the self, which is set forth in the monist concept of the identical subject, is found to be completely modified. The son is not only my work, like a poem or an object, nor is he my property. Neither the categories of power nor those of knowledge describe my relation with the child. The fecundity of the I is neither a cause nor a domination. I do not have my child; I am my child. Paternity is a relation with a stranger who while being other (“And you shall say to yourself, ‘who can have borne me these? I was bereaved and barren [...]’” *Isaiah*, 49) is me, a relation of the I with a self which yet is not me. In this “I am” being is no longer Eleatic unity. In transcendence the I is not swept away, since the son is not me; and yet I *am* my son. The fecundity of the I is its very transcendence. The biological origin of this concept nowise neutralizes the paradox of its meaning, and delineates a structure that goes beyond the biologically empirical.¹²

Here, for Levinas, the child is another example of irreducible plurality within Being: in paternity the self-identity of the subject is broken because in my son I escape myself as a subject of systematic laws, e.g. of memory and, with that, of destiny.

Without multiplicity and discontinuity — without fecundity — the I would remain a subject in which every adventure would revert into the adventure of a fate.¹³

¹¹ See especially: Luce Irigaray, “On the Divinity of Love,” in *Re-Reading Levinas...*, pp. 109–118.

¹² E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity...*, p. 277.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 282.

With the coming of the child, subjectivity escapes its fate because the child, who for Levinas is myself, yet separate, is capable of another fate and with that resumes “the adventure of existence so as to be to the infinite.”¹⁴ The child is my completely new beginning, free from all matters that determined me previously.

“The son is not only my work, like a poem or an object, nor is he my property [...]” With such “only” Levinas obviously refers to the difference between having and being (“I do not have my child; I am my child”) and also, as we have noticed, to the discontinuity of my being which surfaces in the offspring. Yet the “only” can also be understood in the most straightforward way: the child is not only my work of paternity, because there is also the mother.

(Parenthetically: can the child be considered a work or even the work? He or she is not just myself made other, but my relationship with the differently sexed Other — who, by the way, must be a “fully-fledged” Other and not “[t]he Beloved, at once graspable but intact in her nudity, beyond object and face”¹⁵ who abides in darkness and invalidates expression; we will come back to that — made flesh. Since the relation is for Levinas always transcendent, which means infinite or unfathomable, we would rather say that the child is the *unworking*, that which makes the accomplishment of work impossible.

As far as another example is concerned: is the poem my work in the sense that an object I have made may be? Insofar as the language I use to create is not mine, it cannot be.)

There is also the mother and with that the tame discontinuity of father/son seems to appear a bit more complicated. What is more, our old problems with fitting the Third into the face-to-face relation which is said to be original, an-archic and, in a sense, isolated, but which also is, as we have seen, always haunted and somehow limited by the Third, whom we called the Other of the Other, comes back to us even more forcefully.

Why then, if the Third keeps inserting herself into the relation, is Levinas so adamant to exclude her? One of the answers

¹⁴ Ibidem.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 258.

may be that he privileges the dyad because ethical asymmetry of absolute difference, which is said to open the egoistic individual to the Other who is transcendent, impossible to grasp, is built on the model of prayer. What we have here is the model situation of a man totally diminished before God, and all other Levinasian concepts describe such a relation ever clearer: infinite patience, the loss of initiative, guilt, etc.

Yet, as we have noticed, the repressed and the silently mastered keeps haunting such face-to-face with the father.¹⁶ Because of that, in order not to allow the Third to be permanently turned into the spectre, some kind of acknowledgement is necessary. One of the possible ways would be this: instead of speaking about discontinuity in the dyadic situation of paternity, we may rather introduce the triadic model of family into the discussion of the absolute relation.

Such a move would allow us, for instance, to reinterpret the crucial places devoted to Eros in Levinas's oeuvre. First of all, in spite of Levinas's work of abstraction (that is neutralisation, so condemned by him), the Other, a singular human being is, to put it crudely, a "genital" product. There would be no Other without sexual difference, because each possible Other in order to be available for the absolute relation has to be *born*; only as incarnated can he or she be "transcendentalised." Which would mean that messianism, as Levinas understands it (the judgement of history by ethics), can only begin as materialism¹⁷ — there is no transcendence unless there is community, otherwise we revert to theology.

¹⁶ It is interesting to note in this context that in his early work *Existence and Existents* Levinas speaks about the urgent philosophical necessity of committing *parricide* on Parmenides.

¹⁷ Levinas would of course reject that, saying that materialism equals history or any other system: "Materialism does not lie in the discovery of the primordial function of the sensibility, but in the primacy of the Neuter. To place the neuter dimension of Being above the existent which unbeknown to it this Being would determine in some way, to make the essential events unbeknown to existents, is to profess materialism." (*Totality and Infinity...*, pp. 298–299). Yet is dialectical materialism of Marx the only possible materialism, as Levinas seems to suggest here?

The Other is said to open one to the transcendence which is ethics beyond history. In such transcendence the Other is incomprehensible and unrepresentable, because all representation becomes knowledge that generalises the Other and turns him or her into an object. Such transcendence is made possible by the Face. But the Face is not a mask — it is always naked; its nakedness puts its vulnerability on display. Yet, is what he describes in this way only true about the Face? The Other's whole *naked* body cannot be reappropriated through the representation if we do not want to make him or her into a thing; the whole body is unrepresentable, imageless, insofar it *is* the Other and does not belong to him or her. The Other's vulnerability is displayed there in the naked body exclusively, appearing as the presence of the other, material presence and not as the aggregation of functional parts of some whole (an organic mechanism and, therefore, a thing). Hence, the cunning of the uniform, as Elias Cannetti noticed: it would not be so easy to kill the other, if people had to fight naked. (Admittedly, the face is the part of the body that is kept permanently naked, but this makes it only a synekdoche of the body as such and not a privileged spot; unless we treat the eyes as "the windows of the soul" and collapse into dualism again. But, above all, the phenomenal face is not the ethical Face.) Moreover, the naked body understood in the aforementioned sense as imageless is much more than an enigma (Levinas speaks about the inexhaustible enigma of the Face). A naked body does not harbour any secret, it simply reveals that "there is nothing to reveal, everything is there exposed,"¹⁸ the body does not hide anything; here "endlessly, the mass rises to the surface and peels off as surface."¹⁹ Such exposure, such inexhaustible obviousness is precisely what commands the ethical relation: the "secret" (which is a "materialised" one) is on display, yet it eludes comprehension: the Other *is*, and he or she is *naked*, I must relieve this suffering.

¹⁸ Jean-Luc Nancy, "Corpus," in *The Birth to Presence*, trans. B. Holmes et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), p. 205.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 199.

There is no enigma here, no unspeakable secret hidden behind the surface which would welcome or disallow *penetration*. Only this kind of exposure can accomplish what is one of Levinas's dreams: to finish off the virility of thought.

The Face has also another silent advantage for Levinas: sexual difference is present there only secondarily (if at all) and this is the place he wants it to keep. Yet, the undivided body is no body "in general," it is never neutral — the body does not have sex, it *is* the sexual difference incarnated and only that makes possible Levinas's paternity (or maternity, for that matter). The body ("materialism") seems to be Levinas's blind spot, and that is probably why he has to return permanently to the transcendence beyond history which can make judgements on history. Yet, perhaps it is possible, taking into consideration all our "perversions" of the transcendent relation (the split Other, the child who is emphatically not myself²⁰), to trace the values about which Levinas speaks as produced "materially," that is, historically?

We have to come back to our family triad (which is here, of course, only the simplified model of plurality: four, five, six, etc.). In a family situation nobody is replaceable and all relations are

²⁰ In the chapter of *Totality and Infinity* called "Fecundity," Levinas puts forward certain propositions which, considered in the light of transcendence, seem to us utterly unacceptable, e.g.:

By a total transcendence, the transcendence of trans-substantiation, the I is, in the child, an other. Paternity remains a self-identification, but also a distinction within identification — a structure unforeseeable in formal logic. p. 267

In fecundity [...] the I is other and young, yet the ipseity that ascribed to it its meaning and its orientation in being is not lost in this renouncement of self. Fecundity continues history without producing old age. [...] Both my own and non-mine, a possibility of myself but also a possibility of the other. of the Beloved, my future does not enter into the logical essence of the possible. pp. 267-268

Whether it is paternity or maternity, they are self-identification to no extent whatsoever. The child is not my future and in particular is not a possibility of myself — the child is vulnerability of the wholly Other. The child is (partly) "myself" only on the most crude biological level; *ethically*, he or she is the Other — genes have nothing to do with it: the adopted child is, from the point of view of ethics, exactly in the same place as the biological child, notwithstanding his or her being genetically "myself" to no extent.

asymmetric. First of all, the human child is always born “too early,” without the sacrifice on the parents’ part it will not live; both of them are indispensable if we consider proper development. Furthermore, one parent cannot put his or her responsibility on the other parent (although it has been too often done in our paternalistic society), because in each case my responsibility for my child is always mine and impossible to be exhausted. One also cannot say that one has done enough and now is the other parent’s turn. When one stops thinking about the child’s well-being one becomes egoistic; if one thinks that one has a right to be replaced one becomes legalistic (“all should have equal responsibilities”) which is another form of ethical egoism.

Nobody can change places in the family relationship. The adults obviously cannot take the place of the child, but they also cannot “swap” — although they can, for instance, reverse or displace the traditional roles (like taking care of home or getting money), they will always remain mother and father (sexual difference).

The relationship between the parents has to be asymmetric as well. Although Levinas tries to collapse the absolute difference between lovers into a relationship outside the face (“The beloved, returned to the stage of infancy without responsibility — this coquettish head, this youth, this pure life ‘a bit silly’ — has quit her status as a person”²¹) saying that it is “the very contrary of the social relation,” because “it remains intimacy, dual solitude, closed society,”²² love cannot be thought otherwise than on the basis of the absolute relation (in this sense it *is* secondary), since before somebody becomes my lover, he or she has first to become for me the Other, the human neighbour whose hostage I become. (Love may contradict my relation as hostage, but it will never get the upper hand, since it would have to annul itself: egoistic love is a contradiction of terms.) Treating love as communion (the blurring of limits irrecoverable to the “formal logic”) repeats the same ethical slip that the comment on the child as “myself” has committed: the

²¹ E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity...*, p. 263.

²² *Ibidem*, pp. 264–265.

confusion of the ethical and the biological plane.²³ Moreover, the family is a social relation and as such must be first of all thought ethically. For Levinas only one relation is ethical — the absolute relation to the Other.

The triadic asymmetry does not only operate between the members of the family. In order to show that even in a dualistic framework the child is nobody's work, we have already noticed that the child is the incarnated relationship between the I and the Other. But the situation, in fact, is rather more complicated: the child as subjectivity is not the incarnation of the dyadic relationship between the parents, he or she is the incarnation of the triadic relation mother—father—child in the state of becoming, also in its historical dimension. So, while for Levinas the Other is my abyssal truth (truth without substance but truth nevertheless), in the family relation the Other is always double, so the truth of it is split. And within this split truth — where the father is the truth of the mother, the mother is the truth of the father — their truth is not the same truth since they cannot, as we mentioned earlier, swap places with one another as far as the child is concerned.

In the light of the above, therefore, the child is (the incarnation of) the asymmetrical relation with the split Other, so the relation with the non-neutral Other(s) marked with both ethical difference as well as sexual one is the child's truth. Yet this truth is — to use Levinas's term — an an-archic truth: it comes from immemorial time before consciousness, before subjectivity, since the relation is what made such subjectivity possible. The child is "originally" the relation with the Other(s), but the relation is no substance, since it

²³ Unexpectedly, this is also the direction in which Irigaray, commenting and "rectifying" Levinas, goes; e.g.:

[...] the loss of boundaries which takes place for both lovers when they cross the boundary of the skin into the mucous membranes of the body, leaving the circle which encloses my solitude to meet in a shared place, a shared breath, abandoning the relatively dry and precise outlines of each body's solid exterior to enter a fluid universe where the perception of being two persons becomes indistinct.

"On the Divinity of Love,"... p. 111

Doesn't it rather sound like some theorists' wishful thinking?

is every time unique and infinite. Such a relation consists of emptying out of one's self for the Other in the "sentimental" and "unreasonable" compassion which is its rule that lacks any essential ground. Yet such a rule does not come from beyond history as an instrument to judge history with. It turns out to be the product of a micro-history, liable to be perverted by historical circumstances (pathological upbringing, ideology, etc.). But this, paradoxically, makes it only more urgent and even more unconditional.

Strangely enough, it seems that we finally ended up in a very ancient spot. Aren't we also struggling here with the familiar Antigone's dilemma? For her, the insurmountable wall divided the laws of the family (which Hegel, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, called the "divine law") and community (Hegelian "human law"). Levinas — the enemy of Hegel — divides precisely the same: "infinite transcendence" (judgement of God) and "finite historicism" (politics, economy) validating, against Hegel, the former. But do we have to choose between Jerusalem and Athens once again? Only when we insist on the beyond-history of transcendence. However, what happens if, as we have tried to argue, the Face, or rather the body, presents itself not as a hidden enigma of the beyond-history but as a depthless, yet inexhaustibly infinite materiality of incarnated ethics weighing down on us with its obviousness? What if messianism, properly understood, is nothing else than what we have been pursuing here: materialist transcendence?

Radix, Matrix: trzecie ciało w etyce Levinasa

Streszczenie

Autor próbuje określić zręby dyskursu zdolnego przezwyciężyć paradoksalną neutralizację, której w myśli Levinasa ulega Inny; stara się pokazać, że aby uchronić relację pomiędzy mną a Innym przed generalizacją abstrakcji, musimy przestać operować nią w kategoriach Levinasowskiego diadycznego modelu modlitwy, który, choćby na poziomie relacji między płciami, prowadzi do pewnych niemożliwych do zaakceptowania waloryzacji. Wydaje się, że modelem bardziej owocnym mógłby być triadyczny (a właściwie „polimeryczny”) model relacji rodzinnej, w którym Inny zyskuje płć, a zatem zostaje rozszczepiony na dwa równorzędne, lecz nietożsame byty, co nie tylko pozwala uniknąć dyskusji poświęconej miejscu początkowo wykluczonego z etyki Trzeciego jako Innego Innego, ale także — ponieważ pokazuje, że Levinasowską etyczną transcendencję, jeśli spojrzeć na nią pod pewnym kątem, można wyprowadzić z materialności nagiego ludzkiego ciała (którego Twarz jest tylko synekdochą) — umożliwia nawiązanie etycznego dialogu z dyskursami historycznymi i materialistycznymi, które myśl Levinasa wykluczyła z obszaru etyki.

Sławomir Masłoń

Radix, Matrix: dritter Körper in der Ethik von Levinas

Zusammenfassung

Im vorliegenden Artikel bemüht sich sein Verfasser, die Grenzen einer Erörterung zu beginnen, die die paradoxe Neutralisierung der, nach Levinas, ein Anderer unterliegt, zu überwinden könnte. Er will zeigen, dass wir aufhören müssen, in Kategorien des dualen Gebetmodells von Levinas zu denken, das auf der Ebene der zwischenengeschlechtlichen Relationen zu einigen, nicht akzeptablen Aufwertungen führt, wenn wir die Relation zwischen mir und dem Anderen vor Abstraktionsgeneralisierung retten wollen. Ein viel besseres Modell scheint das triadische (genauer gesagt „polymere“) Modell der Familienrelation zu sein, in dem der Andere ein bestimmtes Geschlecht bekommt und demnach in zwei gleichberechtigte, aber nicht identische Existenzen aufgespalten wird. Es lässt eine an den Haaren herbeigezogene Diskussion über die Rolle des, zunächst aus der Ethik ausgeschlossenen Dritten als eines andersartigen Anderen zu vermeiden. Solch ein Modell ermöglicht auch einen ethischen Dialog mit den historischen und materialistischen, von Levinas aus der Ethik ausgeschlossenen Diskursen, weil es zeigt, dass man die ethische Transzendenz von Levinas, wenn man sie unter einem bestimmten Gesichtspunkt betrachtet, aus der Materialität des nackten menschlichen Körpers (dessen Gesicht lediglich eine Synekdoche ist) ableiten kann.