



## Phenomenology of Religious Experience III: Visuality, Imagination, and the Lifeworld

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# The Phenomenology of Sacrifice in Marion, Patočka and Nancy

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**Abstract:** The phenomenon of sacrifice has been analyzed by Hegel, Kierkegaard, Bataille and many other philosophers. In my paper I intend to examine this phenomenon from the phenomenological point of view as outlined by Jan Patočka, Jean-Luc Nancy and Jean-Luc Marion. With their help I differentiate several kinds of sacrifice (strategic, moral, political, and religious), but above all, I am interested in the *limits* of sacrifice. Provided that the fields of morality, politics and religion are opened by sacrifice, is there any morality, politics and religion without one? And if so, what is the meaning of morality, politics and religion that are not based on some kind of sacrifice? These questions seem essential in our time, when the meaning of sacrifice is compromised by acts of terrorism. It is relatively easy to denounce terrorism and its propaganda, which uses the concept of martyrdom, as an inauthentic approach to the experience of sacrifice (Marion). But how can we break its spell if we believe that sacrifice brings our existence to completeness (Patočka)? How can we avoid inauthentic forms of sacrifice, if we believe that without sacrifice we must fall into nihilism and indifference?

**Keywords:** the unsacrificeable, coexistence, terrorism, politics, religion

## 1 Opening

The phenomenon of sacrifice has been discussed so extensively that it is practically impossible to say anything new about it. Yet, it is also impossible not to speak about it. Sacrifice itself calls for understanding. In the secular, consumerist society, sacrifice brings us to the limits of our understanding, but we can never stop asking what is the meaning of sacrifice. We should constantly stay open to this question, if we are not to lose ourselves and turn into self-blinded consumers who can hardly differentiate themselves from consumable goods.

Even though we like to forget it, a sacrifice, and especially a radical sacrifice, plays an essential role in the collective imagination. Not only can we say that there would be hardly any morality, religion, or politics without some form of sacrifice, it appears that an act of sacrifice inspires the social imagination more than anything else. Nations and religious communities sustain themselves by a glorification of past acts and appreciation of present forms of sacrifice.

It was none other than Mahatma Gandhi who explained the social relevance of sacrifice in a profound way. In his comments on Bhagavad Gita, which he elucidated as “the Gospel of Selfless Service”, he wrote:

While acting, remember that action leads to bondage unless it is performed in a spirit of sacrifice. Sacrifice means exerting oneself for the benefit of others, in a word, it means service. And where service is rendered for service's sake, there is no room for attachment, likes and dislikes. Perform such a sacrifice; render such service. When Brahma created the universe,

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He created sacrifice along with it, as it were, and said to humankind, 'Go forth into the world; serve one another and prosper. Look upon all creatures as gods.'<sup>1</sup>

No doubt such a view of sacrifice deeply inspired Gandhi's own notion of social activism, pacifism and non-violent resistance. In his repeated hunger strikes, Gandhi demonstrated that he himself was willing to go to extremes and make the highest sacrifice. Does it then mean that self-sacrifice has no limitations? Does it mean that selflessness shall not be limited by our self-preservation? Indeed it would appear so, if sacrifice did not rely on compassion, consciousness and the understanding of others. But since sacrifice necessarily represents an intersubjective act, its meaning and existence is essentially conditioned by others.

Reflecting on the limits of sacrifice that originate from our intersubjectivity, one may think of another intellectual position that clearly depicts social limitations of sacrifice. In the famous passage from *The Brothers Karamazov*, Dostoevsky raises the question whether it would be acceptable to establish peace and happiness of all human kind on the torturous death of one little child. His answer to this question is unambiguously negative. Not even the redemption of all human kind is worth the sacrifice of one child's life.

It may seem that one may solve this dilemma simply by making a distinction between voluntary and non-voluntary sacrifice. Yet, it is not enough to content ourselves with the claim that a sacrifice is acceptable when it is voluntary and unacceptable when involuntary. This is but a first distinction that opens a way to a critical examination of the social meaning of sacrifice.

The social dimension of sacrifice needs to be understood in a complex way if we are to see the prospects for and dangers of various forms of sacrifice. Especially today it is vital to distinguish positive forms of sacrifice from those that serve pure self-destruction or an utter destruction of the world we share with others. Sacrifice cannot be reduced to martyrdom. On the other hand, the logic of sacrifice cannot simply be refuted as something useless or dangerous. As the example of Gandhi's non-violent resistance demonstrates, sacrifice and readiness to sacrifice is an indispensable and powerful instrument in numerous dissident movements all around the world, perhaps because self-sacrifice makes possible our very co-existence with others. Stimulating social imagination, sacrifice makes possible the maintenance and togetherness of human communities.

To approach the social meaning of sacrifice, it is necessary to engage in an interdisciplinary investigation that combines religious science, political science and sociology. Unfortunately, we can only allude to those fields, while leaning on philosophy. For the sake of brevity, we must restrict ourselves to phenomenological descriptions of sacrifice that draw on religious science, political science and sociology, but their validity is mainly philosophical. Our aim is to demonstrate that phenomenological reflections on sacrifice are open to other disciplines by their very nature. Let us therefore enter into a dialogue with philosophers whose reflections allow us to see the complexity and social relevance of sacrifice. Let them lead us to the collective experience of sacrifice as well as to its internal limitations.

The three philosophers we would like to follow are not chosen randomly. What they have in common is their source of inspiration, which they all find in Heidegger's ontology. Even though Marion, Patočka and Nancy read Heidegger differently, emphasizing various aspects of his work, they all take him as their point of departure which allows them to view social reality in terms of the lifeworld we share with others.

In fundamental ontology, lifeworld is conceived as a semantic context of our existence that we understand in conformity with others. Our conformity with others, however, is disturbed by the possibility of death that individualizes our existence in a radical way. The possibility of death imbues our existence with a negativity that remains in the shadow of our co-existence with others. It brings us beyond all beings we find in the lifeworld shared with others, while exposing us to the empty openness of being. Yet what Heidegger says about death applies also to sacrifice. He deals with the phenomenon of sacrifice explicitly in the *Postscript* to his lecture *What is Metaphysics?*, where he claims: "Sacrifice is the departure from beings on the path to preserving the favor of being. Sacrifice can indeed be prepared and served by working and achievement with respect to beings, yet never fulfilled by such activities."<sup>2</sup> For Heidegger, sacrifice means

<sup>1</sup> Gandhi, *Discourses on the Gita*, chapter 3.

<sup>2</sup> Heidegger, "What is Metaphysics?", 236.

giving up some-thing or every-thing for the sake of being itself. In sacrifice we express our gratitude for the favor of being, while accepting the finitude of our existence.

Marion, Patočka and Nancy are well aware of this passage from *What is Metaphysics?*, but they differ as to how exactly the relation between sacrifice, death, community and lifeworld is to be seen. They provide different conceptualizations of sacrifice whose meaning is determined not only by our relation to our individual existence, but also by our co-existence with others.

## 2 The social relevance of sacrifice

Before we get to our three thinkers, let us recall one more philosopher who was deeply concerned with the social meaning of sacrifice. In the essay *Young man and Death*, Czech philosopher Karel Kosík refers to the case of Jan Palach, who set himself on fire in order to protest against the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia in 1968.<sup>3</sup> He uses the example of self-immolation to demonstrate that sacrifice — especially this most extreme form of sacrifice as suicide — constitutes society. A sacrifice, according to him, mobilizes or recreates society. It appeals to free citizens and makes possible their collective existence. Without sacrifice, we would just be a bunch of atomized individuals living in a consumerist society. By its tacit existence, claims Kosík, sacrifice points beyond the logic of capitalist society that is based on exchange of goods and satisfaction of individual needs.<sup>4</sup> Sacrifice can never be understood from an economic point of view, since it makes a gift to others by allowing them to enter another time and space. A true sacrifice is nothing but a generous gift that expects neither remuneration nor compensation.

A sacrifice, however, is not only an absolute gesture of self-sacrifice; it is every act of selfless donation that opens up a distant future from which the given person cannot profit any longer. In other words, we could say that it is sacrifice that constitutes ethics, politics and religion. The very difference between the profane and the sacred is constituted in and through sacrifice. Leaving aside sacrificial rituals of prehistoric societies, we may simply consider what the great monotheistic religions would be without figures such as Abraham or Jesus. As Jean-Luc Nancy puts it in his essay *The Unsacrificeable*, every collective participation, every communion and community requires a real or symbolic sacrifice: “Every time nihilism declares that there is no more community, it also announces that there is no more sacrifice”.<sup>5</sup> For sacrifice not only teaches us what selflessness means, it also makes possible our collective togetherness.

On the other hand, nowadays we see too often how terrible the ideology of sacrifice can be. Again and again we are shocked by adherents of ideologies that misuse the notion of sacrifice. Our society does not understand those who are ready to give up the earthly life for a prospect of eternal bliss in afterlife. Yet, the problem is not only that our capitalist society fails to understand such ideologies; it also has no means to prevent them, except for its own ideology of limitless consumption. Face to face with the modern forms of religious terrorism, our consumerist society repeatedly experiences its own limitations. We must therefore ask ourselves if there are any criteria for assessing various acts of sacrifice. How can we distinguish “good” and “bad” forms of sacrifice? To answer this question, we need to find out whether sacrifice itself could have some limits and whether there is something beyond those limits. In other words, we need to ask ourselves – together with Nancy – if there is anything that is unsacrificeable.

With respect to those questions, we would like to put forward the following thesis: a sacrifice has no inner value in itself. A sacrifice is a social act that either appeals to the existing society, or constitutes a new community. Without its relation to the existing or future community a sacrifice has no positive sense; it is nothing but a self-destructive act that surely has some individual motivation, but lacks collective echo. A sacrifice must have its addressees who understand it; otherwise, it will be nothing but an act of madness or resignation. This ascertainment also sets some limits to the functioning of sacrifice. One can remember suicides of sectarians and religious fanatics that failed to find an echo among their contemporaries. But

<sup>3</sup> Kosík, *Jinoch a smrt*, 29, 30.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>5</sup> Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, 51.

there can also be something like an inflation of sacrifice, which appears when an increase in the number of sacrifices devalues their significance. This happened, for instance, in South Vietnam, where many Buddhist monks burned themselves alive, or in post-communist Bulgaria, where too many people chose the same form of death to protest against the corruption and ruthlessness of capitalist society. In both cases, those to whom the acts of self-immolation were addressed were simply tired by too many sacrifices. As a result, people no longer cared about them. Such indifference, however, clearly demonstrates that a successful sacrifice, if one may call it this, is not possible without others.

### 3 Marion's view of sacrifice

It is actually this intersubjective dimension of sacrifice that Jean-Luc Marion emphasizes in his *Sketch of a Phenomenological Concept of Sacrifice*. Contrary to the prevailing opinion in contemporary sociology, Marion maintains that “my sacrifice always assumes the other as its horizon of possibility”. “So by my decision alone”, he affirms, “the sacrifice cannot be accomplished halfway; its effectiveness is not within the reach of my dispossession, but awaits acceptance and agreement by the other, thus depends on another's decision, on another decision, coming from elsewhere.”<sup>6</sup>

Yet the intersubjective aspect of sacrifice is not enough to explain the effectiveness of sacrifice in its complexity. Marion, in fact, differentiates three levels of sacrifice. First, there is sacrifice as pure waste and destruction. This is the vulgar sense of sacrifice which nowadays manifests itself especially in terrorist attacks. A terrorist who sacrifices both himself and others for his cause wants to destroy the world we live in. “Terrorism”, according to Marion, “does away with goods, innocent people and the terrorist himself, because it accomplishes first and radically the destruction of all beings as useful and at hand..., thus of the final organization of any world for us.”<sup>7</sup>

Such a notion of terrorism, however, seems to be oversimplified, as it pretends that we could isolate a terrorist from his or her social context. But terrorism never appears as an isolated action. It cannot be explained merely by a belief in blissful afterlife, for such a belief is only one of its conditions. Terrorism is usually a protest against intolerable conditions of life, a protest against the situation in which one is forced to live. Terrorism is also a weapon of the weak who cannot fight in a more acceptable way. Let us not forget that the Nazis during the Second World War called all freedom fighters in occupied countries “terrorists”, which was supposed to legitimize all their atrocities against innocent civilians. Hence, we see that the word “terrorism” can be used as a label, the meaning of which is to discredit one's own political opponents and legitimize all actions against them. Maybe we should be more careful when talking about “terrorism”. Maybe we should pay attention to political aspects of the given social situation, rather than contenting ourselves with an “ontological” notion of terrorism.

Such an “ontological” notion of terrorism is highly dubious because it is culturally biased. It is based on the dominating, Eurocentric perspective, which makes us view our enemies as barbarians who lack a proper sense of community and fail to understand a true meaning of sacrifice.

Besides the pure waste and destruction represented by terrorism, there is a second notion of sacrifice whose meaning, according to Marion, depends on others. We have already mentioned this intersubjective meaning of sacrifice, but it is possible to formulate it more precisely. For a sacrifice whose meaning depends on the other must be, strictly speaking, understood as a gift.

The motif of a gift, which is fundamental for Marion, then brings us to the highest and most sublime level of sacrifice that remains in the moment of givenness. In its pure givenness, a sacrifice appears as an event which opens and confirms the world we live in. Finally, such a sacrifice need not destroy anything, nor does it require some compensation in an afterlife. Contrary to acts of terrorism, it simply attests to the givenness of life, as Marion demonstrates in his interpretation of Abraham's sacrifice:

<sup>6</sup> Marion, *The Reason of the Gift*, 72, 73.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

By refusing to let Isaac be put to death, God does not thereby refuse acknowledgement of the gift presented by Abraham. Rather, God acknowledges and thus accepts the sacrifice all the more, understood this time in the strict phenomenological sense. By sparing Isaac from now on recognized (by Abraham) as a gift (of God), God re-gives him to him, gives him a second time and by presenting a gift by a redundancy, which consecrates it definitively as a gift from now on common and in the end open between the giver and the givee. The sacrifice redoubles the gift and confirms it as such for the first time.<sup>8</sup>

In any case, what is typical for Marion's elucidation of sacrifice is a hierarchy of various kinds of sacrifice. There is the inauthentic sacrifice of a terrorist; there is sacrifice as a strategic calculation (as in chess); and, finally, there is the authentic sacrifice as a confirmation of a pure givenness of life. Through such hierarchicalisation of sacrifice, Marion believes we can solve all the problems of pathological forms of sacrifice. He sets a high standard of sacrifice that sheds light on all (culturally) lower forms of sacrifice and puts them where they belong.

## 4 Patočka's notion of sacrifice

It seems that Patočka's approach to sacrifice has many similarities with the hierarchicalisation of sacrifice we can find in Marion, including its Eurocentrism and Christocentrism. For Patočka, the phenomenon of sacrifice is closely related to the third motion of existence. Hence, the phenomenon of sacrifice deeply determines Patočka's understanding of our existence, for it is the third movement of existence that allows us to discover and comprehend who we truly are. While the first movement expresses the instinctive-affective side of our existence, and the second movement corresponds to our practical self-realization in the world of daily affairs, Patočka calls the third movement of existence a movement of one's own self-understanding. In his study "What is existence?", he then grasps the third movement of existence in terms of a specific submissiveness.<sup>9</sup> This submissiveness means neither resignation nor fatalism. The Czech term "odevzdanost" corresponds rather to the English words "submission" and "devotion". The life in submission (*život v odevzdanosti*) Patočka speaks about is here expressed as a movement, in which we go beyond ourselves and our self-centered existence. In this movement, we give up our worldly interests, but not in the name of some higher authority to which we must submit. The only reason we must go beyond ourselves is to submit ourselves to the very openness of the world. This life in submission brings us not out of the world, but into the world we share with others. The concept of submission, however, implicitly suggests that the life in submission requires a sacrifice: we must sacrifice our earthly interests to reach the world we live in; we must also sacrifice our egocentric existence to discover what connects us with the others. To avoid any doubts, Patočka gives here the only concrete example of life in submission: it is the example of Jesus Christ, who was able to sacrifice himself in the most radical way.<sup>10</sup>

In his essay on the danger of technical science, Patočka then deals with the phenomenon of sacrifice in a more explicit way.<sup>11</sup> When looking for the limits of technical civilization, Patočka finds these limits in the phenomenon of sacrifice that cannot be subjected to the logic of technical manipulation. Yet, when referring to sacrifice, he uses a strange and disturbing expression: "a repetition of sacrifice".<sup>12</sup> Sacrifice is here conceived as an experience that is being repeated. When one makes a radical sacrifice, according to Patočka, one repeats the experience of sacrifice. In other words, a radical sacrifice presents itself only in a repetition.

But isn't every sacrifice, and especially the sacrifice of one's own life, absolutely singular and absolutely unrepeatable? For a true sacrifice, as Patočka himself puts it, is a sacrifice of one's own life, or a sacrifice of something that makes our life full and complete. What sense does it then make to talk about a repetition of sacrifice? This very expression suggests that there must be an original sacrifice that is then being repeated. With respect to Patočka's own argument, there is only one plausible explanation of the repetition of

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>9</sup> Patočka, 'Nebezpečí technizace ve vědě', 157.

<sup>10</sup> Patočka, 'Co je existence?', 365.

<sup>11</sup> Patočka, 'Nebezpečí technizace ve vědě', *Pěče o duši III*, 156-160.

<sup>12</sup> Patočka, 'Nebezpečí technizace ve vědě', 158, 159.

sacrifice: the original sacrifice is the one of Jesus Christ, while all the other true sacrifices represent nothing but *imitatio Christi*.

According to Patočka, there is a fundamental difference between the Christian view of sacrifice and pre-Christian or non-Christian religions which understand sacrifice in terms of behavior that addresses and obliges some divine power who will later provide some compensation for the loss one suffers in sacrifice. This difference makes it then possible to establish a certain hierarchy in the experience of sacrifice. Patočka believes that we must differentiate a true, radical or authentic experience of sacrifice from a naive and inauthentic form of sacrifice. Patočka deliberately uses the expressions of a proper and improper experience of sacrifice.<sup>13</sup> While the proper experience of sacrifice is understood as a *repetition of sacrifice* which accepts and understands the finitude of human existence up to the point that nothing positive can be expected from the sacrifice, the improper form either fails to understand the finitude of our existence or takes this existence as a price we must pay for the achievement of some positive value. The true sacrifice is a sacrifice for nothing, while the false sacrifice exchanges one being for another. In the inauthentic sacrifice, there is always some place for honor, pride or duty, whereas the authentic sacrifice leaves us in the pure openness of world, which, however, makes possible an arrival of a new community of those who understand the true meaning of sacrifice. For this reason, Patočka even claims that the inauthentic sacrifice, such as that of the Japanese kamikaze, is no sacrifice at all. It is nothing but a loss of one's own life for the sake of some higher value. The authentic sacrifice, on the other hand, serves the pure openness of being that is being manifested in this gesture, which is why it opens the dimension of our coexistence with others in an absolutely fundamental way.

It is not difficult to comprehend why Patočka praises a pure sacrifice that opens an ontological dimension of existence rather than the self-immolation of a kamikaze who turns himself into a flying bomb. While a pure sacrifice can be related to the third movement of existence, which in Patočka's phenomenology of existential movements remains in the overcoming of earthly bounds and the acceptance of the finitude of our existence, the case of kamikaze would correspond rather to the second movement, where we tend to instrumentalize our own existence and where struggle has also its place. In the proper sacrifice, there is no place for the pride and honour prescribed by the warrior's codex. In a hierarchicalisation of sacrifice, we could also find a distinction between profane and sacred, which differentiates the familiar world and its unfamiliar surrounding. This difference between the earthly and unearthly dimension of the world is in Patočka so radical that it prevents those who make a real sacrifice from expecting any reward in this life or in the afterlife. Without the possibility to expect remuneration for one's own sacrifice, a sacrifice attests only to the finitude of human existence that gives itself to others as an absolutely selfless gift.

On the other hand, Patočka's view of sacrifice can be seen as Eurocentric, for it puts non-European forms of sacrifice on a much lower level. One could hardly ignore the Christocentric rhetoric that brings Jesus Christ into the very center of the experience of sacrifice. The real history of sacrifice starts for Patočka with Jesus Christ, around whose gesture it then revolves.

We can surely admit that Patočka also mentions Buddhism when referring to the third movement of existence in his lectures about the three movements of existence.<sup>14</sup> But the Christian critique of selfishness and self-centeredness still seems to be a determining motif of his thought. It is equally interesting that Patočka refers to Sacharov, or Solzhenitsyn, when speaking of a possible resistance to dangers of technical civilization, but he never recalls Mahatma Gandhi, even though Gandhi's anti-colonial practices would be perfectly fitting in this respect.

In any case, we can confirm our initial impression that Patočka's phenomenology of sacrifice has many similarities with Marion's elucidation of sacrifice. Patočka uses Christocentric rhetorics to the highest extent, which is often underestimated by his readers.<sup>15</sup> Equally, he employs a hierarchicalisation to differentiate desirable and undesirable acts of sacrifice.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 157, 158.

<sup>14</sup> Patočka, *Tělo, společenství, jazyk, svět*, 113.

<sup>15</sup> See e.g. Tava, 'Oběť jako politický problém: Jan Patočka a sociologie posvátna'.

## 5 Beyond sacrifice

Yet, this is not to say that there are no differences between Patočka and Marion. There is no doubt that Patočka's notion of sacrifice was formed by his personal experience with the dissident movement in the communist regime. Needless to say that Patočka himself was finally able to bring an absolute sacrifice. Contrary to such an uncompromising notion, Marion stresses rather a readiness to sacrifice, as the example of Abraham illustrates. What matters to him is a readiness to accept and praise the very givenness of our existence, rather than the actual destruction of someone or something.

In this respect Marion seems to be closer to Nancy, who in his essay *The Unsacrificeable*, claims that Western thought is characterized by an overcoming of sacrifice. The movement of Western thought, according to Nancy, makes possible a sublimation of sacrifice that turns from real sacrifice into symbolic gesture.<sup>16</sup> Nancy, however, radicalizes this movement when affirming that our destiny is to exceed and surmount the very logic of sacrifice. This is because the sublimation of sacrifice takes us beyond the sphere of sacrifice where the unsacrificeable appears.

What is beyond sacrifice, what is unsacrificeable, is nothing but our existence in the world shared with others. It is existence in the sense of coexistence with the others, as Nancy would put it in his *Being Singular Plural*, where he develops an ontology in the plural sense of our coexistence. Such an existence, indeed, "isn't to be sacrificed and can't be sacrificed. It can only be destroyed or shared. This is unsacrificeable and finite existence that is offered up to be shared."<sup>17</sup> For sacrifice it means "that there is no 'true' sacrifice, that real existence is unsacrificeable, that the truth of existence is to *be* unsacrificeable."

Yet the assertion that our coexistence with others is unsacrificeable has nothing to do with the self-content and mediocre way of life. It does not celebrate the individualistic morality of our capitalist society. Even though such a notion of existence transgresses the logic of sacrifice, it doesn't bring us to indifference or nihilism. Quite the contrary, it makes us alert, for it remembers the historical experience of the Holocaust. Nancy refers to this experience precisely in order to demonstrate that there is something that cannot and must not be grasped in terms of sacrifice.

In this respect, he fully agrees with Giorgio Agamben who, in his *Remnants of Auschwitz*, asserts that it is utterly inappropriate to use the term "holocaust" when referring to atrocities of the Third Reich, for this concept is too burdened with the meaning of sacrifice.<sup>18</sup> Even if we are used to this term, or we use it for lack of a better one, we shall be aware that the Jews or Gypsies who were dying in the concentration camps cannot be understood as martyrs in the classical sense of the term. The first Church fathers used the word "martirium" to indicate the death of persecuted Christians who thus bore witness to their faith. Martyrs for them were the witnesses of faith, but what happened in the concentration camps of the Third Reich had nothing to do with martyrdom, not only because people didn't suffer there voluntarily, but also because it was literally impossible to bear witness to this suffering. Those who experienced concentration camps in the extreme did not survive. The pure victims could not survive, which is why the Holocaust can be understood as "an event without witnesses", or a horrible event without martyrs.<sup>19</sup>

To explain Agamben's argumentation, we could return to Viktor E. Frankl, Bruno Bettelheim and many other survivors of the Nazi concentration camps. But the most appropriate explanation can be found in Primo Levi, whose work served as a primal inspiration for Agamben. In his *If this is a Man*, Levi describes the machinery of Auschwitz, the demonic nature of which remained not only in the industrial killing of people, but in the elimination of essential difference between victims and their murderers. Anyone who managed to survive could live only at the costs of thousands who died. This, according to Levi, created "a grey zone" of moral indiscernibility, where all those who survived felt guilt for what happened to them.

For all those reasons the Holocaust makes visible the limits of sacrifice. The Holocaust transgresses the limits of sacrifice, as its politics remained in the destruction of the space of coexistence with others. What

<sup>16</sup> Nancy, *A Finite Thinking*, 55.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>18</sup> Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 28.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

was at stake here was an utter destruction of existence in the sense of coexistence. The aim of the so-called “final solution” was to create a world without others. It was this very aim that makes it impossible to employ here the word and the logic of sacrifice.

## 6 Conclusion

By this we come to the conclusion that, when making a phenomenology of sacrifice, it is not enough to elaborate some hierarchy of various approaches to the experience of sacrifice. To avoid abuse of the word “sacrifice”, we need to realize that there are some limits where the word “sacrifice” loses its sense. Those limits are related to our coexistence with others which, according to Nancy, remains and must remain unsacrificeable. If the meaning of sacrifice is socially conditioned, it means that a sacrifice makes sense in its relation to an existing or future community. However, it also means that sacrifice loses any sense in the moment when its intention is to destroy the world shared with others, the world of our coexistence. The limits of sacrifice become apparent in the machinery of the Holocaust and other genocides. Beyond those limits, there is no community with others, as the others are excluded and annihilated. Ethics, politics and even religion that do not succumb to the ideology of sacrifice could then remain precisely in an effort to preserve the space of coexistence with others. As Hannah Arendt puts it in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, a new politics and, we might add, a new ethics and new religion, may have one common task: to avoid another Holocaust.

If we return to Patočka, we can understand that sacrifice itself is a problem rather than a solution for problems caused by our technical civilization. Nowadays, we see clearly that the logic of sacrifice cannot help us out of the trap of technical *Gestell* because it is its symptom. For this reason, one could agree with Nancy’s claim that what we need to do is to scarify a sacrifice. We should not only beware of sacrifice, but get rid of its adoration. We need to stop attributing an absolute value to sacrifice.

Yet what would it mean for Patočka’s notion of existence to do away with sacrifice? To put it more precisely, how can we conceive of the third motion of existence, if we free ourselves from sacrifice? It appears that we can’t simply do away with the third motion of existence, as Pavel Kouba tries to suggest in his article, for it would jeopardize the very integrity of existence.<sup>20</sup> For Patočka, the integrity of our existence remains precisely in the third motion of existence. Without this motion our existence would lose its existential integrity. It would be incomplete and incoherent. This is why we need to preserve the third movement of existence. What we can do, however, is to free the third movement of existence from the logic of sacrifice.

Actually, why should the movement and moment of truth be related to sacrifice? Why cannot this experience be filled with feelings of relief, liberation and happiness? Why cannot we experience the third movement of existence as an excessive joy of thinking and pure joy of being in the world with others? Our thankfulness for the openness of being could be as simple as a joy that affirms and opens the world we share with others, a joy that celebrates our coexistence with others beyond the sphere of work, competition and struggle.

But even if we were reluctant to renounce the ideology of sacrifice, we need to realize that the third motion of existence is not always idyllic and harmless. Patočka himself formally admits that all three movements of existence have their pathological variants, but he never explains the negative aspects of the third movement of existence. Contrary to the first two movements, the third is seemingly free of any existential danger. Its only function is to bring our existence to completeness. Yet, with regard to the reflections mentioned above, we can understand that the third movement of existence, driven by the ethos of sacrifice, can easily turn into pure self-destruction. This happens when a sacrifice remains solitary and finds no echo in the minds of others. But it also happens when a sacrifice ceases to be a reflection of the givenness of life and turns into utter disrespect for life. Contempt for life can poison not only individual but also collective existence. We can see suicidal tendencies among both individuals and collectives, despite the

<sup>20</sup> Kouba, *Problém třetího pohybu*, 19.



fact that such tendencies are often masked under sublime forms of sacrifice. Precisely for these reasons, we need to accept some disillusionment with sacrifice, which can bring us to a more sober and more insightful reflection on current social processes.

This is not to say that sacrifice becomes totally insignificant. But what we need to do is to subordinate the concept of sacrifice to the authority of coexistence with others, which is in itself unsacrificeable. If sacrifice has any sense, this sense must be derived from our coexistence with others, and not vice versa, otherwise we would easily fall prey to political or religious ideologies that operate with the notion of sacrifice.

Only if we understand the meaning of sacrifice from what is unsacrificeable can we give justice to those who are ready to sacrifice their lives in order save the lives of others. An example of this is firefighters who are not simply saving lives, but, by their courage and readiness to risk their own lives, are giving hope to society. No society could exist without this essential hope and trust, which prove to be real conditions for the possibility of our coexistence. We cannot live without confidence that help will come when we most need it. This is what the Belarussian writer Svetlana Alexievitch notes in her book *Chernobyl Prayer*, when describing the look of firefighters who were facing a catastrophe beyond their imagination. She reminds us that the firefighters heading for the burning nuclear reactor had the eyes of those who were leaving forever.<sup>21</sup>

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