

Being and Not Being Like Others: Recognizing the Universal-Individual in Myself and in the Other

Wojciech Kaftanski

Keynote Speaker

Harvard University (Cambridge, Massachusetts)

Living in mass society we encounter people on an unprecedented scale in the history of human existence. These daily interactions (substantially modified by the advent of the Internet and social media and political-economic globalization) influence how we perceive ourselves. We know from thinkers such as Hegel that our identity or sense of selfhood develops substantially in relation to Others. The social dimension of our existence affects how we act in the world and treat various Others in it. Morality is essentially a social phenomenon, whether in a genetic or practical sense, and our being with Others is influenced by our interactions with them. Being with Others may lead to an aberration that Kierkegaard calls “Being Like Others” wherein our identity as individuals is compromised due to it being constructed solely in social interactions. This occurs via a robust form of imitation that Kierkegaard calls aping. However, the prescriptive of “Not Being Like Others” may lead to another aberration whereby the Other is essentially different, essentially not like me. We learn from Levinas and Arendt that seeing Others as essentially dissimilar warrants not caring for them, or actively seeking their harm.

The solution I propose is in seeing oneself and Others as being on the spectrum of *Being and Not Being Like Others*. You are like me because we share (largely) the same genetic makeup, we similarly seek our own good and the good of our close ones, we prefer less rather than more pain, we are alive and we want to stay that way. You are not like me because your loved ones are different than mine; you speak a different language; your ambitions and political views are also different than mine. While you may empathize with me, it is I who feels grief or happiness, I am the center of that experiential world. We ought to treat these individual and shared qualities in an existential-dialectical way. On the one hand, I am not like you because I am an individual that cannot be reduced to our shared

qualities. On the other hand, I cannot abstract myself from our shared qualities. Hence, I ought to think about myself as a universal individual; I ought to conceive of Others in the same fashion.

The Real Transcending Itself (Through Love), Revisited

Katerina Kolozova

Keynote Speaker

Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities (Skopje)

The talk is based on a chapter from my book (*Cut of the Real, Subjectivity in Poststructuralist Philosophy*, Columbia University Press 2014/2018) which first discusses the thought of Alain Badiou and François Laruelle, both of whom shared the aspiration for radicalism in method, routed in a form of realism. It then espouses the non-philosophical line of thinking in correlation with the real and considers the possibility of conceiving of a love of the other's radical solitude (that is to say, of the real) and in correlation with the real. It further argues that every thought is immanently universalistic since the pretension to universality is constitutively inbuilt in the desire of thought. This pretension is unavoidable, as is the naïve or prelingual compulsion in every thinking endeavor to attain "the most accurate truth," "the most truthful truth" of an event or of the world. This naïve compulsion is what gives birth to thought, and it is certainly prior to any self-reflection, to any autoreferential self-correctives of the thinking process that introduce criticality and political responsibility into itself. The entire topic is revisited through the lens of non-philosophical (as in Laruelle's non-philosophy and Marx's critique of philosophy in German Ideology) Marxism.