

Heidegger and Levinas

Intentionality

The location of the disagreement between Heidegger and Levinas is that of intentionality.

In the European phenomenological tradition, intentionality is the relation between the thought [*la pensee*] and being [*l'etre*]. The phenomenological method [eidetic reduction/intentional analysis/hermeneutic procedure/existential analytic] reveals the horizons of meaning, which is what makes the thought possible (the transcendental).

Husserl largely focuses on theoretical knowledge as the primary form of intentional relation. Merleau-Ponty introduces the specific conditions of possibility (transcendental) that the body offers, thereby making his phenomenology an embodied one. Heidegger introduces a practical and engaged form of affective relation to being as the intentional relation, i.e. to say Dasein subsists in the existential mode of Being insofar as Dasein is concerned with tools and other beings as of practical interest. Entities *matter* to Dasein. One way to summarize this is that, for Heidegger, Care is the Being of Dasein.

Heidegger

Heidegger interprets Care temporally as having three aspects: *thrownness*, *projection* and *fallenness*. Thrownness (past) refers to the fact that we find ourselves always already in the world and that the world matters to us in some or the other manner. Projection (future) refers to the fact that Dasein interprets every situation that we are thrown into as one of possibilities of action. Fallenness (present) refers to the fact that our everyday dealings with the world obscure a real understanding of the world. Our everyday dealings with the world are inauthentic, insofar as we act in ways *one* acts. The authentic self that is mine is thus characterized as having fallen (in the present) to the level of the They.

Heidegger calls the being of entities revealed as objects of knowledge as *Vorhandenheit*, present-at-hand. In Mohanty's essay, we saw how Heidegger's analysis of the copula reveals an identity-cum-difference structure of intentionality which is not captured by presence-at-hand. Instead, Heidegger contends that entities must already have been disclosed to us, for it to be possible for them to enter in such relations as predication. This more directly disclosed being of entities, as revealed by practical action, is labelled *Zuhandenheit*, ready-to-hand. Hence judgemental meaning still refers back to the practical embeddedness of Dasein. Whether there is a spectrum between presence-at-hand and ready-to-hand and whether they are qualitatively entirely incompatible is a matter of contention in Heidegger interpretation. At any rate, ready-to-hand is pre-theoretical disclosure of being and makes theoretical judgments possible.

Levinas

Levinas will be contrasted to both Husserl and Heidegger here.

He contends that in Husserl, we see a privileging of knowing as the intentional relation between thought and being. Levinas explains this: The thought focuses on the entity of thought, thereby forgetting itself, i.e., it is immersed with the entity. Consider when we think about a pen. We are

entirely thinking about the pen, the thought is “filled” with the pen. Yet our thought is never outside of us. Hence, the self-sufficiency of thought is a recurrent theme of intentional consciousness. Where is this self-sufficiency coming from?

Levinas explains that in judgemental/theoretical consciousness, the being of objects is “*given*” to us. The intentional relation of thought and being is one of *grasping*, of seizure. This grasping means that thought of this form is always subject to adequation. This is what we question when we ask about the adequacy of our representations to the entity/concept to the way the world is etc.

Let us pause and notice the active nature of intentional consciousness. Intentional consciousness is active as it grasps the entity. It is always appropriating the entity; always an active intervention in the being of beings.

All consciousness of something brings along with it a non-intentional indirect consciousness: that of consciousness of the self. When we think about something, we also have a consciousness of ourselves thinking about it. These two consciousnesses are not of the same kind. Consciousness of an object is intentional. Consciousness of the self’s consciousness about the object is non-intentional. (Perhaps this relates to the debate on *svasamvedana*).

This non-intentional consciousness of the self as accompanied by the intentional consciousness of an entity is pre-reflexive. Levinas contends that this is not merely a confused consciousness that is clarified in a process of intentional reflection. He says that this consciousness is pure passivity as it only accompanies intentional consciousness. This pure passivity is not *just* characterized by the thrownness of the self as explained by Heidegger. This passivity is a self-effacement. It has no name, no attributes (perhaps in some sense a minimal self). As it is tied to intentional consciousness, non-intentional consciousness does not affirm itself in the way thought affirms the object. It is not self-sufficient. The self is not expressed by the nominative here but by the accusative.

Non-intentional consciousness, hence, is not a case of an entity being revealed. The affirmation of being is already assumed in the process of disclosure of an entity as a being. Non-intentional consciousness is a case of ‘*bad conscience*’, of being put to question. Non-intentional consciousness is not a case of an entity (the self) being revealed but a case of the self being questioned in its right to be. The self has to say ‘I’ and grasp itself in a hateful act. The question is not posed by an abstraction but by the face of the other. When we think of something, Levinas contends that we already come away with a question: What right do ‘I’ have to think and act here instead of the other? Hence, the very basic structure of consciousness has an ethical aspect.

The ethical structure is interpreted by Levinas as being twofold: fear and responsibility. The self is responsible for the other. It is open to being questioned and has to answer the call of the other. This responsibility (exemplified by the command “Do not kill me”) is what Levinas calls *the Voice of God in the Face of the Other*. The self also fears for the other. This fear is a fear *for* another’s death.

Heidegger’s analysis of affectivity has a double structure: an emotion is *of* (moved by) something and *for* oneself. Levinas clearly disagrees saying that fear of another’s death is not an emotion *for* oneself but entirely *for* the other.

Even in Heidegger’s analysis, entities are always affirmed in their being and their disclosure is always *with respect to*, and hence *for* oneself. Levinas claims that this disclosure being “for” oneself is insufficient to capture the *alterity* of the Other and hence, the *ethical*.

In fact, he prioritizes ethics over ontology. Being has to answer to its right to be before it can answer Heidegger's question of being. If the privileging of ontology over logic gives way to a practical pre-theoretical understanding, what does the privileging of ethics over logic reveal?