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## Phenomenology of the Other. Paul Ricœur and Emmanuel Lévinas' attitude towards the ontology of *Totality*

Truth would [...] designate the outcome of a movement that leaves a world that is intimate and familiar, even if we have not yet explored it completely, and goes toward the stranger, toward a *beyond*, as Plato puts it. [...] Western thought very often seemed to exclude the transcendent, encompass every other in the same, and proclaim the philosophical birthright of autonomy.<sup>1</sup>

E. Lévinas

### Plato's metaphysics and the failure of the *cogito*

The Platonic meta-categories of “Same” and “Other,” which belong to the so-called “great kinds,” which in turn are discussed in *Parmenides*, have permanently established the framework of Western metaphysics.

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<sup>1</sup> E. Lévinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. A. Lingis, Dordrecht–Boston–Lancaster 1987, pp. 47–48.

The philosophical language developed by Plato captures all being as bound up, within a reference structure, with that which is other than it, with the aid of dialectic. “This horizontal nexus is complemented by a vertical hierarchy, the proportions of which correspond to the degree to which the rational whole is reflected in the individual being.”<sup>2</sup> The modern interpretation, which is oriented around the Cartesian theory of the *cogito*, has placed philosophy “within a closed circle of representation.” Thinking from the *cogito* perspective culminated in the logic of identity consisting in the subordination of every difference to the principle of identicalness. The cognitive subject represents to himself that which the other, the unfamiliar by reducing it to that which is familiar.<sup>3</sup>

In response to the existing metaphysical heritage many philosophers undertook a challenging task of finding language capable of expressing a new mode of reasoning that would go beyond traditional ontological categories. One of the key redefinitions effected above all by “adherents” of the school of phenomenology is concerned with philosophy’s excessive attachment to the actness of consciousness, and by extension with the omission of the aspect of experientiality related to the broad problematic area of that which is alien (other). The critique of the old order of thought, conducted by followers of new phenomenology - a trend oriented chiefly around the corporeal experience and “non-intentionality,” does not consist in its straightforward reversal. Such a strategy usually does not help the controversy, because a reversal will forever remain bound by that which it makes its opposite. Marking out new pathways in anthropology (or, more broadly, philosophy)<sup>4</sup> requires different laying

<sup>2</sup> B. Waldenfels, *Phenomenology of the Alien. Basic Concepts*, trans. A. Kozin and T. Stähler, Evanston, Illinois 2011, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> See M. Heidegger, *Panowanie podmiotu w nowożytności*, in: M. Heidegger, *Nietzsche*, vol. 2, trans. A. Gniazdowski et al., scientific ed. by C. Wodziński, Warszawa 1999, pp. 135–142. Cf. P. Ricœur, *Heidegger i problem podmiotu*, trans. E. Bienkowska, “Znak” 1974 no. 240, pp. 778–789.

<sup>4</sup> Jean-Luc Marion claims that after Nietzsche demonstrated that all the possibilities of classical metaphysics had ultimately been exhausted, it was precisely phenomenology that originated a revival of the most crucial philosophical questions, playing in our times the proper role of philosophy as such. See *Fenomenologia francuska. Rozpoznania/interpretacje/rozwińnięcia*, selected texts edited by J. Migasiński and I. Lorenc, Warszawa 2006, p. 8.

of accents and conducting distinct reorientations.<sup>5</sup> Restoring the aspects of experientiality and responsivity to their proper place, which begins with suspending the expectation of sense and the rules proper to reason and will, is as much as admitting that the “embodied self” (Ger. *leiblichen Selbst*, Fr. *soi corporel*) is not only something more than “something” with some attributed characteristics, but also something more than “someone” with specific roles, rights and capabilities.<sup>6</sup> That which is alien, and which we encounter in experience is not comprehended only as something that appears in spite of our will, but as something that is impossible to want.<sup>7</sup> The description of the mode of action consisting in inner constitutive differentiation, which is postulated by proponents of new phenomenology, is about showing a manner of speaking and acting which does not start with the self, but elsewhere, bearing traces of “alien influence.” However, this turning to something completely alien that is incomprehensible, and whose influence is elusive, preceding thematisation, enables formation of the sphere of that which is own, without which “nobody would be him- or herself.”<sup>8</sup>

The reorientation that takes place in phenomenology itself consists in abandoning the “realm of sense,” i.e. in going beyond the sense, which is constituted intentionally and as per rules, towards another kind of responsivity – “capability to respond” to that which is alien, which precedes responsibility for that which we say and do. “The common characteristics of *intentionality* and *regularity* on which the emergence of a common world depends are not replaced by responsivity, but are certainly surpassed by it.”<sup>9</sup> In this sense – unlike Gadamer’s hermeneutics or Habermas’ concept of communicative rationality, which treat the alien as always already included in conversation – we might say that man is never entirely at home with himself. The point is not, therefore, about

<sup>5</sup> Cf. B. Waldenfels, *Phenomenology of the Alien. Basic Concepts*, op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. B. Waldenfels, *Phenomenology of the Alien. Basic Concepts*, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. B. Waldenfels, *Phenomenology of the Alien. Basic Concepts*, op. cit., p. 34; also B. Waldenfels, *Topografia obcego. Studia z fenomenologii obcego*, trans. J. Sidorek, Warszawa 2002.

<sup>8</sup> B. Waldenfels, *Phenomenology of the Alien. Basic Concepts*, op. cit., p. 28.

<sup>9</sup> B. Waldenfels, *Phenomenology of the Alien. Basic Concepts*, op. cit., p. 36.

some type of antithesis describing the relation between self-reference and reference to the alien, but – as pointed out by Lévinas and then Bernhard Waldenfels – apart from the approach consisting in polemic complementarity of self-reference and alien reference, there is room for another approach which manifests itself when alien reference is encapsulated within self-reference, thereby giving rise to a new type of responsivity. Differentiation that occurs within self-reference is at the same time a modification of the field of rationality, which leads to a peculiar “disappropriation” of the subject, who from now onwards comes over “as a being that is looking for its place but does not have it, and that can no longer act as a substitute for a single rationality.”<sup>10</sup> The concept of new responsivity radically changes the problematic concerned with demarcating the boundaries between the inner experience of “mineness” and the experience of the alien. The unifying element here is a fundamental splitting (diastasis) in a happening, which concerns antecedent pathos of the alien on the one hand, and the deferred response. Diastasis, as Waldenfels comments, “separation of the *own* and the *alien*, effected by no third party, belongs to a different dimension than the distinction between *same* and *other*, which is backed by a dialectically created whole.”<sup>11</sup> The critical detachment from the heritage of classical metaphysics is not merely another concept developed within the framework determined by contemporary “philosophies of alterity.” Jacques Derrida’s deconstruction, the specificity of the anti-dialectical attitude in Emmanuel Lévinas’ philosophy, as well as Hans-Georg Gadamer’s and Paul Ricœur’s interpretations inspired by Martin Heidegger’s philosophical hermeneutics provide new and different descriptions of the process of comprehension. While Ricœur points to a variety of mediations constitutive for its dynamics, Lévinas imparts to it a character of a special form of response which is completely different from intentional or rule-bound sense formation.

<sup>10</sup> B. Waldenfels, *Phenomenology of the Alien. Basic Concepts*, op. cit., p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> B. Waldenfels, *Phenomenology of the Alien. Basic Concepts*, op. cit., p. 11. Cf. E. Lévinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. A. Lingis, Dordrecht 1991, pp. 31–34; E. Lévinas, *Time and the Other*, trans. Richard A. Cohen, Duquesne 1987, pp. 81–90.

There appears, precisely at the interface of phenomenology, hermeneutics and deconstruction, to have been some interesting shifts and modifications with regard to the constitutive features of these trends, the consequence being formulation of different anthropological and metaphysical interpretations. Even though the characteristic shared by the postulated projects lies in their transcending of the traditional language of consciousness, and turning towards new approaches to corporeal experience, which include the issues concerned with intentionality, self-perception and intersubjectivity, the direction and manner of overcoming the Cartesian heritage distinctly demarcates borderlines differentiating between the particular positions. One of the most interesting intellectual tensions that come to the fore in the different understanding of the phenomenon of “other” – i.e. in its description that goes beyond the Husserlian noetic-noematic correlation – is depicted by the discussion, or rather dispute between Ricœur and Lévinas. If the history of phenomenology is a history of a heretical interpretation of Husserl’s works,<sup>12</sup> Lévinas’ question of the possibility of articulating the unrepresentable (how is phenomenology of the non-phenomenal possible) constitutes the most radical expression of the “heresy,” thereby putting question marks over the problem of the boundaries of phenomenology itself.<sup>13</sup>

Both Ricœur and Lévinas are critical of the horizons of metaphysics delineated by Plato, but while the former one speaks about grafting hermeneutics onto the domain of phenomenology, which goes beyond mere eidetic description, revealing the mediating role of language in the open (never unclosed) process of acquiring self-knowledge, the latter one distances himself from the hermeneutic tendency, turning towards metaphysics oriented around the logic of response, to which connected is (also at the lexical level) the notion of responsibility providing a source of a radical ethical requirement that is antecedent to any constitution of the subject. Both the philosophers are unanimous that the Cartesian

<sup>12</sup> Cf. P. Ricœur, *À l'école de la phénoménologie*, Paris 2004, p. 9.

<sup>13</sup> See *Fenomenologia francuska. Rozpoznanie/interpretacje/rozwiniecie*, op. cit., pp. 11, 22–23.

idea of sovereign, autonomous consciousness conditioned by nothing is the beginning of all kinds of totalising forms of subjectivity. Still, while Ricœur includes in the dialectical movement the gnoseological dimension of sense that encompasses the intentional directing of consciousness at someone other than I on the one hand, and the ethical dimension of imperative subject to the rule of reciprocity on the other hand, Lévinas follows the path on which he does not stop at describing inner-world relations, but as he goes beyond the sphere in which appears the phenomenon of passivity (*le phénomène de la passivité*), he tries to reach its pre-origin.

As I analyse Ricœur's interpretation of the phenomenon of "radical otherness" described by Lévinas, which the author of *The Philosophy of the Will* contained in three texts,<sup>14</sup> I try to present the reasons for the impossible intellectual understanding between the two thinkers, which would consist in demarcating a shared horizon for the concept of the self (*soi*) of *open* dialectics and the self constituted by the original "designation for responsibility," within which one can speak about phenomenology of selfhood, i.e. the self who recognises himself thanks to some other than himself.

### **Hermeneutic phenomenology and the self (*soi*) of *open* dialectics**

A genealogy of logic or morality, which strives to be more than a history of ideas or morals, is only possible if the solid grounds of *common sense* are left behind, thus returning to reason and freedom its true nature, that of an abyss. For phenomenology, this means the need to turn against itself, to resist the euphoria of sense which would dull it like it dulls other philosophies of sense.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> P. Ricœur, *Autrement. Lecture d'Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence d'Emmanuel Lévinas*, Paris 1997; P. Ricœur, *Emmanuel Lévinas, penseur du témoignage*, in: P. Ricœur, *Lectures*, vol. 3: *Aux frontières de la philosophie*, Paris 1994, p. 99; P. Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. K. Blamey, Chicago 1992, p. 332. See also the letters exchanged by Ricœur and Lévinas, collected in *Éthique et responsabilité*, which contain a critical commentary on Lévinas' book *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence: Éthique et responsabilité*. Paul Ricœur, textes réunis par J. Ch. Aeschlimann, Boudry-Neuchâtel 1994, pp. 35–38.

<sup>15</sup> B. Waldenfels, *Phenomenology of the Alien. Basic Concepts*, op. cit., p. 32.

The new language for describing the experience of the self, which comes to be expressed with the formula “the-one-who-is-himself-and-the-other,” was developed in a threefold critical reference to the Platonic opposition of the terms “the Same” and “the Other,” the Cartesian and post-Cartesian philosophy of reflection, which treats the *cogito* as a pole constitutive of all sense, and the Hegelian model of dialectic leading to abolition of all differences (assimilation of all otherness) and making the subject a totalising and unifying principle. Plato reckons the concepts of “the Same” and “the Other” among the so-called “great kinds” – meta-categories – placed above the first-order discourse, which encompasses categories and basic particulars such as persons and things. Ricœur’s reinterpretation of Plato’s interpretation is about negation of the simple opposition of the same and the other, and is oriented towards such an understanding of identity language that could describe the phenomenon of being man as a being defined by time in which mediation between the same and the other takes place. The concept of “the same” is replaced by Ricœur with the scholastic dialectic of the twofold meaning of identity: identity understood as *idem* (sameness) and identity understood as *ipse* (selfhood). Modification of the former element in the Platonic opposition results in a different approach to the latter one, i.e. the notion of “the Other,” which takes on a different meaning depending on which identity modality (*idem* or *ipse*) this element will be referred to. When it refers to the *idem* identity, the otherness of the one other than “the same” has sense constituted on account of opposition. The notion of “the Other” which refers to the *ipse* identity does not spring from comparison (or not only from comparison), but dialectically co-creates “selfhood” itself.<sup>16</sup>

The mutual irreducibility of the problematics concerned with temporal stability consisting in being the same - *idem*, and being a self - *ipse* characterises different modes of realising the metacategories of the otherness of the other. Another way it is manifested is the interrelation between “selfhood” (*l’ipséité*) and “alterity” (*l’altérité*), but not in the

<sup>16</sup> I address this subject at greater length in the book entitled *Tożsamość, narracja i hermeneutyka siebie. Paula Ricœur’a filozofia człowieka*, Kraków 2018, pp. 38-40 (Horyzonty Nowoczesności).

sense of otherness that allows for breaking off (discontinuity in being the same), like in the division into *idem* and *ipse*, but in the sense of otherness that “assaults the same as completely other than himself.”<sup>17</sup> The experience of oneself means recognising oneself in being the other, i.e. as the same and the other. In Ricœur’s formula of “the-one-who-is-himself-and-the-other” the key role is played by the conjunction *comme*, which here takes on the meaning of “as well as,” “both,” “at the same time,” thereby being a unifying element in the *open* dialectic postulated by the French philosopher.<sup>18</sup> The self (*soi*) does not recognise himself as the one who is the same, or as the one who is other, in a pure uncorrelative form. The experience of oneself is always one of co-presence and interrelation between the senses of both the component parts of selfhood and otherness.

The fact that otherness is not added on to selfhood from outside, as though to prevent its solipsistic drift, but that it belongs instead to the tenor of meaning and to the ontological structure constitution of selfhood is a feature that strongly distinguishes this [...] dialectic from that of selfhood and sameness, which maintains a preeminently disjunctive character.<sup>19</sup>

The phenomenon of the otherness of the other does not bring back the meaning of “the Other” from the Platonic opposition of “the Same” – “the Other.” Invoking the dialectic of the “great kinds” serves in Ricœur as a confirmation that his *open* dialectic of selfhood (*l’ipséité*) and alterity (*l’altérité*) belongs to the same discourse as the dialectic of “Same” and “Other,” i.e. the second-order discourse that governs the discourse concerning persons and things, that is basic particulars. Like Plato’s dialectic, which performs the function of hierarchisation of and

<sup>17</sup> P. Ricœur, *Refleksja dokonana. Autobiografia intelektualna*, trans. P. Bobowska-Nastarzewska, Kęty 2005, p. 66.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. A. Warmbier, *Tożsamość, narracja i hermeneutyka siebie*, op. cit., p. 46; B. Waldenfels, *L’autre et l’étranger*, in: *Paul Ricœur. L’herméneutique à l’école de la phénoménologie*, présentation de J. Greisch, Paris 1995, pp. 328–330.

<sup>19</sup> P. Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, op. cit., s. 317.



differentiation between first-order kinds, Ricoeur's metacategory of alterity of the other in the dialectic of selfhood and alterity, "as it analyses the interrelation between [...] the categories, [...] keeps renewing itself without referring to any other category."<sup>20</sup> Ricoeur traces the lineage of the dialectic of ipseity (*l'ipséité*) and alterity (*l'altérité*) to the Platonic "great kinds," which he does in order to point to the conditions of the possibility of phenomenological expressions of alterity, which is a constitutive component of the structures of oneself. In this sense, hermeneutic phenomenology that describes the experience of the self in being the other is provided with a solid foundation, partaking of the highest principles.<sup>21</sup>

The Platonic dialectic of the same and the other is by no means exceptional and *a fortiori* only ethical, and therefore the manner in which it performs its architectonic function with regard to the hermeneutic of the self must for as long as possible be maintained in the pre-ethical dimension of this hermeneutic [...]. All the possible means of pre-moral analysis of the self must be deployed, if we wish to impart a full dimension to the transformation of metaphysics into morality.<sup>22</sup>

The metacategory of otherness is expressed in three basic meanings: the otherness of one's own body (*le corps propre*) or the lived body (*la chair*), the otherness of another man who "is like me, but external to me," and the otherness that testifies to itself in conscience (*la conscience* – "the voice of consciousness directed at me from within myself"). The phenomenological field in which the category of otherness becomes manifest remains open to both the experiences encompassing that which happens within the self, constituting the sphere of that which is independent from one's own will, and the experiences coming from outside, e.g. otherness of other stories (narratives) in which someone's

<sup>20</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Refleksja dokonana*, op. cit., p. 57. See also P. Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, op. cit., pp. 317–319.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. A. Warmbier, *Tożsamość, narracja i hermeneutyka siebie*, op. cit., p. 47.

<sup>22</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Refleksja dokonana*, op. cit., pp. 64, 66.

own story is entangled; otherness of other responsibilities, or otherness of culture *sensu largo*. Hermeneutic phenomenology is guided by the question “who?” (who speaks? who acts? who responds? who is responsible for their acts?), where starting with the subjective aspect of individual experiences, they are examined with regard to capabilities conducive to realisation of subjective action. The question about being a self (*soi*) is embedded by Ricœur within the Aristotelian conceptual pattern of act and potency, thanks to which the French philosopher’s hermeneutics of the *self* becomes ontologically established. Dialectisation of various senses constitutive of selfhood is not a repetition of the Hegelian model of dialectics, which leads to abolition of all differences (assimilation of all otherness) and making the subject a totalising and unifying principle. The idea of *open* dialectic is that the otherness of the other does not get “absorbed” in the process of double negation leading to a synthesis of the opposites at a higher level, but it acts as his constitutive component, a hallmark of the impossibility of total control over himself. The self (*soi*) recognises himself in being the other, because consciousness undergoes a number of mediations. While Hegel’s dialectic is a synthesising dialectic, the dialectic critically adopted by Ricœur preserves its open character, thereby not resulting in the self (*soi*) acquiring absolute self-knowledge, because the finiteness of our being involves incapability to go beyond the horizon from within which we discern and interpret that which is past, and we “project ourselves” into the future.<sup>23</sup>

### **From metaphysics to ethics.**

#### **Non-intentional phenomenology and diastasis**

Freedom, autonomy, the reduction of the other to the same (*la réduction de l’Autre au Même*), lead to this formula: the conquest of being by man over the course of history. This reduction does not represent some abstract schema; it is man’s ego. The existence of an ego takes place as an identification of the diverse. So many events happen to it, so many years age it, and yet the ego remains the same! The ego (*le*

<sup>23</sup> Cf. A. Warmbier, *Tożsamość, narracja i hermeneutyka siebie*, op. cit., p. 52.

*Moi*), the oneself (*le Soi-même*), the *ipseity* (*l'ipséité*) (as it is called in our times) does not remain invariable in the midst of change like a rock assailed by the waves (which is anything but invariable); the ego remains the same by making of disparate and diverse events a history - its history. And that is the original event [*fait*] of the identification of the same, prior to the identity of a rock, and a condition of that identity.<sup>24</sup>

E. Lévinas

Lévinas begins looking for the possibility of re-posing the question about subjectivity with the gesture of breaking with classical metaphysics, and taking a critical stance on the opposition of “Same” and “Other,” which delineated the framework for viewing “Ego” as one remaining the same, “self-identical” being, or substance. A “self-identical” being is one that is totally closed up and separated. The constitutive characteristic of its essence is “the possibility of possessing, that is, of suspending the very alterity of what is only at first other, and other relative to me.”<sup>25</sup> “Self-identical” becomes a name of the subject whose existence allows for only momentary crossing of the boundaries of immanence, which is concluded with a return, self-identification and recovery of the state of perfect unity with himself. Such a subject is free and egoistic, constituting the centre of its own world. Its essence excludes any opening to transcendence, because

solipsism is neither an aberration nor sophism; it is the very structure of reason. This is so not just because of the “subjective” character of the sensations that it combines, but because of the universality of knowledge - that is, the unlimitedness of

<sup>24</sup> E. Lévinas, *Collected Philosophical Papers*, op. cit., p. 48; see E. Lévinas, *En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger*, Paris 2006, pp. 230–231.

<sup>25</sup> E. Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity. An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A. Lingis, The Hague–Boston–London 1979, p. 38 In the essay *On Escape* Lévinas writes: “Thus, escape is the need to get out of oneself, that is, to break that most radical and unalterably binding of chains, the fact that the I [*moi*] is oneself [*soi-même*].” The striving to escape being, which Lévinas expresses with the aid of neologism *excedence* – exceeding, or going beyond, implies understanding being as an existent fact, something closed, absolutely self-identical, the motion of continual self-reference, in which the self-identical “I” gets constituted. See E. Lévinas, *De l'évasion*, “Recherches Philosophiques” 5 (1935–1936), p. 374.

light and the impossibility for anything to be on the outside. Thus reason never finds any other reason to speak. The intentionality of consciousness allows one to distinguish the ego from things, but it does not make solipsism disappear: its element – light – renders us master of the exterior world but is incapable of discovering a peer for us there.<sup>26</sup>

The heritage of the Eleatic concept of being and the Platonic metaphor of light has defined philosophical reflection in terms of a theoretical structure of subjective-objective description. As an epistemological category, the subject is synonymous with the solipsistic reason's activity manifesting itself in experience in which the "Ego" is constituted through a relation with that which comes only from himself. The being under cognition is reduced to the role of an object, a correlate of the relation in which the primary role is played by the subject, i.e. it no longer is an independent and other being; it becomes a being for me and exists as such.<sup>27</sup> "Thematization and conceptualization, which moreover are inseparable, are not peace with the other but suppression or possession of the other. For possession affirms the other, but within a negation of its independence."<sup>28</sup> Knowledge is linked with "possession and violence" by the fact of the dominance of the self-identical.

The fact remains that through consciousness nothing in being can dissimulate itself. Consciousness is a light that illuminates the world from one end to the other; all that sinks into the past is re-membered [*se sous-vient*] or is rediscovered by history. Reminiscence is the extreme consciousness that is also universal pre-

<sup>26</sup> E. Lévinas, *Time and the Other*, op. cit., p. 65. Cf. E. Lévinas, *Entre nous. Essais sur le penser-à-l'autre*, Paris 1991, p. 26: "A person is not [...] devoid of consciousness, but their consciousness is a non-problem one, i.e. it has no exteriority [...], a consciousness that does not care about its positioning in relation to exteriority."

<sup>27</sup> Cf. E. Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, op. cit., p. 126: "[T]he structure of representation as a non-reciprocal determination of the other by the same is precisely for the same to be present and for the other to be present to the same. We call it "the same" because in representation the I precisely loses its opposition to its object [...]"

<sup>28</sup> E. Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, op. cit., p. 46. Cf. E. Lévinas, *Difficult Freedom. Essays on Judaism*, trans. S. Hand, Baltimore 1990, p. 6.

sence and ontology: all that which is able to fill the field of consciousness was, in its time, received, perceived, and had an origin. Through consciousness the past is but a modification of the present. Nothing can, or could, come to pass without presenting itself. Nothing can, or could, smuggle itself into consciousness without being declared, without showing itself, and without letting itself be inspected as to its truth. Transcendental subjectivity is the figure of this presence: no signification precedes the one that I give.<sup>29</sup>

However, as Lévinas claims, there is something else that radically precedes the intentional reference to the world, something external, something that the subject is moved, called upon and designated by. All of Lévinas' oeuvre is about consistent and never-ending development of philosophical language which would enable expression and justification of a pre-theoretical, pre-cognitive and non-content relation with the other.<sup>30</sup> This relation, or more precisely "non-relation" is an original ethical experience, an expression of another intentionality which is independent of the subjective-objective reference, and which is by no means characterised by actness, is not a pole of identity, but is pure passivity that eliminates the precedence of the sense made over representation of the object. "Another" intentionality is one that is devoid of that which served as its foundation – i.e. the "I" displaying its freedom in every act of its constitution. He opposes this kind of intentionality (or "non-intentionality") which Lévinas calls an original ethical experience, which occurs beyond the spatiotemporal horizon, to the origins of

<sup>29</sup> E. Lévinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>30</sup> Lévinas is trying to achieve this goal by moving between two different traditions: Hellenism and Hebraism. In *Of God Who Comes to Mind* he writes: "my concern everywhere is precisely to translate this non-Hellenism of the Bible into Hellenic terms and not to repeat the biblical formulas in their obvious sense [...]. There is nothing to be done: philosophy is spoken in Greek. But we must not think that language models meaning" (p. 85). In *Violence and Metaphysics* Derrida criticises Lévinas from the position taken by adherents of the concept of language as the Greek *logos*, whereby expressing intuitions whose origins lie in a different culture circle is impossible. See J. Derrida, *Przemoc i metafizyka*, in: J. Derrida, *Pismo filozofii*, selection and foreword by B. Banasiak, trans. K. Matuszewski, P. Pieniążek, Kraków 1992, p. 141.

Husserlian intentionality.<sup>31</sup> The condition for the possibility of ethics as well as the condition for the possibility of the establishment of the ethical subject lie outside the system, that is outside subjectivity. The ethical experience that Lévinas writes about is not possible if one is the subject of intentionality. Thus, we go beyond the order of all experience, shifting sense (the ethical sense that cannot be conceived of) beyond manifestation.<sup>32</sup> Lévinas notes that the very Husserlian interpretation contains many remarks that allow for its more manifold reading. The author of *Cartesian Meditations* presumes that the Other is never given to us in his entirety. Thanks to phenomenology we discover that thought is not filled with the presence of that at which it is directed, but it opens up in the process of infinite filling.<sup>33</sup> The fact that thought cannot be completely filled liberates it from the adequacy constraint. Husserl opens up new interpretative vistas, even though himself does not expand them.

The necessity to move on to thinking “outside ontology” is justified by Lévinas with the proposition whereby only radical exteriority which cannot become an object of the intentionality of consciousness, and in which will and reflection get affirmed ensures remaining outside the order of representation. Non-intentional phenomenology describes the kind of experience of the Other the constitutive characteristic of which is remoteness, absence and distance, i.e. one that persists in the sphere preceding all sense and rules, but is “measured against the sense *toward* which we understand something and ourselves, and measured against the rules *by* which we operate when treating somebody or something

<sup>31</sup> As he describes the phenomenon of non-intentionality, Lévinas uses the category of insomnia, which is wakefulness and “disinterested,” indeterminate, non-content awakening. The Other is in the Same, waking him, i.e. the Other does not let the Same become a state. A state, in Lévinas’ opinion, is that which encloses the Same within himself. Opening up to the Other is not about focusing attention on..., is not intentionality. Infinity dwells in thinking in a passive manner, unlike *cogitatum*, which can be understood through *cogitatio*. See E. Lévinas, *Of God who Comes to Mind*, op. cit., p. 59.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. A. Warmbier, *Spór o pojęcie intersubiektywności. Transcendentalizm etyczny a podmiotowa treść doświadczenia*, „Kwartalnik Filozoficzny” 43 (2105) no. 4, pp. 53–54.

<sup>33</sup> See E. Lévinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, op. cit., p. 27.

in this or that fashion.”<sup>34</sup> As he refers to the Cartesian idea of Infinity, which the self (*soi*) discovers in himself as a summons that is coming from outside, and that is not a part of immanence, but that which tears it apart, Lévinas speaks about the Other-in-the-Same. The Same (self-identical) contains more than can be contained in the mode of being “more in less.” The Other is not a variant of the Same; “in” does not denote assimilation. The original ethical experience which is about responding can be described not in terms of linear temporal scheme, where earlier figures herald subsequent figures in which the former ones find their significance, but in reference to a form of temporality called by Lévinas ‘diastasis.’ Diastasis consists in “happening.” “The genuine deferment of the response undermines the primacy of some original presence. The presence is not nothing [...] but it is not self-sufficient. Responding takes place here and now, but it begins elsewhere. [...] The foundation of an order is an event that does not function as part of the order it makes possible. [...] Thus freedom does not mean the ability to begin absolutely with oneself; rather, it means that I begin somewhere else.”<sup>35</sup> Diastasis is a temporal deferment without which it is impossible to understand the meaning of the asymmetry establishing the relation with the Other. The asymmetry of demand and response unavoidably “throws out of balance the traditional dialogue orientated toward common goals and following common rules, and it also leaves behind moral demands for equality [...]” The operation of the asymmetry is not one whereby “in an ongoing dialogue rules are distributed unequally; rather, the asymmetry depends upon the fact that call and response do not converge. Between question and answer there is just as little consensus as between request and fulfilment. The two clash in the same manner as two intersecting glances.”<sup>36</sup> Lévinas describes the incongruity of the two temporal planes, their fundamental splitting by referring to the rhetorical device of passivity more passive than all passivity, i.e. one whose significance

<sup>34</sup> B. Waldenfels, *Phenomenology of the Alien. Basic Concepts*, op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>35</sup> B. Waldenfels, *Phenomenology of the Alien. Basic Concepts*, op. cit., p. 40.

<sup>36</sup> B. Waldenfels, *Phenomenology of the Alien. Basic Concepts*, op. cit., p. 41.

does not emerge by virtue of its opposition to activity. Most critiques formulated by, inter alia, Derrida and Ricoeur, and concerned with the attempt at going beyond the ego essence of the ethical experience, made by the author of *Difficult Freedom*, spring from becoming acquainted with the temporal shift, which is constitutive for Lévinas' thought – i.e. a new approach to the phenomenon of happening (événement).

### A summons to the Other and the Logic of Response

Is the subject completely comprehensible out of ontology?<sup>37</sup>

E. Lévinas

Metaphysics, which in Lévinas is ethics, defines the manner in which the subject is present in the world. The Other, who comes from the outside, breaking up the solipsism of the subject-monad, arrives from a different order that precedes the epistemological order, thereby remaining outside its sphere. “Something already concluded appears in my relationship with another.”<sup>38</sup> The Other designates me as the subject of ethical experience, as the one capable of response. The Other's word gives rise to the word through which the ethical subject credits himself with the origin of his acts. The origin is external to the subject and is a condition of the possibility of ethical experience. Designation for responsibility takes place outside language, outside utterance, in unsaying, *Dedire*, i.e. in the non-phenomenal order. The thing is not that the subject is and at some point in time he is exposed to an ethical experience. The subject, who is in the world, is already a subject of ethical experience.<sup>39</sup>

As he interprets Lévinas' interpretation, Ricoeur notes that responding presupposes capability for receiving and recognising the one who designates the subject for responsibility. This capability, he claims, belongs to a different philosophy of the subject than the one described by

<sup>37</sup> E. Lévinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, op. cit., p. 31.

<sup>38</sup> E. Lévinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>39</sup> Cf. A. Warmbier, *Spór o pojęcie intersubiektywności*, op. cit., p. 58.



Lévinas' philosophy of "the Other." In Ricœur's opinion, since interiority is defined through the very will to self-withdrawal and self-enclosure, a question arises as to the possibility of it ever hearing a word from the outside and of responding to it. The capability for receiving follows from the reflective structure, which presupposes the active dimension of the subject's consciousness. The capacity for discernment is necessary to distinguish the Master from the tormentor. But perhaps the Other demands that I recognise him as superior? Does His voice not make itself equal to the choice made by the subject himself? In *Emmanuel Lévinas, penseur du témoignage* Ricœur writes: "the moment the "Glory of Infinity," while avoiding all thematisation, approaches the unspeakable, the ethical discourse must definitively go silent."<sup>40</sup> Exteriority is its own testimony. "The height of the Glory of the Infinite" does not show, because – as Lévinas claims – Infinity "captured" by the subject – a finite being – would lose its glory. Transcendence must rupture its confirming proof, its manifestation.<sup>41</sup> Ricœur questions the line of reasoning pursued by the author of *Difficult Freedom*, asking how possible it is to experience responsibility and its foundation.<sup>42</sup> As he anticipates similar accusations, Lévinas notes that the idea of Infinity is Desire (*l'idée de l'Infini est Désir*).<sup>43</sup> Infinity is not co-presence, and does not enter into a structural relationship with the subject as its correlate. "The alterity of the absolutely other is not an original quiddity of some sort. As a quiddity, this alterity has a ground in common with the quiddities from which it stands out." Lévinas means the absolute difference which "cannot itself sketch out the ground common to those who differ."<sup>44</sup>

In response to Lévinas' critique of classical metaphysics, Ricœur makes an accusation against the author of *Totality and Infinity*, whereby, as he reinterpreted the Platonic philosophy of "Same" and "Other," he hyperbolised both the concepts, which in consequence imparted

<sup>40</sup> P. Ricœur, *Emmanuel Lévinas...*, op. cit., p. 100.

<sup>41</sup> See E. Lévinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, op. cit., p. 152.

<sup>42</sup> See P. Ricœur, *Emmanuel Lévinas...*, op. cit., p. 100.

<sup>43</sup> See P. Ricœur, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>44</sup> P. Ricœur, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, op. cit., pp. 12–13.

to the self (soi) the significance of a completely closed and separated being, in the face of which the “Other” must be radically different. Ricœur interprets hyperbolisation – which by Lévinas is intended as a methodological device (on the pattern of the Cartesian procedure of doubting) – literally, pointing to the three presuppositions underlying the Jewish philosopher’s reasoning. 1. The subject is absorbed by being, 2. The subject is in the service of the system, 3. As a speaker, the subject becomes immersed in the said (*le Dit*).<sup>45</sup> As Waldenfels points out, such a reading does not take into account the crucial shift in meaning that Lévinas effects, describing the phenomenon of passivity. As he asks about the source of the capability to respond, Ricœur interprets – in a manner different than Lévinas – the differentiation between responding (*répondre*) construed as a happening, and the response (*le dit*), which unlike responding is objective in character.<sup>46</sup> The happening of the response is speaking that does not let itself be absorbed into the said. The fact that I cannot not respond means that the happening of the response (*l'événement du répondre*) cannot not happen, as it is not up to me. What is up to me is merely the response (*la réponse*). The original passivity that is described by the concept of diastasis does not arise from the same level as the psychological dimension of interhuman relationships, Lévinas describes it, differentiating speech, or more precisely the pre-originality of speech, its anachronicity from language, i.e. the said, the thematised. The said prevails over saying that says it.<sup>47</sup> The expression “otherwise than being” does not mean not being. “The *otherwise than being* is stated in a saying that must also be unsaid in order to thus extract the *otherwise than being* from the said in which it already comes to signify but a *being otherwise*,”<sup>48</sup> and that is why Lévinas speaks about saying and “unsaying” (*se dedire*). The unsaid it that which is above being, where the point is not negation that is still connected with being.

<sup>45</sup> See P. Ricœur, *Emmanuel Lévinas...*, op. cit., p. 99.

<sup>46</sup> See B. Waldenfels, *L'autre et l'étranger*, in: *Paul Ricœur. L'herméneutique à l'école de la phénoménologie*, op. cit., pp. 342–343.

<sup>47</sup> See E. Lévinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>48</sup> E. Lévinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, op. cit., p. 7.

## Conclusion

The dispute between Ricœur and Lévinas reveals the difficulty of making coherent the two different interpretations of the Husserlian phenomenology, which as their starting point adopt the Aristotelian belief that it is impossible to be speaking about the acting man without defining the experiencing man. Both the philosophers make a fundamental change to the language used for describing the subject, which involves negation of the idealist approach to the subject as a pole constitutive for all meaning on the one hand, while going beyond the tradition of substance ontology on the other hand. The question of subjectivity is connected with the question of the possibility of an ethical project in the era of deconstruction, in which “the death of man” has been proclaimed many times. This endeavour requires being in favour of a specific anthropological concept that determines understanding of basic categories describing the experience of oneself and the other. The thing is whether ethicality springs from the radical solitude of “a separated being,” which is what Lévinas presupposes, or whether the starting point is a common being, which characterises Heidegger’s concept of *Mitsein*, or perhaps we are faced with the need to find another pathway, which Ricœur seems to be doing.

## Abstract

### Phenomenology of the Other. Paul Ricœur and Emmanuel Lévinas towards the Ontology of Totality

The aim of this paper is to present Ricœur’s and Lévinas’s approach to the concept of selfhood (French *soi*) as a response to the dispute over subjectivity which was initiated by the critics of modern tradition of the absolutization of Cartesian *cogito*. The debate on the notion of selfhood has not been closed yet. The author analyses two different approaches to the problem. One appeals to the Hegelian dialectic, adjusting it to the formula “oneself as another” (discounting that part of the dialectical movement in which

Hegel jumps to a vision of absolute knowledge). The other refers to the category of substitution. Both Ricœur and Lévinas point to the Platonic opposition of the notions of “the Same” and “the Other.” Ricœur’s initial claim breaks with the established language of ontology. Moving beyond the circle of sameness-identity towards the dialectic of sameness- and selfhood-identity entails the transformation of the notion of otherness: it is no longer an antonym of “same,” but it is a kind of otherness that is constitutive of selfhood.

### Keywords

Ricœur, Lévinas, subjectivity, non-intentional phenomenology

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