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PhD THESIS

– SUMMARY –

**THE HEIDEGGERIAN QUESTION OF BEING BETWEEN
CHIASMUS AND PARADOX**

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Key-words

Being, chiasmus, paradox, enowing, essential sway, Beyng, simple-inversion, metaphysics, the ontic-ontological relation, the ontological difference, the between, the middle point, cleavage, abyss, the turning, techno-science, will, re-presentational thinking, the frame, detachment, ethics.

ARGUMENT

The following paper wishes to analyze the way in which the question of being, the central theme of Martin Heidegger's thinking, is taken up starting from the topic of the chiasmus and of the paradox. Accordingly, in this study we will take into account the fact the Heidegger's thinking does not remain unchanged over the course of the years, actually enduring essential transformations starting with the latter half of the '30's, a period which also marks his adherence to the Nazi movement. The turn (*die Kehre*) of thinking, as this radical transformation is widely known, implies on the one hand a renunciation of the central categories of *Being and Time* – the likes of “phenomenology”, “ontology” or “the analytic of *Dasein*” – and on the other the shifting the entire undertaking from an alleged centrality of man towards one of beyng. In the end one could consider that this was the main shortcoming of the first period of thought since the phenomenon of being in general is never reached, the last part of *Being of Time* never even seeing the press.

Although the chiasmus gets to be generally used after the turn of Heidegger's thinking – as D. Janicaud and F. Matéi so aptly point out – we will try to prove the fact that the chiasmus might be considered a guiding thread for the way in which the question of being is laid down in his first period of thought. So, even if the occurrences of the chiasmus during this first period of thought are rare and apparently unessential we will point out the way in which the chiasmus may be related to the starting point of the existential analytic of *Dasein*. Phrased differently, the existential analytic of *Dasein* and the chiasmus have in common the central trait of the chiasmus as such, namely the inversion. But if in the case of the chiasmus it's about the inversion of the terms in order to form an inverted symmetry, in the case of the analytic of *Dasein* it's about the inversion of a tradition tenet “essence precedes existence” with “existence precedes essence”. Of

course this inversion that we are mentioning here does not represent a superficial matter as it might be hastily considered, a simple word play, and must be grasped in its essential dimension: the relation between the ontological and the ontical level. This relation, who defines the whole of *Being and Time* – and accordingly of the first period of thought – seems to be less detached from metaphysics that Heidegger would have been willing to admit at the time. This is one of the ways in which the failure of the first period of thinking and the consequent radical transformation implied by the thinking of the ontological difference. To be more precise, the relation between the ontological and the ontical level implies a type of distancing from tradition that enacts a simple-inversion that leaves everything identical at a structural level. That is why, even though the guiding thread of the analytic of *Dasein* is no timeless essence of man but actually the existence and being-in-the-world, the way in which the relation between the existential (also the ontological one) and the ontical level still implies some kind of metaphysical remnants.

Or, the turn has precisely the role of radicalizing the interrogation on the ontological difference – which in the first period of thought was just presupposed – the accent moving from the being of man towards being as such. That is the reason why most of the concepts that were formerly addressing the being and the agency of man, now must be understood starting from the destiny of being. Thus, *Dasein* becomes *Da-sein*, as the t/here that brings forth the time-space of enowing, decision becomes de-cision as an epochal movement of beyng (this is the way in which we can point out the difference between “*Sein*” and “*Seyn*” only at a graphical level), the understanding of *Dasein* becomes mindfulness, as a way to refuse the type of will for control that is proper to techno-scientific knowledge, temporality becomes the time-space (*Zeitraum*) of enowing and the world transforms from a workshop to the fourfold made up by gods, mortals, sky and earth. All these transformations describe the renunciation of the centrality of man and the refocusing of Heidegger’s thinking towards the ontological fold of beyng. It is precisely this fold, this cleavage, which makes up the radical difference between the two periods of thought. And it is also precisely the thing to which the chiasmus points to: the relation between the ontical and the ontological level is no more considered in a unidirectional fashion (from the ontical toward the ontological), but is now considered as bidirectional and oriented towards the abyss of the lack of reason that is proper to the cleavage. If in the first period negativity was more likely a characteristic of the ontical level – the ontological one being named on several occasion the “positive” one and always centered on the phenomenon of manifestation, disclosedness and

intelligibility – in the second period negativity assumes a more central role: from the very beginning of history being retreats and refuses. Thus, this kind of negativity leaves traces even at the level of Heidegger's text, a situation pointed out by the different paradoxes that he uses. But we mustn't understand these paradoxes as being just a continuation of the way in which paradoxes were conceived during the long history of philosophy – as coincidentia oppositorum or the identity between Being and Nothing – but in a totally different way: the tension between the two opposing terms must not be interpreted as a dialectic or any kind of progression of the stages of being, but more likely a way in which we can grasp the abyss of the cleavage between being and beings. More so, as we will try to prove, we must firstly understand the paradox not as the different occurrences of paradoxical formulations in Heidegger's text, but as the way in which he tries to describe the enowing of being through the language of metaphysics, which it normally exceeds. Is thus philosophy condemned to silence, in order for it not to relapse into metaphysics, or is there an alternative to this silence? As we will try to demonstrate silence is more likely a tool of the mystic, but Heidegger was not a mystic – although as Caputo aptly shows we might consider the existence of an mystical element in Heidegger's thought – and his solution was to speak about being from out of the language of metaphysics. The fundamental requirement of Heidegger's thought, to start thinking from being and not from beings, must be understood in a similar fashion. Yet, it is obviously impossible to begin thinking from being since being never "is" as a being is, but we can think the thing (das Ding) from out of his relationship with the fourfold and not with mathematical, physical complex of characteristics. This kind of reference is termed by Heidegger in a way that brings him in direct connection with Meister Eckhart, and this term is Gelassenheit. This concept does not point to a detachment from things and retreat in a supposed mystical union with the principle, but rather points to a detachment towards things, letting things be the way they properly are, without trying to determine them. This is Heidegger's approach to technology: without demonizing the essence of technology (the Gestell), the counter-essence of enowing, we must behave towards the technical devices in a detached way that allows us to view them as simple instruments. Or, this is exactly the place in which the ethical and political horizon of Heidegger's thought opens up. But if "only a god can save us now" and the philosopher as a guardian and protector of the truth of being must simply prepare a leap into the new beginning of thought, what is there to be done in the face of the wayward advance of techno-science? Although Heidegger never took up ethics, the

problem of how to slow down or stop the covering up of the truth of being, and its subsequent transformation into correctness, disposability and production-consumption, is still a very important one. Now more than ever we must find an alternative route to this kind of problem since Heidegger's thought will forever be linked to his adhesion to the Nazi movement.

Section I. The question of being and the chiasmus of the first period

In the first section of this chapter we will focus on the relationship between the question of being and that of the chiasmus. Firstly, we will address the typology of the chiasmus which Janicaud and Matéi so skillfully construct in their book *Heidegger. From metaphysics to Thought*. Starting from this typology and a prior dealing with the topic of the chiasmus we will try to show that the connection between the chiasmus and the question of being must primarily be thought starting not from the occurrences of the chiasmus in this first period of thought, but from the structural role it implies. We will try to show from the very beginning that we cannot think the chiasmus outside the way in which being is grasped in *Being and Time*, this being also the reason why the first part will be a recollection of Heidegger's view on being. Thus, starting from the phenomenon of meaning and the phenomenon of Dasein's spatiality, we will try to point out the way in which the relation between the ontical and the ontological level always falls back to a simple-inversion. Actually the reason why we named the chiasmus of the first period of thought as a simple-inversion chiasmus is because it is about operating a simple-inversion between two metaphysical terms, while the metaphysical structure remains intact. Yet, the chiasmus must be looked after in the courses of the phenomenology of religion at the beginning of Heidegger's Freiburg period. In this early period the chiasmus is considered to be no more than an artifice and a word play, the main focus being of these courses being the temporality of the second coming of Jesus. Proceeding from this temporality and from the early Christian vocation, Heidegger focuses on the phenomenon of time and he will do so up until *Being and Time*. Even if these courses helped Heidegger quit the kind of scientific phenomenology that was proper to Husserl, focusing more on the facticity of existence, they also downplayed the importance that the chiasmus will come to have in the second period of thought.

As for the phenomenon of the simple-inversion this can be best seen in the case of *Dasein*'s spatiality. Closeness and distance exist only at the ontical level while *Dasein*'s spatial existential is called dis-tancing (*Ent-fernung*). Thus, negativity can be found only at the ontical level (distance) while the ontological level has a positive character (dis-tancing) understood as a condition of possibility – although a factual one – of both positive (closeness) and negative (remoteness) characters. We can thus see that even if the starting point of Heidegger's ontology is not essence but existence the way in which the ontological level is conceived is extremely similar to the traditional and metaphysical way which Heidegger will eventually criticize in the *Contributions*. This reading of the analytic of *Dasein* is supported first hand by the way in which Heidegger chooses to conceive his question of being as a question about the meaning of being. Meaning is the intelligibility of what can be articulated in understanding and in this sense we can see for one more time that this phenomenon of intelligibility is central to *Being and Time*. Even if the truth is grasped as dis-closedness the phenomenon of disclosing, manifestation and intelligibility are more important than hiding and closing.

Once the phenomenon of authenticity enters the discussion we can have an even better view of the different metaphysical remnants of Heidegger's thought. The critique of authenticity, that in this study will revolve around Lewis's position and critique, must not be tied only to what we mentioned earlier – the focus on intelligibility – but must also take into account the type of politics that is present in Heidegger's view of the community or the people. The type of political Platonism that Heidegger shows (this is at least the way Lewis puts it) revolves around an illegitimate transition from the level of the individual *Dasein* to the level of the community. The adhesion to the Nazi movement cannot be seen as a simple mistake, a mistake understandable in a very hard context, but must be seen as having its roots precisely in the kind of political thinking that Heidegger develops in the §64 of *Being and Time*. The transition from the individual analysis of *Dasein* and the transfer of what that entails (being-towards-death, conscience, resoluteness) towards the communal level represents an shaky move and a kind of Platonism (since there is a relation of *mimesis* between the two levels). Yet it is exactly the insufficient thinking about the ontological difference and his adhesion to the Nazi movement that make Heidegger's thinking to undergo a radical transformation.

Section II. The question of Beyng. The turn, chiasmus and paradox

In this second section we will show the way in which Heidegger's thinking transforms itself and in order to do that we will resort to what is commonly called the second *Being and Time*, and that is the *Contributions*. In this book Heidegger drops all ties to the rigidity of academia choosing to write in a poetical, if not mystical, way. Instead of chapters, as any work in the academia would have it, we find joinings which do not replace chapters but are more likely in connection with the historical development of beyng. As we were saying, Heidegger drops categories like "phenomenology" or "ontology", the interrogation moves from the meaning of being towards the truth of beyng and the preeminence of *Dasein* transforms itself in the reservation of man's thinking and willing in the face of beyng retreat. The shift from an interrogation about the meaning of being towards one focused on the truth of beyng has the role of assuming the negative: beyng is from the very beginning retreat and hesitant refusal. It is not a lack of knowledge or what that made beyng retreat, but its very own negativity that did it. The whole history is reinterpreted starting from beyng while the will of man to re-present starting from what is constantly present must be overcome by a thinking that lets beyng be. But the truth of beyng is enowing, which must be said is not a new name for creation, production or generation, but leaves these names behind, as it mustn't be conceived as the first engine, first cause or first principle.

Enowing is the granting of the ownhood to beings and their founding in beyng, but not as an unidirectional dynamics – from beyng to beings – but as a bidirectional dynamic: beyng is also founded and enowned by beings. This play of opposites, of contrasts, is the strife between earth and sky, mortals and gods. This strife which points back to beyng essential negativity is also essential. Yet, this tension and strife must not be understood in a dialectical fashion since both of the terms in strife are turned towards each other. By being turned toward each other they are also turned to their middle point, to the between as the abyss of the cleavage. Or, it is in this point that we can see the chiasmus pointing to this kind of dynamic of turning. As we will show, the essence of the chiasmus is not the inversion, but the turning. Though the turning the terms that are in strife are turned toward each other, toward their mutual point of origination which is the enowing that grants them their own. The way in which the chiasmus is used in this second period of thought gives us the first hint of how we should start thinking from beyng and not from

beings. So, even if we start from a being, all of a sudden we enact a change of tonality (an example would be the one from the *Principle of Reason* which implies the transformation of “nothing is without ground/reason” to “nothing is without ground/reason”) that shakes the metaphysical way of conceiving from its very basis and opens up a space for a new reading.

Or, it is precisely this new, different reading, this change of tonality, which introduces the paradox. The topic of the paradox is not that much related to the incommunicability of being that needs to be grasped through contradictory constructions, as it is related to the strife and the play of the tension, to the essential negativity of being. More so, the problem that we were referring to earlier – that philosophy might be condemned to silence, especially because knowing is described in a totally negative fashion – might have a solution in this other tonality. Consequently, it is not about renouncing the language of metaphysics or inventing a language from scratch (that wouldn't even be possible) as it is about operating these turns in what gets said, turns that make possible a different tonality, a different resonance in which thinking can move beyond metaphysics. From this point of view the thing, which gathers the fourfold, has the same kind of role: even if it's only a being the way we conceive it is not from the mathematical and physical characteristics that it possesses, but from the bringing together of the ones that are opposed and strifing (earth and sky, mortals and gods). That is precisely the reason why the detachment that Heidegger preaches is not a detachment from, but towards things. This detachment does not imply a renunciation of the technological devices as it does not imply a return to some kind of archaic way of life that would imply losing the comforts and welfare brought by scientific progress. It implies more likely a distance towards these things in order for them not to control us, so we can use them freely whenever there is the case. This is the sense of *Gelassenheit* that Heidegger opposes to the *Gestell*, the will to dominate and transform everything into a calculable item.

Final remarks

It is precisely in this point of the argument regarding technology that the discussion about ethics and politics might appear. There is a long line of authors – starting with Levinas and all the way to Lewis or Caputo – that point out that Heidegger has no ethical preoccupations. As if

the advance of techno-science and of the will to dominate and subdue the planet that is proper to the calculatory reason of metaphysics that transforms every being in a commodity ready for the industrial cycle of production and consumption might be stopped by a tranquil waiting for a hint. Although Heidegger's critique of will also applies to the will that wants to oppose this assault of techno-science we cannot help but wonder if human agency cannot be thought of despite the categories of metaphysics. Heidegger would imply that trying to change things, typical of human agency is still bound to an understanding of action as will to control and dominate, but couldn't we feasibly think of a concept of action that would not resort to such an understanding? Heidegger's critique of the main ideologies of the past century is actually a critique of modernity and from this point of view one can see an opening towards ethics and politics from this point bringing together different traditions of the left that criticize modernity, industrialism, Marxist humanism or the economic determinism of history. It is not about using Heidegger's thought for a different agenda, it is about opening a path of interrogation and thinking that remains faithful to the Heidegger thought, but that also takes into account the present situation. The talk of an ethic in Heidegger could start from the critique of the will to power, or the critique of hierarchy (understood as the hierarchy of the stages of being, being understood as $\delta\nu\tau\omega\varsigma \delta\nu$) and we can find such efforts in the works of Vattimo, Zabala, Lacoue-Labarthe or Reiner Schurmann. Since the thinking of being starting from the chiasmus and the paradox offers so many tools in order to conceive such a path of thinking maybe it is time to respond to the distress of the lack of distress proper to a consumerist and neoliberal society. From this point of view to enact a certain path of thinking is to respond to this distress that we are under today, the distress of being's total abandonment and the total domination of *Gestell*.