**Interview with Ramón Rodríguez (Universidad Complutense de Madrid) by Cristina Crichton (Universidad Adolfo Ibañez, Santiago, Chile)**

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1. How did Heidegger’s thinking figure in your own intellectual trajectory? Or, more specifically, what was it in his thinking that made sense to you and led you to focus on it?

My first encounter with the philosophy of Heidegger was relatively early, just after I started college. I remember perfectly that then, in 1968, we had an elective seminar on *Being and Time*, which I attended with greater eagerness than ability to make sense of it. Although I did not understand anything (I remember the professor commenting on the German text without anyone being able to follow him), I had the distant sense that fundamental issues were being addressed there. I could not yet understand or evaluate those issues, but they greatly impressed me and left me with a latent interest [in Heidegger’s thought] that fully flourished later on. During my undergraduate studies and my first years as a graduate student, however, my interest turned to thinking that was more directly “committed,” more directly relevant to the tumultuous social-political reality of the final years of Francoism. That was how I became acquainted with the personalism of Emmanuel Meunier, whom I profoundly admired as a human and political figure and on whom I wrote my undergraduate thesis. But it was precisely that work that led me down other paths by convincing me that personalism lacked a philosophical basis up to its ethical and political aspirations, however worthy they were. In my doctoral dissertation, I therefore addressed this deficiency directly and dedicated myself for many years to studying the Kantian way of establishing a foundation for ethics. This period of struggle with Kant’s texts was a magnificent time that I remember fondly, one spent trying not just to complete an academic project, but rather to understand the moral experience based on Kant’s thinking. From the Kantian school I adopted the effort, which I have never abandoned, to combine rigor, depth, and clarity. And it was also the origin of my ultimate interest, in Heidegger. Although I have never given up reading *Being and Time*, it was Heidegger’s texts on Kant, which were published in 1975 in *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* and which I read with relish at the time, that led me to a reading of almost his entire body of work. That explanation of Kant’s thesis concerning being, with the phenomenological analysis of perception that it involved, proved extraordinarily illuminating for me when it came to understanding the notion of reality that Kant employs in practical philosophy and that I needed to use with precision. From then on, my amateur initial reading of *Being and Time* was complemented by ever more intense study of the book, on whose introduction I taught various seminars. The text of that introduction remains irreplaceable and is the best way of understanding the overall program of Heidegger’s work, its achievements, and its failures. The idea of tying a study of the most traditional of concepts, “being,” to a very determined and precise phenomenological analysis of the human fact of existing was extraordinarily forceful, in two ways: on the one hand, as a radical rethinking of the philosophical tradition giving rise to historic-philosophical interpretations of indubitable originality, and, on the other, as an examination of the way human existence actually happens in the real world we have to live in. That examination is both novel and especially deep, always leaving the reader hooked. At least, that was always my experience in my seminars on *Being and Time*.

2. Thinking about Heidegger’s relevance today, in your text “Ontology and the Voices of the Epoch,” which you wrote in 1991, I found myself with a sentence of yours that I would appreciate your evaluating and developing based on the experience of the world that you have today: “Of all the characteristics that the Heideggerian attempt to realize a systematic phenomenology of the life world has revealed, none seems to me so modern, so current in effect, as the absolute primacy of the public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*). If it could be said, not without reason, that the analysis of “manageability” (*Zuhandenheit*) corresponds more to an artisanal-preindustrial world than to the universe of modern technology that captured the late Heidegger’s thinking, the same is not true of the interpretation of public being in the world.”

Seen from today’s perspective, I see that Heideggerian vision as more current than ever. What I wanted to express in those lines was a basic idea from the initial hermeneutics of facticity, which was later transferred into existential analysis: that the way each one of us human beings living in a determined situation *immediately* understands ourselves is never the result of a specific introspection or reflection. Rather, it results from what Heidegger calls “being in an interpretation” (*Ausgelegtheit*), the fact that our action and thought rest on representations, ideas, and topics from the environment (“interpretations”), through which we can exercise our reflection and criticism, but which are already present in us before that. “Being in interpretations” therefore cannot be understood as a “state,” in the sense of being an episodical moment or something changing and variable, like states of mind. It is, instead, a structural feature of existence, something like a form of being. Interpretations can change, but being in them means that we are them, not just that we have them; they make us the people we are, so to speak. That implies that the very fact of humanly existing involves a structural reference to the situation with respect to which we live, a reference to what the young Heidegger called the “today,” the historical present broadly understood. And this is an interesting point in terms of understanding Heidegger’s philosophical position and distinguishing it from the sociological and historical point of view, with which it is often confused. The way that concrete human existence embraces its situation is what the concept of *everyday life* is about. This concept refers to something distinct from “daily life” (in Classical Rome, the Middle Ages, etc.), an object of historical investigation that took on great interest years ago and was understood as consisting of the customs that governed life, their distribution by class, etc. Everyday life is, at once, a purely methodological concept, the phenomenological terrain to which analysis adheres, and the ontological way in which existence welcomes and exercises its being in a situation. In addition, what is characteristic of the “today” is the prevalence of the public sphere. In Heidegger’s day, that concept already went well beyond customs differentiated by town and city, social classes, etc., and took on an extension that today we would call “universal.”Everyday life is thus not a sociological concept; it is an ontological one that captures existence’s specific way of being in a shared public world. It is this way of being, not particular public ideas and their origins, that is of interest in existential analysis. That understood, it is relatively clear that the effect of an ever less differentiated public sphere on everyday life has since only grown. Its power over everyday life is much stronger than it was a century ago when Heidegger wrote. The twist that information technologies have given the power of the public is impressive: the accommodation of our conduct to prevailing usages is more constrictive, the homogenization of behavior and opinions ever stricter, people’s dependence on their “images” even more intense. The “one,” the latent requirement to be as *one* is, according to the compartments of the public sphere in which we are, is lived today with a degree of constriction far superior to that of Heidegger’s time. The impropriety or inauthenticity attributed to that everyday life therefore remains a difficult idea to avoid. Now, more than ever, the sensation of being carried along by the force of the public arises with greater frequency,becoming more objective, and the concealment of another possible form of being that sensation always carries with it – so-called “authenticity” – thus appears more clearly.

3. In that same text, you make it clear that not only current and commonly accepted opinions belong to inauthenticity’s talk, but also the philosophical and cultural interpretations of an epoch. However, you argue that the interpretations of the philosophers of culture of our time are not totally without value, “…the fact that we must welcome them, that we lend them our ears, is an indication, a symptom, of something not explained by the trivial concept of ‘being fashionable’ alone. The fact that these interpretations of our culture coincide concerning the need for us to find a role in it is only possible because of the spread everywhere of a general sense of loss of significance, an essential homogeneity among all things that manifests itself in the constant succession of cultural novelties, ‘currents,’ ‘movements,’ etc. . . . and that betrays a lack of ‘place’ of the individual in it. Existential analytics is not yet positioned to understand the deep, epochal meaning of this phenomenon. It just shows that it is tied to the public sphere, in which it presents itself today.” Could you expand on some of these ideas from your current perspective today?

If everyday life, as a mode of existence, is considered inauthenticity, this is not something that depends on the content of the interpretations taken on; it is just the way interpretations are. That is what establishes the distinction propriety/impropriety, authenticity/inauthenticity. That distinction is therefore not, to begin with, a moral one. But we will talk about that while responding later to another of your questions. What the philosophy of culture aims to determine about everyday life is something different [than existential analysis]: to what extent topics originating in the philosophy and even the cultural diagnostics so typical of the 1920s contributed to shaping the situation to which “being in an interpretation” responds. What I argue is that Heidegger, while seeing the ontological importance of public interpretation, was nonetheless unable clearly to distinguish the decisive traits of the historical situation, a task that required something more than existential analysis. Such analysis is formal and cannot make sense of the contents that everyday life incorporates. To distinguish or recognize the basic cultural ingredients of the time is a very different problem, one proper to historical science or sociology. Heidegger’s incursions into this field in his courses did not have the depth that one could demand of a historian or sociologist. Judged from that angle, they are clearly insufficient.

As I understand it, there are two reasons for that, both of which indirectly derive from existential ontology itself. First, one must not forget that these were courses directed to students, whom Heidegger wanted to put on guard against what we could call academic inauthenticity, a way of approaching philosophies by slipping between theories, comparing them, classifying them, and keeping them at an objective distance without committing to anything. Or the reverse, surrendering to specialized minutiae that provide a comfortable environment in which academic life can go on without risk. Heidegger wanted to show students that the fact of studying philosophy alone did not involve departing from the everyday “the one,” that there was a way of “being in philosophy” that hid the liberatory power of thinking. That was what the existential commitment inherent in philosophy that was at the root of Heidegger’s initial thinking sought to combat.

The second reason had to do with his conviction that the “philosophy of culture” in vogue during his time (that of Spengler, Klages, Ziegler, and even Scheler) was inevitably superficial, not just on the existential plane just discussed, but also in terms of its capacity for historical understanding. Although Heidegger had not yet arrived at the historical hermeneutics of being, his peculiar way of understanding the historical did not allow for attending to the “signs of the times.” And he intuited that *Kulturphilosophie*, with its enthusiasm for recovering a role for man in a context of awareness of decadence and change, reflected the poverty of the epoch and revealed the need to understand man’s way of being in that context in a new way. To understand what was going on with human existence in the Europe of 1929, he therefore developed a long analysis of boredom rather than a cultural reflection.

If, as you have asked, we approach this existential philosophical perspective with today’s situation in mind, I believe that two things are evident. First, that many of the interpretations that we are in and that shape what we are stem from philosophy. Here we can think, for example, of the issues of identity that dominate the imaginary and behavior of so many people in the West. Second, the inauthenticity of academic life has become systematic in virtue of the homogenizing globalization of academic habits: the imperative need to “build a CV,” the standardization of papers, the requirements of faculty accreditation, the obligation to have officially recognized research projects, etc., etc. All of that has turned academic life into a bureaucratic obstacle race that does not leave time –a vital place – for a personal commitment with philosophy, for living thought from within.

4. Over the last decades, you have had a strong interest in relating Heidegger’s thought and ethics. As you have explained, the notion of authenticity has provided “food for thought” when it has come to unfolding the, not always fully explicit, ethical implications of Heidegger’s work. Discussing the “implicit ethics” of *Being and Time* in your text of 2014 titled “Existential Ontology and Ethics,” you draw a distinction between "existential resolution” and “moral decision.” You argue that confusion between the levels that these notions represent is at the root of many misunderstandings related to a supposed “ethics of authenticity” contained in existential ontology. Could you say more about that?

The issue of the ethical, and even political, implications of existential analytics and Heidegger’s thought in general has always interested me, especially once I translated and wrote a prologue to his [1933] rectoral address, but it was only much later, in relatively recent writings, that I focused on it explicitly. Perhaps this delay was due to a latent idea that, before addressing it directly, I first needed to come to a more precise understanding of Heidegger’s body of work, of its fundamental aim and, more particularly, the mission and method of basic ontology.

The ontological framework of existential analytics, its subordination of the moral phenomenon -- as a preparatory task -- to the question of the meaning of being, completely determines its way of approaching the moral phenomenon and its possible relevance for understanding being. First off, one thing is clear: moral conduct, like any other form of behavior, is part of the ontic plane, which ontological analysis draws on with the aim of extracting its existential form. The implicit question guiding such analysis would be this: “How does an entity have to be in order to be *capable* of moral conduct?” What is of interest is thus not morality, but rather the type of being that it presupposes. It is on this ontological plane that the authenticity/inauthenticity distinction is inscribed. Its origin is found in the double order of possibility that the idea of existence entails: the specific possibility that we project (doing this or that) and a meta-possibility. This meta-possibility hinges on how we assume or accept, or *can* initially assume or accept, it. Do we do so in a semi-automatic way, or *can* we choose it properly, that is, consciously recognizing it as a possibility and not something that comes to us as a given? The “oneself” of everyday life is characterized by the first way, and Heidegger therefore says that choice is omitted in it. So that repairing this lack of choice is what brings about the existential resolution that characterizes the second way, authenticity. That is what opens the possibility of behavior being rigorously one’s own, making full sense of the expression, “I am *myself* the one who acts.” It is clear, then, that authenticity only qualifies our way of behaving with respect to the behaviors we adopt, not those behaviors themselves. Two things therefore seem plain to me. First, authenticity does not define the morality of a behavior, nor does it constitute a moral value in its own right; on the contrary, it always supposes first-order possibilities, which is where the options and preferences of moral life are given. Authenticity does not provide any decision-making criteria in this field; those criteria come from the moral or professional formation of each [person]. Authenticity just tells us how the subject makes his behavior his own. The basic point is this: authenticity is the ontological condition making moral life possible, in the sense that only an entity whose being consists in having to take a position with respect to itself can be a moral subject. But that merely ontological responsibility does not qualify [as] moral life. That does not consist of freely assuming one’s actions as one’s own, but rather of their good or bad character, and obviously the fact that I choose my choice does not thereby make what I chose good. Moral decision supposes existential resolution, but the latter cannot be substituted for the former. Doing so would, so to speak, be to empty [our decisions] of morality. An *ethic* of authenticity is therefore meaningless: it lends an absolute and separate character to what, by essence, refers to the first-order possibilities, to what we have to do, and makes the moral value of the action hinge on what is just a premise for it. The result is a nonsense already apparent in the joke going around among Heidegger students: that they left classes with resolve, but not knowing what to do. And this brings us to the second thing I would like to highlight: that authenticity obliges one to engage in making first-order decisions, that existential resolution requires moral decisions. Authenticity is not an existential moment where the agent can rest. On the contrary, it dispatches him toward the field of options and possibilities of practical life and to the rationality proper to it. Entering into a decision about the good reasons for undertaking an action is something that authenticity requires by virtue of the second existential plane, on which it is located.

5. In this same text, you maintain that “existence itself is something like the framework of morality, its original anchor point . . . But that does not mean that existential ontology alone can be considered the foundation of morality.” In other words, you claim that “the Heideggerian treatment of conscience offers elements sufficient for accommodating reasonable doubts about the possibility of deriving the moral phenomenon from existence itself.” Could you expand on this idea?

Your question is partly answered by what we were discussing regarding the previous question; it is a generalization of what we have seen concerning the relation between existential resolution and moral decision. In the same way that the former is the condition for the possibility of the latter, the general structure of existence as that being “to which its own being suits it” -- which has its being as something proposed to be done -- is the matrix, the root from which the possibility of moral conduct emerges. Only an entity whose being consists in having to realize possibilities and, with that, in having to take a position with respect to itself, configuring its own life, can ask itself, like the young Descartes, “What path will I follow in life?” And, because of that, its actions then appear as good or bad, its attitudes as egoistic or altruistic. But being an *ontological* condition of possibility does not mean that what is made possible, the morality of conduct, gets rid of the conditioning structure. Morality (the criterion of actions’ moral value, the idea of duty, moral principles, etc.) does not arise from the purely formal structure of existence. That is what it means to say that ontological existence is not the basis of morality, which supposes something more, something added from sources not pertaining to the ontological-existential constitution of the human being. And this is not a criticism of Heidegger, but rather a faithful reflection of the limits that he himself established to ontological analysis. What does to me appear deserving of criticism is the propensity in *Being and Time* and some of the contemporary courses not for deriving morality from ontology, but rather for interpreting ontologically what is specifically moral. That is what is especially noticeable in the pages on moral conscience that you allude to. Heidegger turns to moral conscience as a more or less common phenomenon in everyday experience in order to extract from it, as always, an existentially relevant structure. And for that he submits conscience to a process of formalization proper to existential analysis, which consists of dispensing with objective moments (not fulfilling a duty or complying with a law) and sticking to the form of being that implies the experience of reproaching oneself for something that moral conscience involves. What interests him here is that sense of rupture, the experience itself of questioning one’s own conduct. Once he has dispensed with the moral components of law and duty, Heidegger leaves one with the pure form of a call that existence makes to itself in order to accept its finite condition, to assume itself as pure power – to be what it is: authenticity. What warrants criticism is not this work of existential reduction, but rather the fact that Heidegger suggests to us that its result exposes the true meaning of moral conscience concealed by vulgar understanding. But this substitution of moral conscience with a type of existential conscience is untenable. The idea that something (a particular action) is due, that it is good to do it or to avoid it, and that the space of moral life is above all located in relations with others all disappears with the existential version of conscience and cannot be replaced without its losing meaning.

6. In your 2015 text titled “The Ontological Interpretation of Moral Sentiment,” you analyze the ontological interpretation of moral sentiment that Heiddeger develops in *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. There, Heidegger maintains that the “for-the-sake-of-which” (*Worumwillen*) is the structure that Kant dimly perceived with his formula of the “end in itself,” a formula that your own analysis takes as a starting point for casting the metaphysical neutrality of the “for-the-sake-of-itself” (*umwillen seiner selbst*) in a positive light. However, near the very end of that text, you indicate that “with the metaphysical neutrality of the for-the-sake-of-which, it seems logical to think that the ontological interpretation of moral sentiment has reached its desired endpoint, that of accounting for the internal character of the end of human existence, as suggested by the Kantian characterization of the end in itself.” But you then immediately call that into question, suggesting that the for-the-sake-of-itself does not fully incorporate the ontological structure supposed by the sentiment of respect since the for-the-sake-of-itself involves total silence concerning the rational being of the moral agent. How do you explain the fact that Heidegger commits, or allows himself, that omission?

It is interesting to compare how the Heideggerian treatment of Kant’s moral philosophy, which was clearly distant and critical in *Being and Time*, became increasingly understanding and close in the years that followed. That is what happens with interpretation of the Categorical Imperative, to which your question alludes. As always, Heidegger seeks to read the moral phenomenon ontologically and comes to see the Kantian idea that man exists as an end in himself (an idea giving rise to the second formulation of the Categorical Imperative), as another path to the existential root of morality. And I believe that Heidegger successfully repeats the attempt to demonstrate that the form of existence is a condition for the possibility of moral conduct. In effect, what Heidegger calls “for-the-sake-of-itself” (*umwillen seiner selbst*) emphasizes that, in realizing possibilities, we are at the same time indirectly working on ourselves. We are therefore, implicitly, our own end. Indeed, the mandate to act in a way taking man as an end and not as a means only makes sense if man’s being has that quality of being its own tacit end, a metaphysical trait that, though morally neutral, establishes the possibility of receiving the moral qualification of “end in itself.” And this is where the problem of Heideggerian interpretation presents itself: even if the for-the-sake-of-itself is shown to be the necessary ontological structure on which the moral concept of “end in itself” is based, it is completely insufficient when it comes to incorporating the moral, and even the ontological, premises of the Kantian idea. What the sentiment of respect reveals is that the universality of the moral law takes precedence over all the other ends arising from the inclinations, and that law does not see the subject as something exterior and foreign, but rather as belonging to it, as something that shares in its own nature. In short, the ability to be moved by a moral law in an unmediated way is what it means for an agent to have a rational nature. The concept of autonomy originates from there: it is that rational nature that allows for giving a law to oneself. The for-the-sake-of-itself and authenticity account for the moment of self-determination, but not of self-legislation, which is the rational moment of autonomy. This silence concerning rationality and the law is admissible, even obligatory, for existential analysis, but fatal for the understanding of morality.

7. I would like to return to your text of 2014. There, focusing on Heidegger after *Being and Time* (post-1927), you emphasize that “the initial (*anfängliche*) thinking about the truth of being, removed from all concrete analysis of factual existence, allowed for a zone of familiarity and proximity with ethics that the existential analytic decidedly rejected.” Here you are referring to *Letter on Humanism*, a text in which Heidegger explicitly referred to the possibility of an original ethic. As you indicate yourself, that possibility is tied to recuperating the original meaning of *ethos* (*ήθος*) noted by Heidegger, that of dwelling place or abode, which implies thinking about the original belonging-together of man and being underlying the modern philosophy of subjectivity. This philosophy, according to Heidegger, is the way of thinking on which habitual representations of man’s moral action are based. Could you outline the nature of this original ethic, taking into consideration Heidegger’s emphasis on calling subjectivity into question? And do you think that there would be space for an ethic thus understood in today’s world? Based on Heidegger’s interpretation of Hölderlin’s phrase “But where the danger is, grows also the saving power,” perhaps one might think that, despite this epoch being subjectively determined (and maybe even because of it), there is a space for welcoming an original ethic. What do you think?

What you suggest in these questions implies too many things about the “turn” of Heideggerian thought, [an issue] impossible to explain briefly. I will limit myself to making a few brief strokes, at the risk of oversimplifying. If we remember that already in *Being and Time* the meaning of “*being-in* (the world)” was, in keeping with its original meaning, “to dwell in,” “to be familiar with,” we have a road to understanding the place of ethics in the “second Heidegger”: it is about thinking the essence of human dwelling without the mediation of metaphysical categories of subjectivity, which are not just those of modern philosophy. The interesting thing is that existential ontology is also barred insofar as it offered [an account of] the being of the “well understood” subject, leaving only the basic idea summarizing it, the transcendence of Dasein as the open space that allows things to manifest their being as such. That [later] Heidegger also abandoned transcendence, too tied to the scheme of intentionality. But that does not mean that he did not recover it in the form of the belonging-together of man-being: the essence of man is being and maintaining himself through this power to manifest being, and being needs him as the place for its manifestation. That is why “to think of the truth of being as the initial element of man is already the original ethic.” That ethic is understood, then, not starting from the question of the correctness of the action, [as is] typical of thinking centered on subjectivity, but through thinking about dwelling, taking as its point of departure man’s original dwelling (*estancia*), which is nothing other than the open realm of being, the field where things can be manifest circumscribed by the four poles of the Fourfold (*Geviert*): earth, sky, gods, and mortals, within which our dealings with things take place. Heidegger also therefore defines the primary essence of dwelling as a taking-care of (*schonen*), a respecting of what is, in accordance with what the anchoring of man in being demands of him: *letting be*, being an active part of things’ capacity to manifest themselves. Dwelling is, then, essentially responsive; it is always a form of responding to the call of being. But since being is historical, dwelling is always epochal, which means that in our epoch it is technological, with the peculiar being-man relation that involves, one that imposes things’ way of appearing. And it is this situation, in which the original form of dwelling in being is postponed or forgotten in favor of relations of calculation and planning, which arouses the false idea that everything depends on human action. The task of thinking is therefore to find a way out of this intra-technological vision and to think of the technological as a determined configuration of belonging-together which, without escaping from it, we thereby begin to experience differently. Naturally, this is a slow and arduous, perhaps even illusory, endeavor; its aim is to keep the original meaning of dwelling from disappearing into complete oblivion, because that is what can settle human action into its proper place. This task therefore sounds nothing like an ethic in the usual normative sense; it includes neither moral norms nor programs of action, just attitudes like this kind of distanced acceptance of the technological world, which that [later] Heidegger calls “serenity” and can be understood more as a waiting than a form of action.