Editing Sample

**The Departure from Heidegger in Tanabe and Lévinas**

In the following, we shall consider Hajime Tanabe’s critical reading of Martin Heidegger’s *Fundamentalontologie*. In two articles published in 1931, Tanabe noted Heidegger’s omission of a “phenomenon of corporeity,” before any similar critiques were formulated by readers of *Sein und Zeit* in Europe.

Heidegger’s reformulation of the question of being involves a radical reduction from the “ontic” to the “ontological.” This procedure gives a privileged place to our *Dasein*, whose being consists in “having, in its very being, a relation of being to its being.” In this process, this “self-understanding” of *Dasein* is to be unfolded so fully that its “whole-being” (*Ganzsein*) reveals itself as such. *Dasein*’s wholeness is then disclosed as an ontologically “guilty-being” (*Schuldigsein*), rarely burdensome facticity of its being-in-the-world (§58). For Heidegger, this constitutes *Dasein*’s “ownmost” form of self-understanding through its acceptance of its being-towards-death (§60). This shows that the truth of *Dasein* is the “originary temporality” or auto-temporalization (*sich zeitigen*) of time that emerges from this acceptance (§65).

Tanabe consistently asserts that this process should be accompanied by what he calls “transcendentally metaphysical corporeity,” which he considers more transcendental than the “*sich zeitigen*” to which the ontological transcendentalism of *Sein und Zeit* ultimately returns. Although Heidegger attends in detail to “equipmentality” (*Zeughaftigekeit*) as an existential concept, Tanabe notes, he rarely scrutinizes the corporeity of bodies in using equipment (*Zeug*), and even less the body as a “materially appearing existence in corporeal activities such as drinking and eating.” These remarks, making a guess for later Lévinas and other French critics of Heidegger are worth noting here. What is more important, however, is that in insisting on the hypertranscendentality of *Dasein*’s corporeity, Tanabe concurs with Lévinas’s essential insight of 1934. Accordingly, to be faithful to the *Sachlichkeit* of Dasein, we have to go beyond the temporalization of time, which is the originary phenomenon of our *Dasein*, to its “pre-originary” embodiment, which remains irreducible in the face of the reduction from the ontic to the ontological. Despite its thrownness, the originary temporality of *Dasein* opens a “horizon” of our self-understanding, while the originary corporeity of *Dasein* represents, for Tanabe, a “manner of being which compels us to have such kind of horizon.” If this point is taken seriously, the ontological reduction should ultimately reach that which transcends our ontological self-understanding. In short, as was the case in Lévinas, the corporeal experience of the weight of being surpasses ontological phenomenology.

It is here, however, that Tanabe departs from Lévinas. Where Lévinas thematizes the impossible escape from the burden of being, Tanabe identifies a form of reversal. For Tanabe, the essentially corporeal weight of our being, heavier than the ontological weight of its thrownness, compels us in the innermost depths of our *Dasein* to actively manifest ourselves in the external world of historical contingency, which transcends Heideggarian “being-in-the-world.” Thus understood, our corporeity lies at the heart of Tanabe’s “acting dialectics of absolute nothingness,” which he characterizes as an “ontisch-ontologisch standpoint.” No form of insight, whether Nishidian self-awareness, Heideggerian self-understanding, or Hegelian absolute self-knowledge, can embrace the essentially historical *Sachlichkeit* of being. For Tanabe, the foundational mobility of historical being, where all the conceptions of being should be marked on their upside- down side with the indelible contingency and irrationality, can be attested to only by our genuine action as it assimilates itself to a corporeally lived “absolute negativity.” Tanabe uses this term not to mean the annihilation of historical reality, but rather a specific modality of this reality in which all beings are immediately mediated by what they are not.

In this way, Tanabe’s corporeal *Sachlichkeitsdialektik* presents us with a reformulated notion of absolute nothingness at the heart of reality “as it produces and develops itself historically.” Contrary to the Nishidian version, which is compared to a self-emptying mirror, Tanabe’s absolute nothingness is conceived as a whirlwind – as the eternal turning point around which all beings are immediately reversed into non-beings, and vice versa. This is called absolute nothingness because in transcending the relative opposition between being and nothingness, it realizes absolute negation as a principle of reality in action.

On this basis, the difference between Tanabe and Lévinas becomes clear. Corporeity, for Tanabe, should be followed by the “acting attestation of absolute nothingness.” Such a “dialectic of action” is inconceivable for Lévinas, for whom our corporeally bound existence is passively exposed to the unacceptable burden of being. Absolute passivity will remain the essential characteristic of the Lévinasian subject, even in his later period when it assumes an ethical significance. This “passion,” which never becomes “action,” is the site at which the impossible desire is generated for the “otherwise than being.”

In our view, this divergence between the two philosophers determines their apparently opposed orientations in the face of the deadlock of ontological phenomenology. Lévinas’s thinking moves toward a retreat from the world, particularly from the ineluctable weight of “social-being,” the most violent form of which he discerns in Nazism. This insight will lead him to search for another form of phenomenology that is essentially non-intentional and attentive to what occurs beneath our ontological understanding. Tanabe, meanwhile, seeks to penetrate the world, questioning whence this “forcing power of racial nation” comes. Interestingly, from 1934 onward, his philosophy of absolute nothingness takes the form of a socio-historical speculation that he calls a “logic of species,” which is accompanied by an ambitious attempt to elaborate the logic of “social-being” and “historical reality.”