
I. IMMANUEL KANT'S RECENT ANNIVERSARY

Kant's Influence on Levinas' Conception of Time

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Abstract: Levinas' philosophy is an attempt to overcome Heidegger's reduction of the question of time to the ontological problem. Reducing everything to the event of existence Heidegger perhaps neglects another and perhaps more original meaning, namely, the moral one. There seems to be something like moral intelligence. Levinas returns to Kant, to practical reason and the universality of the imperative, but interprets them and time differently. Temporalization might first be diachrony, both presupposing and transcending any totality and form obtained by synchronization.

Keywords: Kant, Levinas, Heidegger, time, morality, ontology

Throughout his philosophical path, Levinas develops his position on time. He continues the critique of onto-theo-logy. That criticism is the focus of Heidegger's interests and traces its origin to Kant, who refused to deduce time from God's eternity. Levinas, after Heidegger, returned to Kant to prioritize moral philosophy, albeit by incorporating time into it.

1. The return of Levinas after Heidegger to Kant

For Heidegger, the most important characteristic of Western metaphysics is that it is onto-theo-logy. He discovered this term in Kant. Its onto-theo-logical character is expressed in the understanding of being as the basis of everything that exists, as the foundation of the sum of all existents, with the status of the supreme Being, identified with God. Metaphysics, which conceptualizes the foundation, becomes an onto-theo-logical construct. According to Heidegger, this trend dates back to Aristotle. Heidegger re-reads metaphysics in order to discover what remained unthought and unsaid in it. He concludes that it is necessary to completely deconstruct it.

Heidegger opposes Hegel's way of doing this. For Hegel, philoso-

phy itself is progress in which the central concept is *Aufhebung*, where the formal definitions of time, namely past, present and future, are filled with ever more new content by denying, preserving, and creating a richer totality than the previous one. Hegel was perhaps the first philosopher to attempt to overcome Kant's formalism of reason with his dialectical method.

Heidegger also insisted on deformatization, like Hegel and many other philosophers after Kant. However, his is not a progressive development by *Aufhebung*, but a returning, rediscovering, rearranging, rethinking, and capturing of hidden opportunities. The respect for totality, present from ancient Greek philosophy to that of Hegel, was preserved in Heidegger. *Dasein*, being-in-the-world-with-others, is understood and thought in its own wholeness. The whole also has great authority in Kant's philosophy. With Levinas, however, the idea of the whole is associated with the synchronization of time and acquires a new meaning inferior to the idea of infinity.

For Levinas, infinity is not a goal of development, as in Hegel's teleology, nor derived from the finitude of human existence, as Heidegger explains. In those cases, infinity has become a finitude since it has been given limits. Levinas insists that infinity itself is beyond any idea that we can form about it and of which it would be a referent. Every definition is both a limitation and a negation, a setting of limits, but only finite things can be determined through limitations and exclusion. Infinity is rather the transcendence of boundaries and cannot be closed, totalized, or surrounded by something, even nothingness. Transcendence is not a negation for Levinas. For him, in the transcendence of any and all qualities and dimensions, as well as of any and all ideas, including our idea of God, is the unceasing superiority of Infinity over the finite.

Levinas, in turn, took the approach of deformatization. Transcendence, or going beyond (where beyond is otherwise than being), consists in deformatizing each form, for example, of time as an *a priori* form of all sensory data, as a de-balancing of any synthesis, including between intuition and categories, of the union of subject and predicate or of the unity of parts in the whole. Infinity is always beyond – beyond totality, beyond knowledge, beyond being. Like Kant, Levinas again raises the problem of reason and infinity, which for philosophy is emblematic, but he is not satisfied with the traditional binding of reason to the Totality, the Whole, or the One, which has dominated philosophy since Greek antiquity.

While Heidegger posits Being as the source of all meaning, Levinas asserts that there is a philosophical tradition going back to Plato and Plotinus in which the world of ideas is prior to and beyond being. Ideas are taken as primary and irreducible to the experience concerning the sensible world. Kant also speaks of the ideas of reason and of the intellectual world, which is not ontological, because it exceeds what is given (for him, the given is the prototype of what exists). For Kant, this is another world created by the moral imperative. Practical reason in Kant's system, which has a regulative function, precedes and orients the volitional performances of actions, as well as the knowledge and speculation of pure theoretical reason. For Levinas, like Kant, ethics is the first philosophy – it takes precedence over knowledge and all kinds of activity, but not because of its legislative function.

Levinas radicalized the idea of the priority of the ethical. However, for Kant, practical reason is still bound to the world, not the natural but the intellectual world, and this very worldliness is, for Levinas, Kant's compromise made towards ontology. Levinas greatly appreciates the importance that Kant attaches to thinking that dares to deviate from what is given. Kant recognizes the existence of another type of thinking that is no longer a synthesis of representations and categories but nevertheless generates rational ideas. These transcendental ideas that reason inevitably reaches are not limited by time, which for Kant is an *a priori* form of sensory diversity. In the "Transcendental Dialectic", he discovers that thinking, without falling into arbitrariness and in order to satisfy the needs of reason itself, starts from being but does not return to it and goes beyond, thinking of God, the whole of the world, and the immortality of the soul. With these ideas, reason seeks to achieve the unity or totality of experience. However, infinity intervenes, and, according to Kant, the human mind, reaching the infinite, gets involved in insoluble contradictions. Transcendental ideas, theological, psychological, and cosmological, to which no intuition corresponds, can lead to an unpermitted, illegitimate, or dialectical use of reason. It is not the ideas themselves but their abuse that engenders deceptive conceptions. Nonetheless, thinking beyond the boundaries of concrete experience is not necessarily negative but rather can contribute to the use of reason. Kant believes that transcendental ideas are given by the nature of the mind, and it is not possible that reason itself as a supreme tribunal of all the rights and prerequisites of our speculation contains illusions, phantasmagoria,

and errors. For him, the purpose of ideas corresponds to our type of mind, and therefore this purpose is good. In short, the use of these ideas is not constitutive, but regulative, and they do not aim to know what exists. Kant, however, admits some object of transcendental thinking, which is the whole of every possible experience. The three transcendental ideas, the rules which the intellect follows, lead to the systematic unity of knowledge. Transcendental ideas do not oppose experiential knowledge but rather unite it; however, much more important is their regulatory function in morality.

According to Levinas, after the establishment of morality as a separate world, albeit only intelligible, Kant makes another compromise with onto-theo-logy, which concerns the idea of God. Kant believes that the existence of God as an object of the theological idea must be admitted. This object is only conceived without being given, without a corresponding appearance, so that its existence cannot in principle be proved or disproved. Kant calls the idea of God, the totality of all possible predicates of reality, a transcendental ideal. Everything must be determined according to this ideal, which begins the causal series and coincides with the idea of God as the creator of everything that exists. But this ideal is imposed on thinking, not because there is a need for a single original cause in the succession of all finite causes, but because of the individuality and determination of anything as entitled to be something in itself. God is conceived as a necessary constituent in Kant's philosophical system so as to be a moral condition for the existence of the highest good. Nonetheless, Kant completely agrees with the Western tradition that the totality of being is itself a being. This is Kant's second compromise with onto-theo-logy. Levinas criticizes him on this point but judges the preservation of the transcendental ideal in morality a great achievement. For Levinas, however, God transcends any concept and cannot be perceived, imagined, or thought and so reduced to an entity, an individual, or an ideal.

The God of onto-theo-logy is dead not only for Nietzsche and Heidegger, but also for Levinas. However, Emmanuel Levinas himself is a religious philosopher and promotes a different understanding of God, i.e. of Infinity, more precisely of God's relationship with the world, man, language, and time. Levinas repeatedly asserts that he should not be considered an irrationalist. Religion and ethics are not irrational in Kant's or Levinas' philosophies. Levinas' humanism makes him wonder

if man is only interested in being and knowledge. Are humans not also beyond being, and can we not speak, as in Kant's case, of two different kinds of rationality, one of knowledge and the other of morality? These are questions addressed by Levinas not only to Kant, but to the entire philosophical tradition that has come down to us.

2. From thinking to conversation

Levinas agrees that the appearances of things fill thinking, but they are also spoken, said, reported. For this intrigue of the conversation, the other, the interlocutor, is needed. In Kant's *Critiques*, language and conversation are not thematized because, as Levinas says, if we are all of the same mind, what is there to talk about? According to Kant, the subject is solitary like any other and this is the Self that thinks and acts autonomously. The Self is simply multiplied when it comes to others, because everyone is I for himself. The Kantian subject is monological. The whole drama of his existence unfolds as an theoretical and practical activity of his various abilities. With Heidegger, *Dasein*'s structures are still the same for everyone, but each individual *Dasein* is its own and singular being together with others in the world. Because of our singularity and our existence with each other, Heidegger assigns a large role to language. However, in Heidegger's philosophy, speaking is first of all a response/pronunciation of the call of Being and only secondarily people's speech. For Heidegger, Being itself is Transcendence, which is revealed only through human language. For Levinas, however, a direct response to Transcendence, which is not Being but God's Infinity, is impossible. Each individual is a subject in relationship with God, but this connection is indirect, possible only through my responsibility for the other person, only with whom I can talk and establish contact. God is absolutely the Other and beyond all measure compared to us as finite beings.

Levinas agrees with Heidegger that what has already been said or is being said constitutes the informative side of any conversation and can be completely cliché. It articulates always events and aspects of being. Then language and speech, depersonalized, are without any direction and could become even faceless idle chatter. But apart from the meaning of the said, another question arises: Is there not another significance which relates to the saying? Perhaps there is an intelligibility not only of reason, but an intelligibility of the attitude towards the other, who for Levinas is the interlocutor. When meeting someone, I have al-

ready begun to respond to her presence even before becoming aware of her and the meeting. The encounter itself is God's finger in human destiny. Levinas insists that my responsibility is there even before any knowledge or volitional decision. The original meaning is not found in the silence of Being, nor is it contained in the language reduced to what is said. In the articulation of what exists, i.e. in the communication of any contents, language expresses only the ontological meanings of words and phrases. However, in communication itself, which for Levinas is the intrigue of responsibility, in the very giving of the word to one's neighbor, another meaning is found that precedes and regulates the meanings relating to existence and non-existence. At this primordial level where the question of the saying itself is raised and decided if it can at all be abstracted from what is said, the moral meaning, the meaning of meaning, not the meaning of being and nothingness, is determined. Saying is a relationship between the other and me that cannot be understood on the basis of rationality related to the foundation; it is not a response to being but expresses rationality inherent in "beyond being". The temporality of time is one's connection with Infinity, which is never direct but is realized through one's face-to-face encounter with the other. Time unfolds as stepping into the trace of God, Who "comes to mind" in my encounter with the other and for Whom my responsibility bears witness. This attitude, or rather this closeness created by responsibility for the other, is moral, even when I try to ignore or destroy it.

The other concerns me not in an indicative, but in an imperative, says Levinas. With both her presence and her absence, the other commands everything I think, say, do, experience, and even what I am. Levinas' imperative is different than Kant's. According to Kant, the universal moral law requires that I should not treat the other as a means to my ends, but always as an end in itself. For Levinas, however, it is not about the law, but about God's commandment "Thou shalt not kill!"; Kant's humanism, although it enacts respect and non-instrumental treatment of humans, is insufficient to understand humanity and humanism. For Kant, everyone is equal in terms of autonomy, but from Levinas' perspective, with such equality, intersubjectivity is impossible. Intersubjectivity as face-to-face encounter is the prerequisite for the unfolding of every conversation and every interaction and presupposes diversity and inequality. Equality, a concept originating in Greece as Levinas notes, has been taken for granted, but common conceptualiza-

tion and self-understandability perhaps are an obstacle to an authentic encounter with the other. My indifference to her and my preliminary equating her with myself according to the principle of "autonomy for everyone" is tantamount to indifference and moral murder. In a face-to-face encounter, it is not about the primacy of autonomy but rather the heteronomous order of the other to answer. It is unspoken, tacit, but heard by me when I meet her face. It empowers me to make decisions. Only by following the command can I independently choose how to answer, but the intrigue between the other and me is already present, and responsibility has fallen on my shoulders. It is not commitment and intentionality coming from my side. Inequality here is not a political relationship of domination and submission but rather ethical, a responsibility for the other in which the moral constitution of my subjectness consists. For Levinas, the concepts of heteronomy and autonomy have a different content compared to Kant's. The presence of the other is heteronomous and *a priori* because only after hearing and obeying the silent command "Thou shalt not kill!", I can determine my answers autonomously and *a posteriori*.

The face of the Other in the meeting is already an appeal to me and awaits a response. This relationship is not symmetrical and reciprocal, which means at least that the path from the other to me and the path from me to the other are different and irreducible. The other is high-ranking because God commands me through her, while I am called, chosen to answer. I cannot escape but respond because even disrespect or indifference is already a response loaded with moral significance. And I can't stop answering because the change and liveliness of the Face facing me requires incessant attention. This is the true otherness of the other. It cannot be fixed as an identity but rather represents the transcending of my idea of her and going beyond. As Buber pointed out, if the interlocutor is "you", this pronoun is in the second person in contrast to its anchoring and closing in my ideas and thoughts, in definitions and indicative descriptions that use third-person pronouns such as he, she, it, and they. According to Levinas, even as "you", the other is not some immutable and definable entity but is this incessant entry into my world, as well as the exit from it. The other and Kant's thing in itself can be compared in that the other exists in itself and appears phenomenally in my knowledge, but the difference emerges in that the other is an interlocutor, which cannot be anything, but only the Face. Unlike reason,

whose meanings are shared, general, and common, the other has her own subjectivity with her own perceptions of things, which are inaccessible to me. From there, she calls me to answer and withdraws after my answers, while I am accordingly constantly responsible. Certainly, neither the other nor my I coincide with Kantian noumena and transcendental subjects.

3. The Question of Time

For Levinas, it is not freedom that precedes responsibility, but vice versa, responsibility precedes freedom. I always have one more responsibility than the other, and that is my responsibility for her, while her responsibility for me is her own business (although I am responsible even for it). No *Da-sein* whether as a pro-noun or as an *aletheia* of existence fully corresponds to the Face. Beyond the form and plasticity of its materiality, to which it is not reducible, there is an incessant liveliness of expression and of speech, an incessant transcendence. The Face is ambivalence itself: it is part of the being as an appearance in the midst of phenomena, but it refers to the beyond being in its moral meaning as an epiphany. With the other, more precisely with my address to the Face in response to her heteronomous appeal to me, a moral connection is established and through it the ambivalence and irreversibility of time itself is created: every moment is the same and is different and unique. My responsibility is never-ending like the otherness of the other. The other is repeatedly otherness, alterity. The passage of time cannot be stopped or be reversed no matter how hard one tries or imagines one can. This is also the case in interpersonal encounters, where Levinas emphasizes that time is the connection not only with what passes, but indirectly with what never passes. The temporality of time is my connection with Infinity, which is never direct but rather is realized through my face-to-face meeting with the other.

Infinity itself cannot be the end of any relationship and cannot be included as one of the terms in some connection. Infinity is revealed without appearing, without showing itself as infinity in human relations, because it always exceeds them - at every moment it is beyond the establishment of closeness with the other and cannot be grasped. As Levinas says, God is present in our relationships when He is absent, leaving everything in the hands of men and not directly interfering in the human tragicomedy. God is not here in the world or anywhere else, cannot be

caught in the present, in actualization, and he is not located anywhere at all and cannot be known. As for Kant, His existence cannot be proven or disproven.

According to Kant, God and the immortality of the soul are necessary only for the mind in order to be able to think about the co-ordination of happiness and virtue. Levinas reminds us that the root of the word *religion* in Latin means to bind inseparably. Usually it is about the relationship between man and God that is inseparable bond but it is mediated by the other human. This bond is, for Levinas, time, which is neither linear nor dialectical; it depends on Infinity's non-in-difference to people. God is glorified through one's care for the other. He sends His commandments to each of us individually. He has appointed me as "my brother's keeper" and called me to be responsible for the other. Through my responsibility for the other, I respond to God indirectly through the closeness established with the first coming. That is why the other is the neighbor. The relationship is asymmetrical and non-reciprocal, selfless and without compensation: an unceasing attention to the otherness of the other, for whom I worry. The Levinasian other is an abstract absolute not because she is omnipotent but rather because she is mortal. Morally, she comes first, and for me she is the primary source of everything that happens. My sovereign self, my autonomy, my intentionality, or my expansion, taken as spontaneous and natural, are called into question. As a moral human (although this is a tautology because moral and human coincide), my Self is not in the nominative but rather the accusative case. My subjectivity is determined by the possibility of questioning my justice in order to protect the right of the other and make room for her (under the sun).

Time, insofar as it is a connection between the beginning and the end, the time of existence, is measurable and synchronized, finite. Being in the middle, we recall or reconstruct the forgotten or unremembered beginning, and we anticipate or project the unreached end that is approaching. The time of beyond being, however, is no longer synchrony, but diachrony itself. For Kant, the supernatural world established by the moral imperative is timeless. Levinas reinforces this point: beyond being not only is the time of ends over, but there is also no supersensible world of ideas and transcendental subjects. Diachrony coincides with the transcendence of all moments in the duration of time, no matter how stretched and long they may be. It is openness itself, de-totalization and

de-formalization of synchronous time. For Kant, time is *a priori* form that is preliminary to any experience although only in possibility but is actualized and further participates in all possible experience. For Levinas, it is not experience that is the source of meaning but rather questioning it. This is not a new, already ethical experience, different from the cognitive experience; “It is rather a question of challenging EXPERIENCE as a source of meaning, of the limit of transcendental apperception, of the end of synchrony and its reversible terms”¹.

According to Levinas, what is said, turned to the world, in language immobilizes and freezes meanings, while saying puts them back into circulation. In this way, another meaning has already been generated and placed in a different context – a meaning, because something unsaid has to be said. Once said, however, it will again be questioned and transcended by new saying. Saying always goes beyond what is said even when repeating because it revises, transforms, cancels, or re-says it in the course of the conversation. The existent and the existence through the meanings in what is said receive form, wholeness, and completeness and have a principle, an *arche*, while the saying, which goes beyond being, breaks every form and makes a breakthrough in every totality, being itself an-archic. Diachrony is precisely anarchic – before and beyond the principle, out of range of any *arche*, without beginning.

Kant decrees that I am free in my respect for the moral law, although I theoretically belong to the world of necessity. According to Kant, there is a world that is intelligible and accessible thanks to hope. There is motivation for actions as a result of hope, and it carries some meaning. In existence determined by death, in this epic of being, there are things that are not in the dimension of being. There are meanings irreducible to the given. This hope cannot be theoretically confirmed as another truth, but in practice it is the reasonable freedom of taking actions accounting for the imperative and doing them for the sake of it. Levinas explains that “this hope happens in time, and in time it goes beyond time”². It is as if in existence, which according to Heidegger is being towards death, the hope that is against death is wedged.

In the ever of hope there is a different temporality that is not identical with that of being and non-being, although death and its annihila-

¹ Emmanuel Levinas, *Humanisme de l'autre homme* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1972), 14

² Emmanuel Levinas, *Dieu, la mort et le temps* (Paris: Editions Grasset & Fasquelle, 1993), 72

tion are irremovable. Levinas uses rarely the word hope in order to pay tribute to Kant in denoting this intrigue, different from the epic of being. Often instead of "hope", "desire for the other" is used. But this is not a hope in the usual sense of the word, which coincides with the expectation that something will happen in time. It is another kind of hope that resists all knowledge, comprehension, understanding, and foreboding and is an openness to infinity, where time and death themselves take on a different meaning. The reconciliation of happiness and virtue needs a "beyond" regardless of the ontological adventure and against everything that ontology teaches us. Hope has to do with the immeasurable because it paradoxically contains, as well as the idea, more than it can contain. This contrasts with knowledge, which in principle corresponds to what is known since knowledge adheres to measure. However, in the moral closeness with the other, which does not depend on separation and remoteness in measurable time and space, the transcendence inherent in hope is revealed as beyond knowledge and beyond "being and non-being". The beyond is the diachrony that transcends the totalization, primitiveness, and imperialism of the Ego, as well as the synchronization of its time. This imperialist Ego wants to be the image and likeness of God and to be the master of time, but it lives like a coward, clinging to its allotted finite time and trembling before death. Diachrony is liberation from my time. Levinas returns after Heidegger to Kant and hope not because it strives for God and the immortality of the soul as its ends (although unattainable) but because it is contained in the responsibility for the Other. The desire for the other, that is, the responsibility to and for her, the hope, leads us along the trace of that for which there is no end and purpose – the Infinity of God.