

## **RICOEUR BETWEEN LEVINAS AND HEIDEGGER: ANOTHER'S FURTHER ALTERITY**

The possibility of extending philosophy at the heart of today's postmodern conversation involves seemingly disparate conversationalists. On the one hand, Levinas, whose later works have been central to many postmodern deconstructive discussions, especially those focused on ethics, proposes a radical alterity of the Other, death, and time. This alterity, however, cannot be voided of the ethical relation, as most deconstructive approaches attempt, without great loss in the conversation. On the other hand, Heidegger's work, often used today as a whipping post, and coming from the other direction, offers an account of coexistence, death, and time which Levinas radically opposes. We must confront this opposition to Heidegger in order to see to what extent Heidegger's thinking is reducible, as Levinas contends, to the same and to totality. In the context of this opposition, I consider Ricoeur's thinking to be in a position between Levinas and Heidegger, not merely as an eclectic one, but rather, one that follows his usual fruitful fashion of going the distance with each thinker, exposing his limits, and then appropriating each adjusted position in an interarticulation that becomes his own unique and ingeniously inclusive position, one which often gets too little attention among those who consider themselves today's avant garde.

My thesis in this study is complex: first, that focusing on the respective critiques of Heidegger by both Levinas and Ricoeur allows us explicitly to see their differences; that seeing these, we can move to relate them more clearly; and finally that we can come to understand, in the light of pursuing these differences, a final position which consists in somewhat adjusting Ricoeur's position enlightened by a rereading of Levinas. Before this final position emerges, however, I will test the contention of Kemp,<sup>1</sup> that Ricoeur is somewhat between Heidegger and

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<sup>1</sup> See: Peter Kemp, "Ricoeur Between Heidegger and Levinas: Original Affirmation Between Ontological Attestation and Ethical Injunction," in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, vol. 21, 1995.

showing that it is precisely only as transcendent that the Other is Other and not me; just as I am solitary and not the other: "the other is in no way another myself, participating with me in a common existence."<sup>2</sup> Yet, in any consideration of Levinas in the context of Ricoeur's critique, it is necessary to explicitly point out that Levinas finds a place for sympathy and pairing even though he rejects them as ultimately constitutive of the intersubjective relationship,<sup>3</sup> a point that Ricoeur seems to miss. Levinas says: "The other is known through sympathy, as another (my)self, as the alter ego....But already, in the very heart of the relationship with the other that characterizes our social life, alterity appears as a nonreciprocal relationship – that is, as contrasting strongly with contemporaneousness. The Other as Other is not only an alter ego: the Other is what I myself am not. The Other is this, not because of the Other's character, or physiognomy, or psychology, but because of the Other's very alterity."<sup>4</sup> We see Levinas here developing the extreme separation between the exteriority of the Other and the solitude of the existent, which later becomes the focus throughout the whole of *Totality and Infinity*.<sup>5</sup> At this point we have seen explicitly the two sides of the double critique of Heidegger, that of the solitude of the existent and that of the Alterity of the separate Other. We have seen a twofold separation emerge in Levinas' treatment of totality and infinity: a separation of the personal Other from the intentional horizon of human existence; and the separation of the existent in his/her singular solitude from existence. In addition to what has been seen above, Levinas' critique of Heidegger's early basic ontological difference is also at the heart of the above double critique.

The fundamental critique of the ontological difference comes to light when Levinas indicates that for Heidegger the distinction between Being [*Sein*] and a being [*Seiende* or *Seiendes*] is a distinction while for him it is a separation. For Heidegger, the two are always together, with existing always grasped in the existent and that existing is "always possessed by someone. I do not think Heidegger can admit

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<sup>2</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, translated by Richard A. Cohen, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1987), p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> Richard A. Cohen, footnote 63, p. 83 of Levinas, *Time and the Other*.

<sup>4</sup> Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 83.

<sup>5</sup> *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, translated by Alphonso Lingis, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

ethical 'principle,' the Heideggerian perspective belongs to a tradition the barbarous depths of which were shown by Nazism. When Heidegger criticizes the essence of technology, he forgets that the source of modern evil, such as it was manifested in Nazism, is found at a depth that lies deeper than the realm of technology. Alluding to certain expressions found in Heidegger's later works, Levinas sketches the portrait of a pagan existence rooted in mother earth and prone to exploitation – very different from the sober existence of availability for the needs of others. The individual are immersed in the *physis* that encompasses them like elements of its unfolding. "<sup>9</sup>

Related to the above critique regarding the failure to get out of subjectivity is Levinas' critique of Heidegger's view of time in relation to ekstasis, which does not break out of the subjectivity of Dasein. Perhaps, I might add, the closest the later Heidegger comes to such a breakout is the time of Being which is somewhat independent of Dasein and is emitted in events. But this still misses essentially what Levinas is indicating, even though it could be claimed that the time of the other person appears somewhat on the horizon of worldly time, ecstatic temporality.<sup>10</sup> It is here that one can see Levinas' critique of the Heideggerian Being toward death, for Levinas considers death to be an alterity related to time. For Heidegger, death is the possibility of no longer having possibilities, or the impossibility of possibility.<sup>11</sup> What strikes Levinas about Heidegger's account of death is that it shatters "inauthentic possibilities"<sup>12</sup> rather than existence itself. For Levinas, rather, "Death in Heidegger is an event of freedom, whereas for me the subject seems to reach the limit of the possible in suffering. It finds itself enchained, overwhelmed, and in some way passive."<sup>13</sup> For Levinas, Heidegger does not go far enough regarding time. Levinas considers time as radical alterity connected to the alterity of the Other. But this alterity of time of the Other is not simultaneous with the time

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<sup>9</sup> Adriaan Peperzak, *To the Other: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (West Lafayette, Indiana, Purdue University, 1993), p. 54.-55. For a very fine treatment of this element of Heidegger, where he in his later work is seen to shuck off any trace of the Judeo-Christian tradition in favor of the pagan Greek and German traditions, as Peperzak states here so well, see John D. Caputo, *Demythologizing of Heidegger*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993).

<sup>10</sup> Richard A. Cohen, Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 70.

<sup>12</sup> Cohen, Introduction to *Time and the Other*, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Levinas, *Time and the Other*, pp. 70-71.

Ricoeur's critique of Levinas' lack of reciprocity for the ethical relation. He states that: "The morality of 'earthly nourishments' is the first morality, the first abnegation. It is not the last, but one must pass through it."<sup>17</sup> And it is this notion of nourishment which is at the heart of this critique of Heidegger regarding enjoyment, for Levinas contends that "prior to being a system of tools, the world is an ensemble of nourishments. Human life in the world does not go beyond the objects that fulfill it....These are the nourishments characteristic of our existence in the world. It is an ecstatic existence – being outside oneself – but limited by the object."<sup>18</sup> And it is precisely this relation with an object that Levinas wants to characterize as enjoyment [*jouissance*] as a way of being prior to the ready-to-hand. I will now turn to Ricoeur's critiques of Heidegger's thought, which is not as extreme as that of Levinas, in order to integrate the two critiques into a viable position emerging from the fundamental insight of both Ricoeur and Levinas.

It can be seen that Ricoeur's fundamental critique of Heidegger in *Oneself as Another* prerequisites the earlier critiques made years ago.<sup>19</sup> Although Ricoeur has been critical of Heidegger from the beginning of his work decades ago, even before it was fashionable to criticize him, he employs far more of Heidegger's analyses than Levinas.<sup>20</sup> The points of his critiques which interest me for our present discussion are those complex and central remarks in the essay "Existence and Hermeneutics" and remarks in *Fallible Man*<sup>21</sup> and *Time*

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<sup>17</sup> Emmanuel, *Time and the Other*, pp. 63-64. Cohen tells us in a footnote to this text of Levinas also develops the notion of enjoyment in *Existence and Existents*, pp. 37-45; *Totality and Infinity*, pp. 127- 139, 143-151; and *Otherwise than Being*, pp. 72-74. See also R. Cohen, "emmanuel Levinas; Happiness is Sensational Time," *Philosophy Today*, vol. 25, no. 3 (fall 1981), pp. 196-203.

<sup>18</sup> Levinas, *Time and the Other*, p. 63.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Ricoeur, "Existence and Hermeneutics," in *Conflict of Interpretation: Essays in Hermeneutics*, Edited by Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

<sup>20</sup> I do not mean here to imply that Levinas has less respect for Heidegger than Ricoeur, for his famous statements about Heidegger being one of the five great philosophers throughout the ages cannot be forgotten, nor his contention that one must encounter in depth Heidegger's thought in order to surpass it. Levinas' entire effort is tied to this surpassing of Heidegger's initial ontology and later thought of Being, not that Heidegger is the only thinker with this profound an influence on Levinas in his attempt to account for the transcendence to the Infinite Other. One need only to remember his critiques of Husserl, as well as his espousal of Rosencranz.

<sup>21</sup> *Paul Ricoeur, Fallible Man*, translated by Charles A. Kelbley (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1965), especially p. 67.

intimacy between the inquirer and the Being of the inquirer. Ricoeur does not want to jeopardize the advantage of his longer way, that it dwells on the ontic level in order to resolve the conflicts and to solve problems often overlooked in attempting to trace the most direct route to the question of Being. Ricoeur's basic objections to Heidegger's short way, as mentioned above, is that it too quickly reaches a unity of Dasein which Ricoeur does not consider to be forthcoming, and which remains for him problematical in that the unity of man is a regulative idea and not one that an ontology of Dasein can reveal.<sup>25</sup>

Ricoeur emphasizes the conflict of interpretations as revealing differing aspects of existence which ontically found various hermeneutic methods.<sup>26</sup> Further, on this ontic level and in an extended ethics, he has focused pointedly upon the problem of the place of evil in freedom within human existence and upon the ontic relation of human existence to the Sacred which is central to his whole philosophy. Thus, for Ricoeur, pausing to dwell on the ontic has fostered an integration or a dialectizing of the symbols which support a phenomenology of spirit and a psychoanalysis of desire, with their respective orientations to teleology and to archeology, both of which prepare for the relation to the Sacred within a phenomenology of religion and its eschatology. These advantages of the long way for Ricoeur militate against Heidegger's short way.

The fundamental justification of the long way over the short way to ontology is the underlying difference in the fore-comprehension of human existence. For Ricoeur, as mentioned, the unity of man as a regulative idea can not be achieved in existence and is not easily accessible to an ontology worked out too quickly. He says: "moreover, it is only in a conflict of rival hermeneutics that we perceive something

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<sup>25</sup> It can be admitted at this point that perhaps Ricoeur stresses too much the broken aspect of human being and the truncated dimension of human existence. His account, especially the later ones, do ring true. Further Heidegger shows the advantage of passing to the originary level in an ontology which provides a more comprehensive and foundational unity below the broken existence which supports the conflict of hermeneutics of existence which has preoccupied Ricoeur for so long. Heidegger, however, as will be seen, has had to lop off the entire Kantian reason and the infinite, as well as the function of understanding in relation to such a reason driven to totality, completeness and the unconditioned. Thus, although Heidegger is useful in helping to get Ricoeur from fixating on his earlier interpretation of the existential role of evil, Ricoeur, even in his later somewhat mitigated appropriation of Kant's view of the tendency to the good and the proclivity to evil, can not ever go the distance with Heidegger's diminished role of Kantian reason.

<sup>26</sup> Ricoeur, "Existence and Hermeneutics," pp. 6-11.

productive imagination in affording schemata for the rules of understanding, and the extension of this function.

This broadened ethics, later to be seen as not incompatible with Levinas' ethics, is understood as a philosophy that leads from alienation to freedom and beatitude, attempting to grasp the "effort to exist in its desire to be,"<sup>28</sup> and opposing any reduction of reflection to a simple critique or to a mere "justification of science and duty as a reappropriation of our effort to exist; epistemology is only a part of this broader task: we have to recover the act of existing, the positing of the self, in all the density of its works."<sup>29</sup> Hence, it can be seen that Ricoeur has corrected Kant's view of the place of evil in freedom. He has, however, considered the locus of evil to stem from the disproportion in the synthesis between finitude and infinitude on the theoretical, practical, and especially affective levels which come to expression in the fullness of symbolic language. It is from the symbols of evil that thought reaches the notion of the servile will or the will in bondage. We have seen, then, that the advantages of the "long way" militate against the Heideggerian "short way. For, although his work on hermeneutics of existence and on the conflict of interpretations seems to flounder in dwelling on the ontic level before reaching the promised land of ontology, the resolution of the conflict indicates the importance of considering the ontic level further than Heidegger does."<sup>30</sup>

Thus, at the very outset, Ricoeur has challenged Heidegger's view of the explicitly temporal unification of Dasein's Being as care. Here, with the consideration of the conflicts in interpreting existence, Ricoeur's two objections to Heidegger's short way converge. For differing methods of interpretation are rooted in the different and polemically synthesized dimensions of human existence which they respectively reveal. Now, it can be seen that this earlier twofold critique of Heidegger must be integrated with Ricoeur's own later critiques regarding the comprehension of Being and with Levinas' critique regarding the need for the injunction of the face to face and

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<sup>28</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, translated by Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 45.

<sup>29</sup> Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 45.

<sup>30</sup> Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretation*, p. 19. He says: "Moreover, it is only in a conflict of rival hermeneutics that we perceive something of the being to be interpreted: a unified ontology is as inaccessible to our method as a separate ontology. Rather, in every instance each hermeneutics discovers the aspect of existence which finds it as a method."