

Priit Põhjala

„The Promise“ and its Ethics: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas in the Work of Dardenne Brothers.

Priit Põhjala certainly chose a difficult topic, both in terms of the Dardenne brothers' film, and in terms of the philosophy of E. Levinas, since both are original intellectual and artistic performances and their understanding presupposes a certain openness of mind. To find some interpretative key enabling to connect both is a rather difficult task, indeed. Priit succeeded in both respects: he explains Levinas correctly and his interpretation of the film from the perspective of Levinasian ethics is not trivial, on the contrary, it is illuminating.

He managed to convincingly demonstrate that the art of Dardenne brothers has strong philosophical roots and that it is possible to uncover these roots through Levinas' conception of ethical relation to other in the specific meaning typical just for Levinas, i.e. as a relationship with a neighbor who - just as unmistakable human being - defies identification, i.e. his or her inclusion into the totalizing generality, who refuses to become interchangeable.

Priit very well understands different interpretation of intentionality (Husserl, Heidegger, Levinas), which is the basis of this radical ethics of otherness (asymmetrical relation) and he clearly sees all the consequences of this reverse orientation for the concept of freedom and for the basic notion of face as a vulnerability and as the index of emerging of the radical Otherness from the most general attributes and of disturbing one's home.

He is very precise especially when describing how it is possible to overcome the differences: not in commonalities, but by finding „a radical Other which is even beyond the differentiating attributes“ (Assita in film, pp. 13-14). This insight - among many others - testifies to the deep understanding not only of the text (Levinas) or film (the Dardenne brothers), but as well as of ethical orientation in both cases, moving towards a radical understanding of the responsibility for each other - even beyond empirical encounters with other people.

Priit Põhjala was able to find common ground for philosophical discourse and narrative (film) fiction. This is not easy and requires knowledge of the specific characteristics of both. If he has succeeded in this matter, he testifies to his thorough preparation which allowed him very good treatment of this difficult topic. I evaluate his thesis as excellent and recommend it to the defense.

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