

HEIDEGGERIAN EXISTENTIALISM AND POST-MARXISM

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ABSTRACT

In this article, the articulation of Heideggerian existentialism to the post-Marxist theory of politics is examined critically. With this articulation, post-Marxism aims to grant politics an ontological status by using concepts which are detached from their philosophical context. The article argues that this articulation is problematic, as the theoretical and philosophical problems generated by this incorporation remain unresolved. However, it also argues that this problematic articulation reveals the inherent theoretical limitations of post-Marxism, which are basically related to the dissolution of “the social” from the theoretical horizon of post-Marxism.

Key words: *Heidegger, existential, ontological, post-Marxism, politics.*

HEIDEGGER VAROLUŞÇULUĞU VE POST-MARKSİZM

ÖZET

Bu çalışmada Heidegger’in varoluşçu felsefesinin post-Marksist siyaset kuramına eklenmesinin eleştirel bir değerlendirmesi yapılıyor. Bu bağlamda Heidegger’in felsefesine özgü kavramların ait oldukları bağlamdan koparılarak siyasete ontolojik bir nitelik kazandırmak üzere kullanıldığı ancak bu girişimin ‘sorunlu’ olduğu vurgulanıyor. Ayrıca, kuramsal ve felsefi olarak çözülememiş olan bu eklenmenin post-Marksist siyaset kuramının içsel sınırlarını açığa çıkardığı tartışılıyor ve bu sorunun büyük ölçüde “toplumsal” olanın bu kuram içinde kayboluşuyla ilgili olduğu sonucuna varılıyor.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Heidegger, varoluşsal, ontolojik, post-Marksizm, siyaset.*

The theoretical and philosophical sources that informed the “post” of post-Marxism, such as Derridean deconstructivism, Lacanian psychoanalysis and Foucauldian post-structuralism, have been well-attested so far. But the philosophical influence of Heideggerian existentialism on the post-Marxist theory of politics has not received critical scrutiny. In a recent review it has been pointed out that Laclau and Mouffe “followed” Heidegger in their claim that although an objective, extra-

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discursive reality “existed external to thought (‘existence’), the world could only be known and acquire meaning through discursive construction (‘being’)” (Townshend, 2004: 271). Therefore, regarding the ontological/epistemological question, they upheld Heidegger’s distinction between “the ‘being’ of an object, whose meaning was discursively constructed and open to change, and its ‘existence’ (something independent of thought), which as such has no inherent meaning” (Townshend, 273). However, we will argue that Heideggerian existentialism had a more penetrating impact on the post-Marxist theory of politics than the simplistic ontological/epistemological distinction between “being” and “existence.” It was through articulating Heideggerian existentialism to political theory that “politics” and “the political” has been elevated to the level of ontological circumstance. This articulation is involved in the post-Marxist attempt to dissolve the given “grounds” on which “politics” has been thought. What is claimed is that these “grounds” themselves are “made” by political acts. That is, politics grounds itself, and by grounding itself, institutes the realm within which we live. It is this incorporation of Heideggerian existentialism by post-Marxism which will be under critical reflection in this paper. It will be argued that this is a problematic incorporation that reveals the inherent limitations of post-Marxism.

WHERE HEIDEGGER COMES IN

Post-Marxism constitutes itself through a rupture from the Gramscian theory of hegemony by decentering the category of class. According to Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 69), social class is “the single unifying principle” in “every hegemonic formation” in Gramsci’s theory of hegemony. Laclau and Mouffe relocate the struggles of hegemony to the field of discursivity. In this new terrain, politics is defined as “to act over” the social to “hegemonize” it through modifying the “identity” of social segments and turning them into the “moments” of a hegemonic discourse. “The social” is the sedimented form of these struggles of hegemony taking place within the terrain of discursivity where efforts are made to limit and “fix” “the infinite play of differences,” however in vain, by politics (Laclau, 1990: 91). In this framework, there is no guarantee, external to this field itself, of the success of any attempt at hegemony. The act of political institution is the contingent outcome of these struggles of hegemony.

In sum, we have the element of contingency in terms of any act of political institution, the incomplete and relational character of any social identity and an all-encompassing field of discursivity (instead of “subjects”) in which various hegemonic articulations compete with each other in this post-Marxist terrain. This means that “both the hegemonic force and the ensemble of hegemonized elements would constitute themselves on the same plane –the general field of discursivity- while the exteriority would be that corresponding to different discursive formations” (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985:135). In this context, the politics of hegemony is on and over instituting “the social” by attempting to fix the “identities” of “the elements” within a discursively constructed “relational” imaginary which involves a “constitutive other.”

In this theorization politics becomes an ontological category rather than a regional one because any “subject” is, in fact, a “subject position” within a discourse that is within a project of hegemony formed in the field of discursivity. As the social and political identities are constructed through “othering” in this domain, as a power hence political relation, Mouffe (1993:3) claims that politics “must be conceived as a dimension that is inherent to every human society and that determines our very ontological condition.”

The circular relationship between the social and the political in which the latter attempts to hegemonize the former while the former overflows the latter within the field of discursivity where no fixing of any identity is possible, and the tendency to associate politics with the ontological circumstance, signal the self-grounding and foundational “essence” attributed to politics in post-Marxism. Yet this tendency becomes clear and takes the shape of an explicit affirmation when the focus is directed upon the “constitutive split” between “the identity” and the continuous process of identification on the one hand, and between “the actual political order” and undetermined processes of “political ordering” on the other. In this split the functions of identification and political ordering are primary rather than their actual contents: they both fill the gap. In other words, the problematic is now centered on the claim that “there is an initial split between the empty place of a function which is not necessarily linked to any particular content, and the plurality of the contents which can actualize it” (Laclau and Zac, 1994:36). That is, there are possibilities of “identit-y-ies” and “political orders” given the lack of a fixed, fully-fledged identity and hence a political order.

This is where Heidegger comes in. Laclau and Zac apply Heideggerian conceptions of temporality, the split between the “ontological” and “ontic,” and the “possibilities” of Being to “the making of political identities” and the formation of “political orders.” As they indicate, these notions lead us from such “ontical” concepts as “the” political order, and “the” identity to such undetermined processes of political ordering and “identification,” which imply that politics is a temporal and “groundless grounding” of human existence. Therefore, the central problematic turns out to be the constitutive split between the ontological and the ontic, as the quotation below would show the way in which the Heideggerian conceptual framework is incorporated as well as its impact on the post-Marxist theory of politics.

Possibility, as opposite to pure presence, temporalizes Being and splits, from its very ground, all identity. Presencing (Ursprung) and what is present, the ontological and the ontic, are irremediably split but this has a double consequence; the first is that the ontic can never be closed in itself; the second, that the ontological can only show itself through the ontic. The same movement creating the split, condemns its two sides (as in all splits) to mutual dependence. Being cannot inhabit a ‘beyond’ all actual beings, because in that case, it would only be one more being. Being shows itself in the entities as that which they are lacking and as that which derives from their ontological status as mere possibility. Being and nothingness, presence and absence, are mutually required terms of a ground constitutively split by difference (emphasis is added) (Laclau and Zac, 30).

It is through and in this relationship between ordering (Being) and disorder (nothingness) that a particular order can be imposed, just like the efforts that are made to fill the ineradicable lack of identity (nothingness) through and in the successive acts of identification (Being). This lack lying at the bottom creates different possibilities that would “mind the gap.” Yet this is bound to be an unstable relation. As emphasized by Laclau and Zac, “if the relation between the ordering function and the actual order is going to be always an unstable one, this is only possible in so far as the identity of the political agents will change by means of successive acts of identification; acts that will sustain, modify, resist or reject that concrete order – an identification that will always ultimately fail to achieve a fully fledged identity” (Laclau and Zac, 37).

In the next part this incorporation of Heideggerian existentialism by post-Marxism will be questioned. Although Laclau and Zac admit that the way they link Heidegger's argument with their own discussion would not be approved of by himself (Laclau and Zac, 30), such a questioning is still important as it may disclose some crucial limitations of the post-Marxist theory of politics.

A PROBLEMATIC INCORPORATION: HEIDEGGER AND "MINDING THE GAP" OF IDENTITY AND POLITICAL ORDER

At the beginning it should be emphasized that in Heidegger's framework of the existential-ontological analysis of Being, "possibilities" are not just an outcome of the split between the ontological and the ontic, they are "disclosed" only in so far as "Dasein" is individualized as to constitute a totality, a wholeness, and gains an "authenticity" out of, as well as within the "they" or "Das Man," that is, inauthentic existence. In this sense, such Heideggerian notions as temporality, becoming, existentiality and ontologically pertain to Dasein's "primordial" peculiarities, which reveal themselves through "authenticity." For Dasein "in its very Being, that Being is an issue for it" (Heidegger, 1995:32). Yet this cannot be an issue within the "publicness" of "the they" since it "disburdens" the particular Dasein of its own Being. Distantiality, averageness, and leveling down are ways of Being for "the they" that constitute the "the publicness" in which "everything gets obscured, and what has thus been covered up gets passed off as something familiar and accessible" (Heidegger, 165). Idle talk, curiosity and ambiguity characterize "the public disclosedness of Being" in which everything seems to be understood and disclosed though nothing is grasped "genuinely" (Heidegger, 217-219). Hence, uprooting (those entities and phenomena belonging to Dasein) and alienation (from ones-self) lead to a superficial life at bottom; however, it seems to be "genuinely lively." This is the "falling" of Dasein as being lost in the publicness of "the they." As Heidegger emphasizes, "Dasein's absorption in the 'they' and its absorption in the 'world' of its concern, make manifest something like a fleeing of Dasein in the face of itself – of itself as an authentic potentiality-for-Being-its-Self" (Heidegger, 229).

So, for Dasein to disclose its existential possibilities of Being, through and in which the meaning of Being is uncovered, first it should be individualized out of "the they" and should be constituted as a totality to be able to reflect on its "ownmost Being-in-the-world." Anxiety (uncanniness) as a state of mind and understanding the Being of Dasein as Being-towards-death, as its most certain possibility, are preconditions in this endeavor. Both anxiety and death are about "one's ownmost Being-in-the-world." Because anxiety is anxious about Being-in-the-World itself, it individualizes Dasein for its ownmost Being-in-the-world so that the understanding and projecting upon possibilities of Being becomes possible. Similarly, death is one's ownmost possibility, "no one can take the Other's dying away from him" (Heidegger, 284). So, again, Being-towards-death individualizes Dasein down to itself and is constitutive for its totality. Since it is the death, which is always one's own, that makes one's own Being-in-the-world the issue, it leads Dasein to constitute itself as a totality and to individualize itself. Death is "one's own most and non-relational" possibility which cannot be "outstripped."

It is the anxiety in the face of Being-towards-death, and hence the anticipation of its own most possibility, that discloses "also all the possibilities which lie ahead of that possibility." In that context, it would be possible to take "the whole of Dasein in advance in an *existentiell* [ontical] manner"

which implies that there is a possibility of existing as “a whole potentiality-for-Being” (Heidegger, 309). This potentiality is attested by Dasein, “*existentiell*,” in terms of the relationship between “the conscience” and “Being-guilty.” In the face of the *existentiell* possibilities disclosed through the anticipation of death, conscience refers to the call for “choosing to choose” (among these possibilities) through and in which one becomes oneself. In this way Dasein is “summoned” to its “ownmost Being-guilty,” that is the “nullity” of any basis for its Being, given its Being-towards-Death. Yet it is this nullity that frees Dasein for its *existentiell* possibilities which are disclosed and chosen through “self-projection.” This is the ongoingness of the Being of Dasein, as existing. That’s why “Dasein is not itself the basis of its Being, inasmuch as this basis first arises from its own projection; rather, as Being-its-self, it is the Being of its basis” (Heidegger, 330). It is this disclosive projection and “determination of what is factually possible at the time” that is called “resoluteness,” which anticipates. In that sense, “anticipatory resoluteness” is the disclosing, and hence uncovering, mode of Being of the authentic Dasein.

By now, it should be clear that there really is a semblance between Dasein’s self-projection upon its possibilities on the basis of its Being-guilty, that is, the nullity of any basis which frees oneself for choosing to choose among the disclosed possibilities, and possibilities of identity and political orders on the basis of identification and political ordering. Similarly the latter processes and the possibilities to which they would give rise, as Being, are made possible by the nothingness lying at the bottom, that is the lack of identity, and chaos or disorder. Yet this semblance is just formal. They are still analytically distinct from each other. In other words, the appropriation of the Heideggerian conceptual framework seems to be inappropriate. According to Heidegger, the split between the ontological and the ontic can generate possibilities (of Being) only in terms of Dasein’s authentic, anticipatory resoluteness which would disclose them through projection and determine what is factually possible. As has been explained above, this mode of Being of Dasein is made possible through the individualization and constitution of Dasein as a totality in the face of the anxiety of Being-towards-death. And this potentiality, of Being an authentic whole, is attested by conscience and Being-guilty. In the theorization of Laclau and Zac, this context to which the conceptual vocabulary of Heidegger belongs, is missing. There is no connection in their works, between Dasein’s “authentic anticipatory resoluteness” and the split between the ontological and the ontic which is presented in terms of the relationship between identification and identity and between political ordering and order. It is not clear why and through what dynamics the “possibilities” (of identity and political order) arise from this split and why Being is temporal. In the Heideggerian existential-ontological analysis the possibilities of Being belong to Dasein and are disclosed by it through becoming an authentic whole.

If we rethink “politics” in this context we end up with a different version. In this sense, “politics” can be conceived in terms of the relationship between anticipatorily resolute, authentic individuals and an irresolute “fallen they” in which these individuals would project upon the possibilities (of identity and political order) and determine what is factually possible at the time, and then the fallen they would identify with these “projects” so that the gaps of identity and order would be filled in. At the beginning such a re-appropriation might seem to be odd since projection upon possibilities (of Being) is related to Being-one’s-own-self in the analysis of Heidegger and has nothing to do with (political) identities and political ordering. Yet, in the next part, it is going to be argued that it is possible to find such a “political” aspect in Heidegger’s existential-ontological analysis developed in *Being and Time*, when we proceed towards the crux of this analysis that is temporality and historicity.

THE POLITICAL ASPECT OF HEIDEGGER'S ANALYSIS

As has been implied above, the resoluteness of Dasein becomes authentic when it is anticipatory. Dasein, Being-free-for-death, anticipates the possibilities of existence through a projection that discloses and chooses choosing. This existential structure of Dasein is temporal and temporality as such is Dasein's Being. Dasein discloses these possibilities in terms of the "heritage." Dasein takes over it as a thrown Being –the past- and projects them upon its future as possibilities of existence in the present of the "moment of vision" as an ecstatic mode of Being. This reflects the temporal structure of anticipatory resoluteness. This is what temporality primordially belongs to and from what infinite and inauthentic "time," and "within timeness," are derived. It is this temporal Being that "historizes" and "historicality" depends on this existential-temporal structure of Dasein. This is the way whereby Heidegger gives history an ontological basis. Moreover, Heidegger locates the notion of "fate" in this core. Dasein is fateful only in so far as it has anticipatory resoluteness, projecting the chosen possibility of existence upon its future and bringing itself towards it. And those who have no anticipatory resoluteness do not have "fate" (Heidegger, 436-437). In this context Heidegger reveals the political aspect of his existential-ontological analysis of temporality and historicality when he relates this temporal structure of authentic Dasein, and its fateful character, to "Being-with-others" and "community." A long passage is worth quoting at this moment;

But if fateful Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, exists essentially in Being-with Others, its historizing is a cohistorizing and is determinative for it as *destiny*. This is how we designate the historizing of the community, of a people. Destiny is not something that puts itself together out of individual fates, any more than Being-with-one-another can be conceived as the occurring together of several Subjects. Our fates have already been guided in advance, in our Being with one another in the same world and in our resoluteness for definite possibilities. Only in communicating and in struggling does the power of destiny become free. Dasein's fateful destiny in and with its "generation" goes to make up the full authentic historizing of Dasein. (Heidegger, 436) (Emphasis is original)

This passage implies that the community, the people, are to be guided by the fateful Dasein –authentic individual(s) having anticipatory resoluteness- towards their "fate," in the manner of co-historizing, through which the full authentic historizing is actualized. The next passage would show the "conservative" character of this historizing:

The resoluteness which comes back to itself and hands itself down, then becomes the *repetition* of a possibility of existence that has come down to us. *Repeating is handing down explicitly*, that is to say, going back into the possibilities of Dasein that has-been-there. The authentic repetition of a possibility of existence that has been–the possibility that Dasein may choose its hero-is grounded existentially in anticipatory resoluteness; for it is in resoluteness that one first chooses the choice which makes one free for the struggle of loyally following in the footsteps of that which can be repeated. (Heidegger, 437) (Emphasis is original)

So, the repetition is “heroic” not only because it is a struggle to make the power of destiny free, but also because it depends on a “hero” being chosen from the heritage and hence from the past, in whose footsteps it is worth following loyally. This drive to repeat a hero of the past as an existential possibility in the future, projected through anticipatory resoluteness, coincides with the degradation of the present. In this sense this repetition through anticipatory resoluteness becomes the way of “detaching oneself from the fallen publicness of the ‘today’” (Heidegger, 449). And this “fallen publicness of today” coincides with “inauthentic historicity,” where “the way in which fate has been primordially stretched along has been hidden.” In such an existence “the they-self Dasein” cannot repeat what has been, but only retains and receives the ‘actual’ that is left over...” It is caught up within the “today” (Heidegger, 443). Hence, only authentic anticipatory resoluteness would reveal the fate by disclosing what has been and what can be repeated as a possibility in the future so that the authentic historicizing would come into being. This fateful drive towards “destiny” is to be a “full historicizing” through and in “co-historizing” that leads the “Volk” from its “inauthentic historicity” to its own future, to its coming-towards-itself. This is facilitated by the resolute and authentic Dasein. As Heidegger stresses vigorously: “Dasein’s resoluteness towards itself is what first makes it possible to let the Others who are with it ‘be’ in their ownmost potentiality-for-Being and co-disclose this potentiality in the solicitude which leaps forth and liberates” (Heidegger, 344). Lyotard (1990) describes this process of “full authentic historicizing” as an “authentic project” if not a political program.

In the context of this “authentic project” Heidegger comes very close to what is understood by politics in terms of post-Marxism. The realization of such an “authentic project” involves acting over “the social” to modify their “identities” in such a way as to articulate them to a “hegemonic project” which “fix” their identities in a discursively constructed imaginary so that the “social segments” turn to be the “moments” of this project. “Full authentic historicizing” can be realized through and in these dynamics of politics. How else can “communicating and struggling” to repeat what has been –the hero-, through projection, in the future result in Being-one’s-self, that is destiny, fully and authentically? And does not Heidegger prepare “subject positions” for “authentic individuals” and for the community –“the Others”- within a possible “project” which is to be a discursively constructed imaginary? In a sense, this is one of the ways through which politics becomes our “ontological condition.”

Even Lyotard might have overlooked the implications of a “program” within these words of Heidegger. As Bourdieu (1991) pointed out, the degradation of the present as “fallen publicness” on the basis of an authentic projecting of a possibility, chosen from the past as “the hero,” upon a futural coming-towards-itself signals the “closeness” of Heidegger to a political movement that is the movement of “conservative revolutionaries.” In a recent study on Heidegger, C. Rickey goes beyond

Bourdieu by claiming that, national socialism fills out the skeletal presentation of being-with in *Being and Time*. Of the two elements, however, nation is the more important, for nation as Heidegger explicates it is the ground and principle of our earthly existence. As the world in which we are, the nation is fatherland and homeland; it is Dasein, the site of our poetic dwelling. National socialism is thus the authentic political manifestation of Heidegger’s vision of a postmodern world (C. Rickey, 2002: 178).

CONCLUSION

The appropriation of Heideggerian existentialism by post-Marxist theory is oriented towards conceptualizing politics as an irreducible ontological category. Yet this is done at the cost of denying the ontological significance of “the social” and reducing it to the sedimentation of political acts. As has been pointed out in recent criticism, “the specificities of ‘the social’ cannot be theorized from within the terms of post-Marxism itself, which always relies on an unspecified understanding of actually existing social structures and institutions...” (Nash, 2002:98). Therefore, in the post-Marxist theory of politics there is no concern with a social/sociological analysis that would problematize the emergence of “possibilities” of political order and identity with reference to the social actors involved in the political struggle. In the absence of such a theoretical capability post-Marxism depends on a particular philosophy to categorize politics as self-grounding. However, this articulation of Heideggerian existentialism is problematic as the concepts of Being, temporality, ontological and ontic are detached from their particular philosophical context and forced to fill the void left by the dissolution of “the social” from the theoretical horizon of post-Marxism. Maybe it is no coincidence that in this philosophy, also, “the social” remains passive within the “fallen today” and waits for the futural possibilities disclosed out of the past by the resolute, authentic individuals. Hence it is no surprise that post-Marxist political analysis is very applicable to the political dimension of Heideggerian existentialism.

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