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Against Violence: Emmanuel Lévinas' Ethical Concept and Alain Badiou's Criticism

Violence affects all people. Nobody is completely free of it. It could be "innocent." It is such whenever a person loses his or her sensitivity towards the other person, does not care about the other's opinion, and at all costs tries to push some matter, be it ordinary and mundane or something of a higher value. However, when such "innocent" actions fall on fertile soil, they can lead to an escalation of hate. Wherever violence is "normalized," accepted, or justified, massive exclusion, marginalization, and even open conflicts or bloody wars occur. Pro-civilizational ideational currents – philosophical, ethical, political, and religious (for example, the ideas of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue) – aim at the elimination or at the very least a decisive minimalization of violence and its derivatives. Increasingly numerous critical conceptions appear parallel to them. These are conceptions that not only permit, but in fact affirm violence in its various forms. All ideologies, regardless of if they are on the left or right side of the political spectrum, permit violence as a legitimate means for the realization of aims. It is unimportant if this violence is physical or "just" verbal, if it is veiled or "naked," subtle or brutal; violence always consists of stomping on another's dignity, denying a person the right to his or her own perspective, and denying the right to humanity.

A great example of anti-violence philosophical thought that was born from the ashes of the tragedy of the Second World War is the work of Emmanuel Lévinas. The ethics of radical responsibility he gave rise to has become an inspiration for many contemporary authors who, making various modifications (not infrequently critical ones), emphasize that no form of the instrumentalization of the human person is acceptable. In addition to numerous admirers of Lévinas' conception, there are also those who question it in its entirety as being in essence worthless. An example of a philosopher who stands in strong opposition to Lévinas is

Alain Badiou, the author of the essay *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*.

The aim of this article is to present the ethical bases of Emmanuel Lévinas' anti-violence conceptions in the contexts of the criticism that Badiou presents on the pages of his *Ethics*. Lévinas' perspective will be briefly presented at the beginning. Next, a series of criticisms as well as Badiou's presumptions will be referred. In the final part, I will make an effort to respond to Badiou's accusations from the perspective of Lévinas' ethical program. I will at the same time emphasize that the affirmation of violence is an inevitable consequence of Badiou's ethical project.

Lévinas

The source of violence is a focus on "I" as well as an aspiratio towards absolute affirmation and the construction of a strong identity and individuality. The philosophical expression of this aspiration is ontological discourse. Ontology, as Lévinas understands it, reduces reality to some supreme factor, to some form of essence/being, always excluding that which does not fir in the framework accepted by it.[1] When that which is unknown and different transcends the defined categories, it is assimilated and converted into that which does not disrupt the cohesion of the system, to something "clear and obvious." It can never be accepted in its incomprehensibility, alterity, or uniqueness.

According to Lévinas, the entirety of philosophy, beginning in ancient Greece and up through contemporary thought, is of an ontological nature; i.e., it is excluding, neutralizing.[2] The unity of all truth, the objective and subjective path to knowing it, the primacy of absolute, impersonal intellectual laws inevitably leads to antagonisms and the consolidation of divisions between people. The "reasons" towards which all knowledge strives are not directly given, but always through some supreme principle. The latter is the subject of preference and personal acknowledgment. Regardless of what the principle of knowledge is *in concreto* – reason, freedom, I, etc. – it always reveals the due "ontological imperialism" of egology.[3] As long as the uniformity-causing knowledge moves in the field of subjectiveness, it is not prone to criticism. The problem begins when theory claims the right to order human life. As Lévinas writes: "As far as the things are concerned, a surrender is carried out in their conceptualization. As for man, it can be obtained by the terror that

1 Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2007), 42.

2 Ibid., 43–44.

3 Ibid., 44.

brings a free man under the domination of another. For the things the work of ontology consists in apprehending the individual (which alone exists) not in its individuality but in its generality [...]."[4] Thus philosophy (ontology) presumes the primacy of truth, sanctioning violence.

Violence is a kind of interpersonal relationship; it is something that one person does to another. "[T]he relation of violence," the French philosopher emphasizes, "does not remain at the Lével of the wholly formal conjuncture of relationship. It implies a specific structure of the terms in relation. Violence bears upon only a being both graspable and escaping every hold."[5] The assimilation of alterity and the reduction of it to that which is "mine" is violence. In other words, an act of violence is an attempt at reducing that which is personal, human, and objective to the row of impersonal subjectiveness, to a function. The claims of violence cannot, however, fully be realized, because humanity in itself eludes all attempts at reification. Thus Lévinas emphasizes that violence, which grows out of the limitless negation of that which is human, contains within itself murderous potential.[6]

One cannot oppose the unity-generating violence in any way other than through a turn towards a horizon that is completely different from the one proposed by the ontological discourse. Contrasting ontology with metaphysics, Lévinas says: "Knowledge [violence – W.Z.] would be the suppression of the other by the grasp, by the hold, or by the vision that grasps before the grasp. In this work metaphysics has an entirely different meaning. If its movement leads to the transcendent as such, transcendence means not appropriation of what is, but its respect."[7] Unlike ontology, metaphysics does not strive for unity and the strict regulations resulting from it. That is why there is no room for violence in it. On the contrary, the horizon opened by metaphysics is the horizon of the absolute alterity of the Other person.

Metaphysics does not allow some elite insight into the alterity of the Other; it does not provide some esoteric knowledge on its topic. The Other always eludes reason. He or she cannot be thematized or described with concepts. His or her absolute uniqueness and singularity cannot be expressed and, adequately, represented within the framework established by the ontological discourse. That which the Other contributes along with him or herself can be respected, but it can also be stomped on, rejected, or desecrated. Knowledge of the other, extra-contextual, and unmediated perception of him or her in the truth about him or her-

4 Ibid., 44.
5 Ibid., 223.
6 Ibid., 238.
7 Ibid., 302.

self, in the nakedness of his or her face[8] introduces to the dimension of Infinity that arouses metaphysical desire. As Lévinas writes:

> The other metaphysically desired is not 'other' like the bread I eat, the land in which I dwell, the landscape I contemplate, like, sometimes, myself for myself, this 'I,' that 'other.' I can 'feed' on these realities and to a very great extent satisfy myself, as though I had simply been lacking them. The metaphysical desire tends toward something else entirely, toward the absolutely other.[9]

That which is absolutely Other is the order of the absolute, transcendent Good. It is a Good that cannot be driven out of the concept of being but, on the contrary, being in itself justifies and sanctions it. Thus Lévinas does not aim to reject ontology, but to subjugate it to that which is fundamental: metaphysics.[10]

Good has a divine status and is one with the Absolute.

> "God is not simply," Lévinas writes, "the 'first other,' or the 'other *par excellence*,' or the 'absolutely other,' but other than the other, other otherwise, and other with an alterity prior to the alterity of the other,prior to the ethical obligation to the other and different from every neighbor, transcendent to the point of absence [...]. This is the confusion wherein substitution for the neighbor gains in disinterestedness, that is, in nobility; wherein the transcendence of the Infinite thereby likewise arises in glory."[11]

The "God of religion" is not infinite; we cannot pray to Him, talk with Him, or turn to Him in difficult life situations. God is an absence, but, if this can be said, a positive absence, as He is absent yet obliges to engage in the matters of other people. He is a challenge, an impervious surplus that establishes the horizon of goodness and justice. Meanwhile, God, to put it in this way, plays a solely ethical "function." Metaphysics is not a theory; it does not lead to knowledge. "Metaphysics is enacted in ethical relations."[12] It is of a *par excellence* practical nature.

Metaphysics is ethics. Lévinas, identifying metaphysics with ethics, clearly emphasizes the primacy of practice over theory, the primacy of a concrete act over abstract intellectual concepts. That is why metaphysics is born in a situation in which "I" is separated from its aspiration

8 Ibid., 74–75.
9 Ibid., 33.
10 Ibid., 44.
11 Emmanuel Lévinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, trans. Bettina Bergo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 69.
12 Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 79.

towards confiscation, towards egotism and undertakes responsibility for the Other, at the same time becoming a subject in the proper sense. "Ethics, here, does not supplement a preceding existential base; the very node of the subjective is knotted in ethics understood as responsibility."[13] Thus, according to Lévinas, the subject is always "the subject – in – summoning;" the essentially open subject; and also somewhat captive, permeated by this Other, to whom it is fully subjugated. "The tie with the Other is knotted only as responsibility, this moreover, whether accepted or refused," Lévinas notes emphatically.[14]

The ontological idea of unity and wholeness, access to which is guaranteed through the construction of a possible system, carries with it the danger of violence, consisting of the reification and functionalization of persons. In order to avoid the degradation of the other person, Lévinas adds to his philosophy a dimension of Infinity; its specific "medium" is always the Other person, requiring responsibility, which consists of constant readiness to take the place of the Other, to take on his or her concerns or problems.

Badiou

Alain Badiou admits that Lévinas' conception is an important point of reference for contemporary ethical thought. Feminist, anti-racist, pro-immigration, and pro-multicultural movements refer to it.15 At the same time, these tendencies are not so much an application of Lévinas' ideas; instead, they are "strikingly different."[16] This does not mean, however, that Badiou would like to defend some Lévinasian "orthodoxy" in the face of its ideological distortions. On the contrary, the author of Ethics, standing in open opposition to Lévinas' conception, questions it at its very foundations.

The main argument against Lévinasian ethics is methodological in nature. The suggestive analyses of the author of Totality and Infinity, basing on a phenomenological description, the pathetic and hyperbolic tone of his statements is, according to Badiou, not enough in order to support a thesis so radical as the originary duties of "I" with regards to the Other.17 Badiou believes that the only convincing explanation for the view proclaiming the unquestionable metaphysical-ethical primacy of

13 Emmanuel Lévinas, *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, trans. Richard A. Cohen (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1985), 95.

14 Ibid., 97.

15 Alain Badiou, *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil*, trans. Peter Hallward (London: Verso Books, 2014), 78.

16 Ibid., 77.

17 Ibid., 77–78.

the Other is that provided by psychoanalysis. And thus, using a psychoanalytical key, Badiou claims that the identification of I with the Other combines narcissism with aggressivity:18 narcissism because the Other is to be nothing more than I seen from the outside through one's own self and aggressivity because "I" places in the Other one's own primeval desire for death; one's own desire for self-destruction.19 "The other," Badiou writes, "always resembles me too much for the hypothesis of an originary exposure to his alterity to be necessarily true."[20]

The above argument finds its extension in the statement that the attempt at grounding ethics in an unclear and indefinite transcendental dimension is something irrational and therefore invalid and impossible to accept. The audacity of Lévinas' postulates is not supported by verifiable experience. The conception contained in *Totality and Infinity*, which requires the acceptance of a religious axiom and thus some form of faith, annihilates the philosophical, universal value of the whole construction in favor of a quasi-theological discourse.[21] Thus it is "art for art's sake;" an impractical, pathetic abstraction that cannot be applied in everyday life. Badiou emphatically states:

> What then becomes of this category if we claim to suppress, or mask, its religious character, all the while preserving the abstract arrangement of its apparent constitution ('recognition of the other,' etc.)? The answer is obvious: a dog's dinner [*de la bouillie pour les chats*].[22]

Thus Lévinas' "recognition of the other" in alterity is of a hypocritical nature. Alterity is always, out of necessity, defined alterity. In order to recognize another person as an "Other," one has to first establish a series of initial conditions. At least a minimal consensus, some community of basic values must exist between "myself" and the Other. One cannot affirm another if there are no common points between "us." "As a matter of fact, this celebrated 'other' is acceptable only if he is a good other – which is to say what, exactly, if not the same as us?"[23] Respect for democratic values, the established social order, respect for man's inherent dignity, and, finally, respect for the very idea of positive otherness are the series of conditions that, according to Badiou, another person must

18 Ibid., 79.
19 Ibid., 79.
20 Ibid., 79.
21 Ibid., 82.
22 Ibid., 83.
23 Ibid., 83.

accept in order to "become" the Other.[24] The Other as such is an empty and insignificant concept.

By accusing Lévinas of making philosophy religious, Badiou openly admits to his own perspective: "There is no God. Which also means: the One is not. The multiple 'without-one' – every multiple being in its turn nothing other than a multiple of multiples – is the law of being. The only stopping point is the void."[25] Meanwhile, the attitude the author of *Ethics* adopts is metaphysical nihilism; he *a priori* precludes any permanent point of reference. If the void is the only limitation, this precisely means that there are no permanent fundaments and all points of view are at their essence worth the same. Inside a being there is unlimited pluralism, incidents not bound up with any permanent laws. The only factor that could somehow order an infinitely elastic reality is the human being. With regards to the above observation, the real problem is therefore not the existence of the Other, but the existence of a principle that could in reality unite. Infinite Otherness, while naturally understood here in the horizontal and not vertical sense, exists, constituting the ontological principle and point of departure for all reflections. Badiou writes:

> Infinite alterity is quite simply *what there is*. Any experience at all is the infinite deployment of infinite differences. Even the apparently reflexive experience of myself is by no means the intuition of a unity but a labyrinth of differentiations [...]. here are as many differences, say, between a Chinese peasant and a young Norwegian professional as between myself and anybody at all, including myself.[26]

Therefore, an ethical project that would guarantee at least a minimal community of universal, obliging norms that would be binding regardless of time and place would be impossible. On the contrary, one should assume that there only exists an ethics of certain processes that with the engagement and labors of its subjects can be, at least to a certain degree, applied.[27] Badiou calls such an ethics the ethics of (some) truths.[28] "[T]here is no heaven of truths."[29] They are born under specific circumstances, in an event, and "summon" the subject to realization,[30] but not like ideas or values that call for their implementation. On the contrary, the procedure of the truth, that is shaped "tailored" to a situation

24 Ibid., 82–83.
25 Ibid., 82–83.
26 Ibid., 82–83.
27 Ibid., 82–83.
28 Ibid., 99.
29 Ibid., 99.
30 Ibid., 99.

assumes fidelity as well as breaking with it.[31] In other words, the aim is to maintain a principled orientation towards events that found the truth (fidelity) and not fear "local," dynamic transformations (immanent breaks) in order to transform reality "custom-made" for the initial impulse, which Badiou calls the truth, despite the obstacles. Thus truth should not be contrasted with falsehoods. Its contents are not prone to falsification, but solely depend on the degree of the determination of the subjects that decide to implement them. Thus the aim (truth) justifies the means; hence it also legitimizes violence. Hence Badiou claims with regards to fidelity: "For example, the politics of the French Maoists between 1966 and 1976, which tried to think and practice a fidelity to two entangled events: the Cultural Revolution in China, and May '68 in France."[32]

Lévinas and Badiou's Critique

Badiou's critique is superficial and dogmatic. His deep misunderstanding of Lévinas' intentions has two sources. First of all, for the author of Ethics philosophical questions about God are not a problem. The non-existence of (any) absolute principle is something obvious. Reality is of a chaotic, aimless nature. Every attempt at a serious intellectual proposition should begin with such a statement. Second, Badiou completely avoids the context from which the thought of Lévinas has arisen: the context of the ideology of hatred, which is personified by concentration camps, for instance. Radical responsibility for the Other, unconditional good that "I" owe the other, is nothing other than a response to the escalation of unifying violence. Thus the reduction of Lévinasian thought to a catalogue of religious statements is something unwarranted.

Badiou accuses Lévinas of a lack of ontological basis that justifies the thesis about the originary opening of the subject to the Other, calling for radical responsibility. This argument is unsuccessful because Lévinas in fact breaks with ontology.

> "Ontology," Lévinas writes, "which reduces the other to the same, promotes freedom – the freedom that is the identification of the same, not allowing itself to be alienated by the other. The relation with Being that is enacted as ontology consists in neutralizing the existent in order to comprehend or grasp it. It is hence not a relation with the other as such but the reduction

31 Ibid., 99.
32 Ibid., 99.

of of the other to the same. [...] Ontology as first philosophy is a philosophy of power."[33]

Thus, paradoxically, the attempt at proving the primacy of the Other is in reality its cancellation. The justification is that which cannot be understood by oneself. However, the "superiority" of the Other over "I" is something absolute that cannot be subject to relativization. The Other does not persuade for him or herself and does not negotiate, but demands recognition in his or her alterity. There is no mediating factor between "I" and the Other. There is no mediating principle. There is only speech that summons "me" to myself.[34] It is his or her calling that is recognized in the direct presence of his or her face. It is precisely through his or her face that the Other most fully confirms, so to say, his or her absolute otherness and independence from "I" and its notions.[35] Respect, recognition, and commitment are not demanded accordingly through some abstract idea of "the other in me," but another, autonomous, specific person.

Apart from any calculation or interest, the Other "gives" him or herself to the Ego in his or her alterity, creating an inalienable bond of responsibility. That is why the attempt at psychoanalytic reductionism that Badiou applies misses the point and is inappropriate. The Other is something radically external with regards to "I." The distance separating the Ego from the Other is infinite. The responsibility for the Other is not a camouflaged version of aggression. A turn in its direction, recognition of the Other is also not an example of narcissism. On the contrary, it attests to the desire of Infinity, which, being goodness, confirms its transcendent, non-ontological origin. Infinity is something *par excellence* metaphysical. One cannot experience or define it, but only desire it, attesting to one's own conduct in its name.[36]

For Badiou, the Horizon of the desired, inaccessible Infinity is something non-philosophical, a nullifying philosophy.[37] Behind this rests the assumption according to which philosophy as such must remain atheistic, independent of any relationship to a broadly understood religious dimension. But does a personal, atheistic credo that resolutely and in one sentence "deals with" the existence of God annul what Lévinas has to say with respect to the relationship between the Other and Infinity?

33 Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 42–46.
34 Ibid., 49–50.
35 Ibid., 50.
36 Lévinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 73–74.
37 Badiou, *Ethics*, 79.

The idea of Infinity, which the Other reveals in the directness of his or her summons, is something that at least gives food for thought. As Lévinas writes:

> Biological human fraternity, considered with the sober coldness of Cain, is not a sufficient reason that I be responsible for a separated being. The sober, Cain-like coldness consists in reflecting on responsibility from the standpoint of freedom or according to a contract. Yet responsibility for the other comes from what is prior to my freedom.[38]

Faith in the rationality of humanity as well as the freedom that follows it is not enough to overcome the power of violence. Conceived ethics is always a kind of agreement. The latter requires some necessary preconditions that must first be intellectually approved and later confirmed by personal choice. Meanwhile, ethics–metaphysics precedes all choices. It is something absolute. Its aim is not to establish socially binding norms, which protect and guarantee the equality of civic rights. It cannot be codified. On the contrary, "I" owes everything to the Other in a completely disinterested and irreclaimable way; the Other owes nothing to "I" and the possible reciprocity from his or her side is solely his or her matter.

That is the source of the next accusation of Badiou, who considers Lévinas' ethics to be abstract and not corresponding to reality. It appears that this argument is the most difficult to rebut. Lévinas' theses are without a doubt extreme and, it seems, have little to do with so-called common sense. Of course, we can note that in his writings the author of *Totality and Infinity* makes use of hyperbole, but from a philosophical perspective this argument is not fully convincing; in any case, it requires supplement. Lévinas himself responds to a similar accusation as follows:

> One can appear scandalized by this utopian and, for an I, inhuman conception. But the humanity of the human – the true life – is absent. The humanity in historical and objective being, the very breakthrough of the subjective, of the human psychism in in its original vigilance or sobering up, is being which undoes its condition of being: disinterestedness. [...] It is I who support the Other and am responsible for him. [...] My responsibility is untransferable, no one could replace me.[39]

Responsibility is the keyword here. Without the concept of responsibility, one cannot understand the essence of Lévinasian ethics. Badiou's criticism, which focuses on the religious aspect, completely misunder-

38 Lévinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 71.
39 Lévinas, *Ethics and Infinity*, 100.

stood the cardinal function of responsibility in Lévinas' ethical project. The Other is not only the "good" Other, the Other who is like myself, as Badiou claims. The Other summons to the radicalism of responsibility even when, from the perspective of common sense, he or she is the "bad" or "unworthy" Other. The Other is the Other. Not only is this unnecessary, but this does not even have to be theoretically substantiated. Effectiveness is not the purpose of responsibility; its measure is not effectiveness.

The responsibility of "I" knows no measure. When translating Lévinas' intention from the Lével of hyperbole to everyday practice, one should emphasize that "I" is really responsible for everything, for those who are physically close as well as those whom we will never meet but suffer: because of exploitation, war, disease, and everyday injustices. Responsibility is that which awakens, which does not allow the Ego to sleep calmly, carelessly enjoying the calm, as "Others do not concern me." There is no situation that would not affect the Ego, be it the war in Ukraine, famine in Sub-Saharan Africa, or persecutions in North Korea, whomever they would concern. "Each of us is guilty before everyone, for everyone and for everything, and I more than the others,"[40] Lévinas quotes Dostoevsky. This does not always have to be a specific possibility of acting on behalf of the Other; perhaps sometimes an ordinary, cognizant act of disagreement or solidarity is enough.

Lévinas' thought undoubtedly comes from the trauma of the Holocaust, which the philosopher directly witnessed. Concern for every person, every Other, and responsibility for his or her life irrespective of his or her condition, position, origins, or views is what he defends against the possibility of disdain. This disdain's historical apogee took place in the years 1933-1945, when the Nazi ideology was implemented. The most serious argument against Badiou comes along here. Do not the assumptions of the Nazi ideology meet the formal condition of truthfulness (as understood by Badiou)? If it is met by French Maoists, for example, in the name of what would we deny Nazi ideas the right to truthfulness? If the void is the only limitation, then it is difficult to offer rationally justified resistance to the hateful demands of the German National Socialism of that period. One can oppose it with another truth, one's "own truth," and in its name fight "Hitler's truth." However, according to Badiou the truth that is fought against is not falsehood and lies, but merely "another truth." With regards to this, the only source of hope can be nothing other than violence, of which Badiou undoubtedly approves as a legitimate means for the implementation of the process of truth.

40 Lévinas, *Of God Who Comes to Mind*, 71.

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According to Alain Badiou, Emmanuel Lévinas' ethical project is not a serious philosophical proposition. Badiou himself adopts the attitude of metaphysical nihilism in which being "right" is always the domain of the stronger, the one who – with the aid of all resources – succeeds in imposing others one's own perspective, which the philosopher calls truth. "There is not, in fact, one single Subject, but as many subjects as there are truths, and as many subjective types as there are procedures of truths."[41] There does not exist any ontologically grounded strong Identity or subjectivity. The subject is that which succeeds in breaking into the so-called procedure of truth. Thus multiplicity is the point of departure and (some!) unity is the possible destination. Meanwhile, Emmanuel Lévinas' though is radically anti-violence at its core. Every person heralds a positive and at the same time unnamed and inaccessible Infinity, at the same time summoning "me" to "revalue all values" and undertake responsibility not subject to calculation. Every person is not only "a value in and of him or herself," but is also "the highest value." The other is absolute. Hence the ethics – that is, the philosophy – of the moral act establishes the horizon of metaphysical questions. All questions: "Why?" "How?" "What for?" only find one response: for the Other. Infinity versus nothingness, alterity versus unity, good and responsibility versus violence and (in)fidelity to (some!) truth: this is Lévinas versus Badiou.

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Przeciwko przemocy. Etyczna koncepcja Emmanuela Lévinasa wobec krytyki Alaina Badiou

Abstrakt

Artykuł jest przedstawieniem metafizyczno-etycznej myśli Emmanuela Lévinasa w kontekście relatywistyczno-ateistycznej krytyki autorstwa Alaina Badiou.

41 Badiou, *Ethics*, 81.

Według Badiou, etyczna koncepcja Lévinasa, odwołująca się do radykalnej, niekończonej Inności drugiego człowieka, jest czymś absurdalnym i niemożliwym do realizacji. W części pierwszej pokrótce przedstawiam najważniejsze założenia Lévinasowskie. W części drugiej referuję krytyczne argumenty, które Badiou wystosował przeciwko Lévinasowi na kartach swojej *Etyki*. W części ostatniej, uznając słuszność perspektywy Lévinasa, odpieram zarzuty Badiou, zaznaczając, iż zgoda z Badiou oznacza etyczne uprawomocnienie przemocy.

Słowa kluczowe: Levinas, Badiou, przemoc, etyka

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Summary

The article is a description of Emmanuel Lévinas' metaphysical-ethical thought in the context of relativistic-atheistic criticism by Alain Badiou. According to Badiou, Lévinas' ethical concept, which refers to the radical, Infinite Otherness of the another human being, is something absurd and impossible to implement. In the first part of the article I briefly present the most important assumptions of Lévinas. In the second part I present the critical arguments that Badiou made against Lévinas in his Ethics. In the last part, agreeing with the Lévinas's perspective, I reject Badiou's allegations, pointing out that agreement with Badiou means that violence has an ethical legitimacy.

Keywords: Levinas, Badiou, violence, ethics

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