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**The Same and the Other. Perspectives of heteronomic ethics**

The core intention of this paper is to explore the possibility of ethics that is based on the idea of difference and otherness. Emmanuel Levinas - one of the most prominent 20th century philosophers - undertook a challenge to overcome the modern concept of Cartesian *cogito* and to construct a concept of dialogical subject that is able to respect the Otherness. Levinas was aware that the project of modern philosophy as established in its foundations by Descartes and Kant is completely false, because it inevitably restricts our cognition to the narrow world of human consciousness. Consequently, from this point of view we can perceive other human beings and other cultures only through the agency of our own categories and values. This way of thinking, in Levinas' opinion, leads straight to violence between both human beings and cultures themselves. The historical culmination - a terrifying culmination! - of this violence was the tragedy of the Holocaust.

The Otherness that *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas' major work, incessantly revolves around, does not mean a relative alterity of the object that the subject could well overcome and assimilate in the horizon of transcendental consciousness or in a creative act. The Otherness that Levinas tirelessly writes about is, above all, the Otherness of another human being, it is a synonym of absolute exteriority that is able to resist all attempts at thematisation and representation. The presence of my neighbor who stands in front of me, as Levinas says, is the presence of transcendence in every sense of the word, a transcendence that questions my uninhibited spontaneity when I bestow meaning.

As a subject, I can arbitrarily control the meaning of the surrounding things that I differentiate, order and name; however, I cannot conceive and comprehend another human being, who eludes my objectivization in an absolute and irrevocable manner. It thus turns out that the transcendental faculty by which we bestow meaning, *Sinngebung*, an indispensable attribute in modern concepts of subjectivity, is not an unrestrained power that could subjugate the entire universe of being with one gesture of dominance. The limit of a subject's cognitive imperialism is the separateness of another human being who is endowed with the power of speech and speaks, thereby manifesting him/ herself as an autonomous source of meaning. Peace arises from the capability to speak.

From this standpoint, heteronomic ethics means neither a set of certain values that should organize our life into a harmonious totality, nor a code of conduct listing rules that should regulate our choices. The ethics of which Levinas speaks is founded on recognizing the validity of the Other. What is at stake is not merely formulating ready-made rules that one should abide by without reservation, but a far more important issue: the core of ethics, its essence, ethics as such.

The main challenge that Levinas's philosophical endeavor meets is the grounding of ethics in unique experience of The Other. In the face of multicultural world, morality requires reliable foundations to guarantee the universal validity of elementary ethical attitudes.

If we wish to avoid violence and colonialism of all sorts, including the contemporary colonialism of values, we have to change our concept of subject and ethics. In other words, we have to go beyond ontology toward ethics. Morality, says Levinas, is consent to the existence of a foreign world, a world of Otherness. This is at the core of Levinas' philosophical endeavor. Ethics mean essentially respect for Otherness and willingness to accept all issues that we cannot comprehend by means of our categories and values.