

The Transitivity of Hearing and the Precedence of Doing: Possibilities and Conditions for Non-violent Teaching in Levinas's Thought

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine how “teaching (*enseignement*)” can be non-violent in Emmanuel Levinas's thought. According to Levinas, pedagogical discourse with rhetoric is preeminently violent. However, teaching that comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain is non-violent.

In order to understand Levinas's reasoning, this paper focuses on three points: the problem of violence in Levinas's thought, the structure of teaching, and the idea of hearing (*entendre*).

First, in Levinas's thought, the concept of violence has two aspects. One is violence from the ego (*moi*) to the Other (*Autrui*), and the other is violence from the Other to the ego. In order to understand teaching, we need to examine the latter violence. Second, teaching means the relationship between the master (*maître*) and the learner. In teaching, the master evokes attention in which the learner transcends himself. On the other hand, the learner hears the master's parole and responds with a question. The idea of hearing allows us to see teaching as non-violent. Third, Levinas sees the transitivity that transforms the learner's subjectivity to be dis-inter-ested (*dés-inter-essé*) into the state of hearing. According to the verse, “Nous ferons et nous entendrons” (Exodus 24:7), doing precedes hearing – the state in which the learner attends to the master's presence.

Focusing on the learner's subjectivity, the transitivity of hearing and the precedence of doing can keep teaching non-violent. The possibilities and conditions for non-violent teaching can be generated not only in the relationship between the teacher and the student, but also in the ethical relationship between the Other and the subject.