

IS A HYPERBOLE OF EXTERIORITY PHENOMENOLOGICALLY ACCEPTABLE?

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Summary

The French phenomenological philosopher *Emmanuel Levinas* (in his book *Time and the Other*) believes that exteriority is non-constituted and in this sense it comes before the methodic procedures of phenomenology, since it presupposes a primordial and therefore metaphysical, pre-predicative correlation. For him, the metaphysician is not absolute in the same sense as the metaphysical. The dimension of highness from which the metaphysical comes to the metaphysician demonstrates a kind of non-homogeneity of space; highness is such that one can create here a radical diversity different from multitude, which is numeric. It is from the point of view of this vertical measurability that the other has no way of being judged (through an immanent interiorization and by the mind) because it is out-standing in the totally different plane of precisely what is being primordially named and not of the naming itself. A number of philosophers object to such a hyperbole of exteriority, among whom *Gilles Deleuze*, *Jacques Derrida*, *Alain Renaut* and *Paul Ricoeur*. The current paper aspires to bring forth the author's synthesis, making use of some of their critical notes about every possible (incl. that of Levinas) absolutisation of the spatial separateness from the Other, resp. along with Levinas' belief about our ethical obligatoriness to the Other conceived in its absolute sense of meaning. The overall conclusion the proposed analysis reaches upon could be summarized as: *the spatial exteriorization of 'the becoming world' is not fundamental; it is not before this world's being given light from the mind. The 'place' of otherness does not properly belong to otherness; the sign of the Other is a trace and not the eternal significance, respectively the metaphysical primacy of what is designated.*

Key words: spatium, space, exteriority, exteriorization, intuition, transcendental consciousness, critique of metaphysics, The Other, trace.

The question of space, viewed through the prism of otherness, evokes a polemic of the phenomenological constitution's own weight and of the coordinating axis around which this constitution is to be conducted. Obviously, the encounter with otherness in the aspect of spatial occupation of the non-mine (which is precisely an out-standing self-givenness of the gaze) seriously provokes the Husserlian procedure of absolute interiorization imposed by the

rules of transcendental reduction. According to *Emmanuel Levinas* (in *Time and the Other*), there cannot be an absolute interiorization here but just the opposite, since the other always comes in surplus of any subject possession.

‘The relation with the other, Levinas states, is not an idyllic and harmonic relation of communion or a sympathy through which we, putting ourselves in its place, would recognize it as similar to us but external; the relation with the other is a relation with a Mystery. It is precisely *its exteriority – or, rather, its otherness* [italics mine – I. L.] – because exteriority is a property of space and it brings the subject back to himself through light – constitutes its whole being.’ (Levinas 1995: 64)

Levinas believes that exteriority is non-constituted and in this sense it comes before the methodic procedures of phenomenology, since it presupposes a primordial and therefore metaphysical, pre-predicative correlation. For him, the metaphysician is not absolute in the same sense as the metaphysical. The dimension of highness from which the metaphysical comes to the metaphysician demonstrates a kind of non-homogeneity of space; highness is such that one can create here a radical diversity different from multitude, which is numeric. It is from the point of view of this vertical measurability that the other has no way of being judged (through an immanent interiorization and by the mind) because it is out-standing in the totally different plane of precisely what is being primordially named and not of the naming itself.

‘In his quality of an Other, Levinas continues, *the other is not just an alter ego; he is what me [moi] is not* [italics mine]. He is that not by virtue of his character or his exterior looks, or of his psychology, but by virtue of his otherness itself. He is e.g. the weak, the poor, “the widow and the prhoan”, while me [moi], I [je], am the rich and the powerful. One could say that *the intersubjective space is not symmetrical* [italics mine].’ (*ibid.*: 75)

A number of philosophers object to such a hyperbole of exteriority, among whom Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida, Alain Renaut and Paul Ricoeur. They all critically observe that through this view of his, Levinas tendentiously, but still phenomenologically illegitimately, carries out *metaphysics of presence* which assumes the space as eternal, i.e. as a factor surpassing constitution. The Other is assumed as an other to the Same (Me) precisely in the vertical transcendence of an eternal, metaphysical, untouched pre-otherness, and this in

the moment in which, conversely, we would like to reveal its presuppositions and get rid of its axioms.

‘I, notes Levinas, touch a thing, I see the Other. But I am not the Other. I am completely alone. Therefore the being in me, the fact that I exist, my *existing*, constitutes the absolutely intransitive moment, something devoid of intentionality, of relation [italics mine]. Between the human beings, everything may be cancelled, except existing. In this sense, “to be” means to isolate oneself through existing. I am a monad in my quality of “am”. It is through existing that I am without doors and windows, and not by virtue of any content that would be incommunicable in me.’ (Levinas 1995: 21)

Things being so, the Other is before me in a saying, he designates before being actually designated, he achieves before being reached – not as a constitutive experience of the *actual* happening of the discourse (the Other as an experience and a problem) but in the necessary mode of experience on the Other (the problem of the Other), in a space and time beyond constitution.

In counterpoint to this – according to Deleuze – Kant, and in our case also Levinas, defines all intuitions as extensive quantities, i.e. such that ‘the presentation of parts makes possible and precedes necessarily the presentation of the whole’ (Deleuze 1999: 292). It is in this that both are misled, since ‘space and time do not present themselves as they are presented. On the contrary, *it is the presentation of the whole that justifies the possibility of the parts, as these are only virtual and they become actual only in the definite values of the empirical intuition* [italics mine – I. L.]. What is extensive [and therefore with a presupposed metaphysical exteriority – I. L.] is precisely the empirical intuition’ (*ibid.*). That is, **the spatial exteriorization of ‘the becoming world’ is not fundamental; it is not before this world’s being given light from the mind.** The fact of giving light is in the same time a fact of exteriority and there is no scheme of thinking before giving light, respectively, no exteriority that does not receive light in the intuition. This is why there also is no fundamentality but only a more universal usability; the event of giving light is phenomenal throughout, and the layer of the unveiling of the Other has no way of referring to some metaphysically absolute closedness of the Other. The event-Other is paradoxical: the Other, by his coming, his advancing itself, has already receded.

Due to that, the horizon of his recognition is not able to locate him in the recognized. **The ‘place’ of otherness does not properly belong to otherness;** the sign of the Other is a *trace* and not the eternal significance, respectively the metaphysical primacy of what is designated.

What was just said is so first of all inasmuch ‘in the sign, *there is no place for any difference* between reality and representation’ (Derrida 1996: 71), and this means, in its turn, that ‘the gesture confirming this difference is the obliteration itself of the sign’ (*ibid.*). The trace, being not more cause than result, creates the relation of spatialization, but together with that it obliterates it, transcendently challenging the self-sufficiency of the presence of the sign, its ‘in itself’, and generally every metaphysical referentiality. There is no doubt that temporalization (i.e. the effect of the meaning’s lagging behind its own pre-format) creates a gap that makes a crack in absolute interiority and ‘outside’ has slipped unnoticed into the movement through which the inside of the non-space – that which carries the name of ‘time’ – appears, constitutes itself, ‘represents’ itself¹. Actually, according also to Levinas,

‘The trace is the inclusion of space into time, the point where the world points to some past and some time. This time is a recess of the Other and therefore somehow a degradation of duration – entirely in memory’ (Levinas 1997: 64).

... and it would seem that the elusiveness of the future (see Levinas 1995: 65) from the standpoint of its self-dwelling in a memory gives it the basis to subject the ‘own’ of existing – the Other². But does the crack in interiority necessarily entail its contrary, that is the absolute exteriority, respectively my absolute metaphysical separation, since ‘spatialization’ and ‘temporalization’ – the

¹ From such a perspective and according to Derrida ‘Space is “in” time, it is the pure coming-out-of-itself of time, it is out-of-itself as a relation of time to itself. The exteriority of space, exteriority as a space, does not abuse time; it reveals itself as a pure “outside” “in” the movement of temporalization’ (Derrida 1996: 115).

² ‘I do not define the other [**autre**] by the future but the future by the other, since the very future of death consists in death’s total otherness’ (Levinas 1995: 74). Levinas does not define the future by the other, but in fact, within his context, pre-defining the future, he does just that, since the other displaces the future, but in defining itself through it. In fact, such a necessity of the *a-utre* through ‘tomorrow’ [in Bulgarian: *utre*] proves superfluous. The other really is, always already out of the time, murdered [in Bulgarian: *u-bito*] (**u-(ê)tre**) by its project (its being) in the drive of ‘to *be*’. In the postscriptum of the unveiling ‘it was’ [in Bulgarian: *to be*] this murder is ascertained.

becoming-spatial of time or the becoming-temporal of space – are simultaneously the possibility itself and the limit itself of phenomenological reduction’ (Derrida 1996: 115-6)? Probably just because of this double bind ‘hearing-myself-speaking is not the interiority of an inside closed in itself, it is the unobliterable answer of the inside, the eye and the world in the word’ (*ibid.*: 116). But there is also no way for exteriority to be more than the representation, since space and time do not surpass the procedure of making-whole. The otherness of the Other does not necessarily imply the exteriority of the Other before the intuition and beyond it. This is why ‘interiority’ and ‘exteriority’ are not metaphysically opposite – just like the One and the Other. (The subject is not primordially defined as ‘the Same’. The same is constituted subjectively and actually as from the subject as the first case.) They are only effects of the *differance*. And there is not an exteriority that would be ‘always more’ than the subject of the presentation, since no external effects before the world are possible, nor a presence that would run before the actuality of its own constituting through a subject of a worldly making-whole.

Levinas is convinced: the face-to-face encounter with the other precedes understanding; the other is not *post factum* of any moral choice. ‘The other remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely alien – but his face, in which his epiphany takes place and which turns to me, breaks with the world which is common to us, whose changes become inscribed into our *nature*, and which we also change by our existence.’ (Levinas 2000: 157)

However, according to Derrida and Renault, exteriority in the ethical aspect is, rather, a ‘non-link’, a rupture. Levinas’s categorical statement that the Other is the absolutely different to what me (*moi*) is not, and therefore also a non-*ego*, is refuted by Derrida: it is precisely in his quality of an *alter* that the Other is an irreducibly other subject/*ego*. In any other case, his irreducible subjectivity could not be binding. The other is *both* personless *and* an ego, and not either-or. In such a comparative perspective, there is also a third modality of otherness (*Ricoeur*): **the being of an enjoined as a structure of selfness**. How is one to understand the alternativeness of the latter?

Once I have become possessed by the legend of joint subsistence together with ‘independently other human bodies’, *the Face of the Other* begins to seem to me as if ‘every other bodily face’ is precisely the ‘properly different’ of the other in the perspective of a spatial distance trying to limit me into a thing. But I would like to specify expressly: what Levinas says is correct only under the condition that *there is* a reflective clarity as to the apparent exteriority of the two private – ‘the face of the neighbour’ in relation to ‘my face’. The respect for the Other is in his very primordially of appearing as an Other, non-me, in the pre-phenomenal requirement of being referred to its transcendence. **It is important, however, to make it clear that this *pre-phenomenality* itself is in the essence of the encountered absolutely other; it is not the distinguished ‘other’ (the human race/individual) with his adjacent physiognimics, i.e. it after-posites his constitutive becoming-valuable as a visible phenomenon.** The One to the Other – should not be understood as if it is the One ‘each time’. The Other Person [*autrui*] does not return back the transcendence of a different subjective I, but returns every other subjective I to the immanence of the field over which he flies. It seems to me that, in Levinas, it is this illusion of the premeditated exteriority of the Other that remains unclarified, since, as I already stated, space is a constituent of the same (the possible experience) as from the Other, but not an objective warrant of an essential [in Bulgarian: literally ‘sameness-ful’] dislocation of the Other. **The Other is the looking as far as His face is not the face-of-the-neighbour that is seen but the ““Face” which looks’ *ef-face-ingly*.** And it is only from this point on that we should pay attention – with the due seriousness – to Levinas’s suggestions of the absoluteness of our ethical duty before the Other.

The consistent phenomenological analysis should not allow at all a metaphysical hyperbolization of the person-Other: **the person-Other**

paradoxically col-locates himself through the Same (the subject)³ – he is in no case primarily at the place of that-one-there-in-front. The *Me*⁴, Deleuze notes in this vein, has no changes, he himself is a change, as this term designated precisely the extracted difference. Unfortunately, not all suggestions of Levinas are methodologically consistent in the spirit of this conclusion.

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³ Providing ourselves clarity of the limits of possessing, we philosophically understand that, essentially, **otherness is the procuring of selfness**, a clarity to be pursued, a surging shadow that climbs the uniqueness of the real. Hell, this is the others (*Sartre*), and this is why we look for those pieces of this hell which can assemble externally our image so that a view on the subjective could be made. The mind is *in* the subject, and what is in the object is not a mind but a consciousness-towards-being, whose trade name is ‘logic’. **Otherness is a sedimentation of the subject as a vehicle – it extinguishes his excessive consciousness by replacing it by a crystallization of the universal.**

⁴ ‘Is the possession of my body by myself, asks Ricoeur rhetorically, related into any criteriology? Does it not fall, rather, into the field of *attestation*?’ (Ricoeur 2004: 206) Therefore, there is no question here of the ‘I of apperception’, unburdened by being and objective ‘hardness’, but of the I of a ‘examining self-ascription’ (see *ibid.*: 65), i.e. of the factual encounter with oneself as somebody else.

ФЕНОМЕНОЛОГИЧНО ПРИЕМЛИВА ЛИ Е ЕДНА ХИПЕРБОЛА НА ЕКСТЕРИОРНОСТТА?

Гл. ас. д-р Ивайло Лазаров

Резюме

Френският феноменологичен философ *Еманюел Левинас* (в книгата си *Времето и другото*) счита, че екстериорността е неконституирана и в този смисъл тя изпреварва методическите процедури на феноменологията, доколкото предполага изначално и следователно метафизично, предпредикативно съотнасяне. За него метафизикът не е абсолютен в същия смисъл като метафизичното. Измерението на висотата, от което метафизичното идва при метафизика, показва вид нехомогенност на пространството; тя е такава, че тук може да се създаде радикално разнообразие, различно от многообразието, което е числово. Именно от гледна точка на тази вертикална измеримост другото няма как да бъде съдено (през иманентна интериоризация и от съзнанието), понеже е отстояващо в свършено различния план на тъкмо онова, което изначално се назовава, а не на самото назоваване. На подобна хипербола на екстериорността възразяват в различните ѝ аспекти редица философи, между които Жил Делюз, Жак Дерида, Ален Рено и Пол Рикьор. Настоящата статия се опитва да извлече авторски синтез, използвайки техни критични бележки относно всяка възможна (вкл. и Левинасовата) абсолютизация на пространственото отстояние от Другия, респ. и на схващането на Левинас за етическото ни дълженстване пред Другия в абсолютен смисъл. Общият извод от предложения анализ е: пространствената екстериоризация на „ставация свят“ не е фундаментална, не предхожда неговото осветяване от конституиращото съзнание. „Мястото“ на другостта собствено не ѝ принадлежи, знакът на Другия е следа, а не извечна значимост, респ. метафизична първичност на това, което бива означавано.

Ключови думи: протяжност (spatium), пространство (space), екстериорност (exteriority), екстериоризация (exteriorization), наглед (intuition), трансцендентално съзнание (transcendental consciousness), критика на метафизиката (critique of metaphysics), Другият (The Other), следа (trace).