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Martin Heidegger on Temporality: Its Moral Implication on Society

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Abstract

Martin Heidegger is one of the contemporary philosophers; he is a mystic reflecting on Being. He believes that all philosophers from ancient to contemporary periods had forgotten Being. His contribution to philosophy is to recover the real meaning of Being. For him, Being is spacio-temporal which means Being is anchored in space and time. According to Heidegger “Being” is a mystery that can be approached but it cannot be penetrated. Heidegger’s temporality includes: past, present and future and they are interconnected. Heidegger’s discussion on time as future does not involve lasting future but immediate future. Therefore, Heidegger’s temporality lacks “eternity”. Indeed, any society that the members accept only “now” and “immediate future” and they do not believe in “eternity” life becomes a do-or-die affair. It means that the society is materialistic, and we are running the race of self-survival, self-preservation, that we cannot donate for the welfare of others and also for good neighbourliness. Our method is to reflect on the original works of Heidegger and commentaries written on him by other authors to see the implications for the society.

Introduction

In all spheres of human endeavour, be it in the market, schools, offices, political set ups, churches and other places of interest, the issue of temporality plays a vital role. Time waits for nobody; time is the only commodity that does not have a second-hand

value. No one has respect outside his own time; people also say, “I had it before is not property”, which means that one had before and now does not have indicates that he/she is lacking. If one comes earlier, before the time, he will be misunderstood, if he comes late he will be rejected by the people, if he comes at the right time he is a hero. In this work, we are reflecting on what time is, Heidegger’s view on temporality, its moral implication to the society, and based on these, conclusion will be reached. It is pertinent to begin with the concept of time.

The Concept of Time

Generally, time is the continuous passage of existence in which events pass from a state of potentiality in the future, through the present, to a state of finality in the past. Time is derived from the Latin word *Tempus*. Temporal means what is in time. It contrasts with what is timeless or non-temporal. Temporality can also be a synonym for time. Thus, what is temporal means what is within the limits and constraints of time. Hence, temporality is time-ness or transient, passing and what has beginning, progressing and ending in time. In this sense, the temporality of man’s existence means the timeness or transientness of man’s existence. Man is seen as being in passage through time; it is the non-permanentness of human existence.

However, philosophers were not silent about time. Omoregbe (1990) commenting on Aristotle on time says:

Time according to Aristotle, is the measurement of motion according to before and after. Thus, the concept of time is inseparable from change or motion, for there can be time only where there is motion. Consequently, it is only a being that is subject to change or motion that can have experience of time. Hence, the eternal and immutable being (God) is outside the realm of time and is therefore timeless (p.1)

From the citation above Aristotle believes that it is only a being that is subject to change that can experience time but God who is eternal is beyond time. In the medieval period, St. Augustine believes time is an elusive concept; if you try to grasp it, it eludes your grasp. What is time? If nobody asks me says Augustine “I know it”. But if I wish to explain to him who asks, I no longer know it. Various difficulties perplexed Augustine, according to him, neither past, nor future is, only the present. The present is a moment; and time can only be measured while it is passing. Nevertheless, time is a mental phenomenon; it exists only in the mind. Commenting on Augustine on time, Omoregbe added: “God is outside the realm of time, he is eternal. For him, there is no future, no past; everything is eternally present to him. He neither remembers nor expects since all things are eternally present to him”. Still in the medieval period, Aquinas made a clear distinction between time and eternity. Anne Fremantle reflecting on Aquinas on time says: “Time is the numbering of movement whereas, eternity is interminable, that is, it

has no beginning nor end.” For Aquinas, eternity is also called whole, not because it has parts, but because it is wanting in nothing. Indeed, it seems that eternity does not differ from time, and according to Aquinas, because time ends in eternity.

For two measures of duration cannot exist together, unless one is part of the other; for instance, two days or two hours cannot be together; nevertheless, we may say that a day and an hour are together, considering an hour as part of a day. But eternity and time occur together, each of which imports a certain measure of duration. Since therefore eternity is not part of time, for as much as eternity exceeds time, and includes time, it seems time is part of eternity.

In the modern period, Korner believes nothing exists in this world that does not exist in space and time. Commenting on space and time in Korner (1970) says:

The Permanent features of a changing thing or activity are often called its form. Since situation in space and time are invariant features of perception Kant speaks of them as forms of perception. The matter he takes to be the result of sensation; that is the result of our being affected by objects (p.37)

It means the use of analogy; space and time are the spectacles are irremovable. Objects can be seen only through them. Finally, the Africans have an idea of time. African time is not clock time but events. Even some of the names we answer is given because of the time or period we were born, for instances, among the Igbos, “Uzoamaka” means ‘open way’, meaning that the child was delivered on the road and not in the hospital; among the Ogonis, “Gbegeta” means “money has finished” meaning that the person was born at the time the family was going through difficulties. For the Igbos, also, we have “Obianuju” which means that the person was born during time of plenty or wealth. For Ikwerre people, “Amaechi” means ‘tomorrow will be good’ or ‘who knows tomorrow?’.

Heidegger on Temporality

Heidegger’s philosophy centres on Being and Heidegger accepts that Being is anchored in time. For Heidegger, temporality has three marks — that is, the past, present and future. Hence, each person is born in time, lives in time and dies in time. Although man is a temporal being, he could still achieve something before death, everything in this world is transitory. Indeed, Heidegger believes that Being, Dasein and time are co-related. Commenting on Heidegger on time Omoregbe (1991) had this to say: “Heidegger distinguished between two kinds of time, namely, objective qualitative time and subjective existential time. The former is the clock time, consisting as it does of irreversible passing moments” (p. 74).

In the same vein Omoregbe (1991) wrote: “It is only the present moment that really exists in objective time. Existential time is however different. In it, the past, present and future are inseparable for these constitute the structure of human existence” (p.74).

In understanding Heidegger’s time, Omoregbe explained that Heidegger’s time is different from the traditional idea of time as clock or calendar. Time, for Heidegger is existential. Heidegger calls temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*), which is distinguished from vulgar conception of time (*Zeit*). For Heidegger, temporality could be described as time understood as the condition of possibility of understanding Being. Therefore, Being is seen as temporal, that is as running its course in time.

Omoregbe (1991) added:

To live an authentic life man must be conscious of the temporal nature of his existence. This means that he must be conscious of his possibilities in the past which can be repeated, his possibilities in the future which he anticipates and shapes by his choices and decisions in the present. The present is the moment of decision the “moment of vision” (p.75-75).

Omoregbe, is saying that to be a mature man one must be aware of his transient nature and project for the future. But he cannot project well if he does not take decisions by himself. And also, the present is the moment of vision. For Omoregbe, reflecting on Heidegger he believes that “vision” is different from trance and dream. “Trans” means receiving a message from someone, whereas vision is that one is looking at the message for oneself or for others. Dream involves sleeping where one does not have a control of what is happening to him.

Sciaccia (1962) asserted: “It is when man sees himself in temporal dimension that he attains integrity and authenticity”. Temporary thus brings to the fore the possibility of Dasein to realize that it is a being anchored in time and as such temporality reveals man in his fallen state as “das Man”, it reveals also the meaning of authentic care. So, true self-awareness brings together the concepts of nothing and of time; which determine the nature of Dasein’s relation to the world he is concerned with.

Heidegger (1982) stated: “What has to be shown in this temporality is the condition of the possibility of all understanding of being, being is understood and conceptually comprehended by means of time” (p. 274).

For Heidegger, time is tied to history and time is identified with Being. Heidegger believes that Being “is” and whatever is must be located in time and space. He goes to disclose three kinds of temporality, which include:

1. Dasein’s inauthentic temporality
2. Dasein’s authentic temporality

3. Original temporality

Dasein's Inauthentic Temporality

This mode of time refers to our unengaged “average” way in which we regard time. According to Heidegger (1962), “It arises from in authentic temporality, which has a source of its own. The conceptions of ‘future’ ‘past’ and ‘present’ have, first arises in terms of the in authentic way of understanding time” (p. 374). It is the ‘past we forget’ and the “future we expect” all without decisiveness and resolute understanding. Heidegger seems to consider that this mode of temporality is the temporal dimension of disseverance directionality which deal with everyday actions. As such, inauthentic temporality must be founded in an authentic basis of some sort.

Dasein's Authentic Temporality

This is the resolute mode of temporal existence. Authentic temporality is realized when Dasein becomes aware of its own finite existence. This temporality has to do with one's grasp of his/her life as a whole from one's own unique perspective, life gains meaning as one's own life. Project is bounded by the sense of one's realization that he/she is not immortal. This mode of time appears to have a normative function within Heidegger's theory. He often refers to inauthentic mode of time as lacking some primordial quality which authentic temporality possess.

Original Temporality

Original temporality is the formal structure of Dasein's temporality itself. In addition to its spatial being—in-the world, Dasein also exists essentially as “Projection” Projection is Oriented towards the future and this futuristic orientation regulates our concern by constantly realizing various possibilities. Thus, temporality is characterized formally as this dynamic structure of “a future which makes present in the process of having been”. ‘We have what we call moments of temporality. Heidegger refers to the future, the present and the past as the three moments of temporality. They could be referred to as the ecstasies of temporality. He emphasized this in his book titled *Being and Time* when he says: “we therefore call phenomena of the future, the character of temporality”.

For Heidegger, we are fundamentally temporal. The basic possibility of existence, the authenticity and in authenticity of Dasein, are grounded ontologically on possible temporality. Temporality encodes time present, what we have at hand now, today, this week, this month. It flows into past, what we can speak of because we have seen and lived.

Heidegger's time is existential, and I think there is a necessary link between Dasein, Being and time. According to Unah (2002),

The human being has destiny. To explain this, Heidegger introduces the concept of existential time and historicity. Existential time is my time that is the span of my life and the basic tense of existential time is the future. My time- is finite and human being as time is being unto death. Personal time is finite in the sense that it has a beginning and an end. Not everyone has a destiny. It is achieved only by the rare individual, in a situation of dread, comes face to face with his own nothingness and has tried to shape his life in the light of that encounter.

In conclusion with destiny, Heidegger discusses time and history; He does this to a great extent, because he sees time as very central to all reflections involving ontology (p. 259).

In understanding Heidegger, Being is not to be understood in the Greek sense as static, necessary, unchanging and eternal. It is essentially historical. Human existence is extended not only in space, but also primarily in time. Human life is not only concentrated in the present, the human being lived in the past and especially in the future directedness. The true meaning of man's life lies ahead of him always in the future in the project that is not achieved. The human being is not a historical being primarily because he is implicated in a vast, on-going, irrevocable historical process, because he must live in his century, adopt the manners and wear the clothes of the epoch and so on. The human being is historical as source of history; it is he who gives definition and direction to life and thus gives meaning to the world he lives.

However, all human life is a leap into the "not yet" of the future. Human being, therefore, is defined by nothing and surrounded by nothing. For if we say existence is temporal, we say it is finite, penetrated and surrounded by nothing that is by time. Time according to Heidegger has to do with events and events do not happen in a serial sequence. History is the records of events. For history is not dead and past; it is rather part and parcel of our very existence. For this, Heidegger thinks that the distinction we usually made between systematic philosophy and history of philosophy is untenable. We study history because in it we encounter ideas in order, thereby to have some conceptual framework with which to encounter the present. In short, we learn from history so that we don't make mistakes in our present condition. We also remember the memories of the good old days.

Martin Heidegger on Temporality: Its Moral Implication to the Society

Heidegger posited that Dasein, Being are anchored in time. Also, that time includes past, present and future and they are interconnected. For Heidegger, Dasein and Being is finite. Therefore, if Dasein and Being is finite it means that Heidegger's temporality lacks "eternity".

The Concept of “Eternity”?

Eternity is derived from the Latin word “aeternus”, a contradiction of aeviternus, which in turn, is derived from aevum, a word from the same root as English words “ever”. But in certain philosophical contexts the notion of everlasting existence is expressed rather by “sempiternal”, “eternal” being reserved for the sense of timeless. According to Edwards (1972) “eternity” means:

The complete possession of eternal all at once. For whatever lives in time moves as something present from the past to the future, and there is nothing placed in time that can embrace the whole extent of its life at once... following Plato, we wish to give things their names, let us say that God is eternal, but human beings and the world is everlasting because they have a beginning but no end (p. 65).

All these notions reappeared in the medieval period. Aquinas for example, quoting Boetius as his authority, said in his *Summa Theologica* (I, x, I) that there are two marks of eternity, namely, that the eternal has neither beginning nor end and that eternity contains no succession, being all at once (*tota Simul existens*).

In summary, eternity means “beyond time”, it also means “continuous now” or “ever present”. Eternity exceeds time, and also include time, all ages terminates in eternity.

This lack of “eternity” has made a lot of people to behave anyhow. People say time waits for nobody and they continue to be desperate. A desperate human being has lost the sense of Judgment or reasoning and when he/she encounters difficulties ‘always’ one will not know what to do but to commit crimes.

However, the moral implication of Heidegger’s theory of time to the society is that any society that believes in “now” and “immediate future” life becomes a do-or-die affair. It means that the members of the society will be running a race of self-survival; self-preservation, which means dog eats dog principle. The question that will arise is ‘what of the Bishops, general overseers, priests, pastors and Imam that discuss eternal life everyday in the society? The answer is simple, we know that some of them only present it as mere words, they do not believe in it themselves; they emphasized prosperity. They also say give us the money now, and we do not care what happens to us when we die or when we reach that bridge, we shall cross it.

In another perspective, since Heidegger’s Being is anchored in time, it means that Heidegger’s Being is not infinite but there is a Being that is beyond time and space and that is the pure Being (*Actus Purus*). Since, Heidegger’s Being is finite and it is anchored in time, the implication is that today the modern/contemporary man is Godless. Any society that is Godless, moral values will be taken for granted; because they trust in temporal and material things rather than spiritual things which are eternal.

Micelli(1971), commenting on Heidegger stated:

By courageous decision of freedom man can make authentic existence its goal in life by overcoming dread, mass mediocrity and death. But such mere teaching and exhortation to moral rectitude is uninspiring and indeed sterile, if the obligation to moral goodness is imposed solely by the private conscience... we are reminded again of Dostoevsky's logical rule of morality. "If God did not exist everything will be permitted (p. 273).

If one does not look beyond the physical and remember that there is God, the result is irresponsibilities. The result of that irresponsibilities will be as follows: telling lies, drunkenness, extortion, bribery and corruption, abortion, child labour, homosexuality, greed by the politicians, lesbianism, ritual killing for money. But if we understand Heidegger better today, we can change these irresponsibilities by returning to the Being that is infinite so that we can have values in the society.

Conclusion

We give credit to Martin Heidegger for the bold step he took in discussing "Being" and "Time" without prejudice of faith or from religious background but purely on spiritual or philosophical reflection. The Being of Heidegger is finite and Dasein is also finite. However, there is something lacking in Heidegger's conception of time. What is lacking is the "eternity" which Heidegger did not say anything about. For me, the better understanding of Being and time today is that there is a "Pure Being" which is not confined in this world; it is beyond space and time. This "Pure Being" is the originative cause of all created things and it is the final point of arrival (*terminus ad quem*). It is this "Pure Being" we must return to so that we can be responsible in the society and contribute to the well fair of our people since life is not all about duration but donation.

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