

TIME OF MEANING AND TIME OF SUBJECT

For two reasons, I see myself as little compatible, in the first glance, with our title (« Time and Temporality after Phenomenology »).

Because the issue is time, and, as a philosopher, I am reluctant to give time the preeminence it usually receives in contemporary continental philosophy: behind this preeminence, I see the choice of keeping ontology's first rank (while for me, transcendental and phenomenological tradition were trying to get apart from such assessment); and I regard space as the better theme, helping us not to think only in ontological terms.

Because I don't feel myself 'after phenomenology'. Even if developments of phenomenology along the last decades have often appeared to me as tedious, metaphysical, and far too academic, I still consider that Husserl's methodology and purpose have to be taken up, if we wish to build a large and welcoming house able to compete with the analytical one.

This being said, I nevertheless intend to deal with our subject. I will do it by exposing two parts of my work, the first one quite old (1991), the second one rather recent (2007). I shall first tell you about the way I tried to conceive some 'time of meaning', operating inside science and especially inside mathematics, following the inspiration of hermeneutical tradition (that is to say, 'after phenomenology', but still inside it perhaps). And then I shall present my description of some 'time of subject', in the context of what I call 'etho-analysis of subject': etho-analysis is the name I give to my way of taking up of phenomenological project today (so again, it stands after phenomenology but still belongs to it).

Time of meaning

Time of meaning is the translation of the title of a collection¹ I published in 1997, but which I gathered in the beginning of 1993: it contains most of the papers I wrote between 1988 and 1993, a period of which the main event, for me and my work, was the publication in 1991 of my *L'herméneutique formelle*, in which I tried to make clear for anyone that hermeneutics, in the sense of Heidegger and Gadamer, was working inside mathematics, especially contemporary mathematics².

The basic idea is quite simple. I understand as the lesson of Heidegger and Gadamer the vision of a kind of 'model of thought' alternative to the logical one. This model tells us the story of some subject which, originally, is concerned by a question about the being of some X (about its essence or about the way X poses itself). Our subject cannot say that he possesses some knowledge able of mastering X, but he cannot say either that X is completely new and unknown to him. His position and attitude towards X may be described as of 'dispossessed familiarity'. But this means that our subject already enjoys some pre-understanding of X – its status and essence – although he cannot put it in words and sentences. His adventure, then, consists in his

¹ Cf. Salanskis, J.-M., *Le temps du sens*, Orléans, Editions Hyx, 1997.

² Cf. Salanskis, J.-M., *L'herméneutique formelle*, Paris, Editions du CNRS, 1991 ; seconde édition Paris, Klincksieck, 2013.

following a path – the hermeneutical path – towards the actual comprehension, in words and propositions, of X’s being. Along this path, the original project of X’s being by our hero is confronted with his experience of it: this leads, possibly, to its rectification or its deepening. What I just resumed is represented by figure 1.

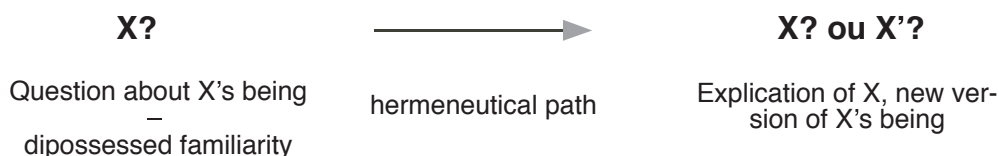


Figure 1 Diagram of ‘Time of meaning’

In Heidegger’s mind, and also, although differently, in Gadamer’s, this scheme was as such incompatible with formal science, typically with mathematics. Both could not conceive of the hermeneutical path as happening in mathematical space: as expressed and accomplished by proofs, computations, constructions, introductions of objects and of concepts. I did my best to show that they were wrong in my 1991 book.

What helped me very much, in that task, was the case of mathematical thought of Infinite, Continuum and Space. Because there is no way, in that case, to imagine that mathematics determines a predefined object. According to the very mathematical sense that was always attributed to them, Infinite, Continuum and Space are beyond object. One could even say that the notion of something beyond *being* with little *b*, which Heidegger has important difficulties to expose and let us understand in his writings of the second period, finds here something like a straightforward illustration. We are only describing our historical-epistemological experience by saying that we – as members of the ‘historial’ community of mathematicians – receive three questions (What is Infinite? What is Continuum? What is Space?), to the effect that it is incumbent on us to formulate answers, taking these questions in charge. Such answers proceed from our pre-understanding of Infinite, Continuum and Space, which clearly amounts to some familiarity, while also being, ‘by definition’, dispossessed. In that case, the hermeneutical path leads to a theory of some kind of multiple. It has to deal in some audacious and excessive way with the finite concept of quantity, while overcoming it. Mathematics is a long history of such theoretical construal of Infinite, Continuum and Space. Nowadays each such construal is bore by some formal theory, or at least by the exact definition of some mathematical structure inside the realm of formal mathematics. And this is the point that people like Heidegger and Gadamer were refusing a priori: that the hermeneutical path, along which the ‘first project’ of the being of X was tested and confronted with our experience of X, could consist in sequences of technical gestures, pertaining to language and formal objects. I even tried to explain that hermeneutics of Infinite, Continuum and Space were happening inside mathematics in the way the second Heidegger describes it: a new version of Continuum digs deeper into the mystery of Continuum, and leads us to experience it more radically through some new theoretical setting. It may be said that the topological concept of connectedness, together with the transdenumerable Infinite composition of the set \mathbf{R} , reformulates the traditional Aristotelian view of ‘non compositionality’ of Continuum, by making clear its relation with Infinity, at the level of elements and of parts.

It is not the place, here, to deal in a more detailed way with this discourse as a discourse about mathematics.

The question which I find natural to ask, after such work has been done, is about what appears at the ‘time of thought’, and which I call ‘time of meaning’, presupposing that thought in its radical sense is nothing but the life of meaning. Formally this time is made of anticipation and taking up, disengaging always two ‘moments’, the moment of

pre-understanding and the moment of explication. In posterior work³, I have defined hermeneutical intrigue in terms of three moments: 1) Impulse ; 2) Circle ; 3) Speech. *Impulse* corresponds to entering pre-understanding, or better to pre-understanding as involvement. *Circle* refers to what happens along hermeneutical path (our pre-understanding leads to understanding, and reciprocally each understanding triggers a kind of reaction and renewing of pre-understanding, the resulting circular process being the virtuous circle through which interpretation arises). *Speech* refers to the phase of going out of the circle in order to display some accomplished structure, which gets addressed inside a community.

But then, I ask my question more precisely: is it so sure that this temporal intrigue is one and the same with the temporal intrigue called fundamental temporalization in *Sein und Zeit*? Should we take for granted that hermeneutical time, as time of thought, coincides with fundamental temporalization of *Dasein*, which itself, according to the second Heidegger, coincides with fundamental temporalization of Being with great B?

I would like to offer just two remarks on the subject.

The first one: in our hermeneutical time, there is no present ek-stasis. The formal scheme shows a starting phase and an accomplishment phase. The starting phase is at the same time past-oriented ek-stasis, as reception of the question, and future-oriented ek-stasis, as a way of relating to the unmastered part, to the mystery. One could say that the second phase corresponds to present: a strange present, coming after past and future. But it does not, in the sense of ek-stasis: when we explicate, formulate, we do not relate to present as such (but still, rather, to past and future as stakes having arisen in the first phase). Ultimately, we could try to see the hermeneutical path as corresponding to present ek-stasis, arguing that such path is what usually, all the time, thought goes through. But again, this is not very convincing. The very content of the notion of hermeneutical circle means that, along the circle, we are always referred either to past (our pre-understanding of enigma) or to future (what asks to be added and said, also in the light of our acquaintance). The explication phase, by which the formal scheme ends, is the phase when we officially deliver or display some present, something others will be semantically contemporaneous of. But it is not the phase through which we relate to present as such, through which we phenomenologically project present as such.

The difference with Heidegger's standard narrative of *Sorge*, clearly, is that 'Time of meaning' does not clearly originate in future-strive (*sich-vorweg sein*). It originates as well, in past: in receiving the question, in a way which gives meaning to past. Time of meaning as I deciphered it taking up hermeneutical tradition is the time of a temporalization which does not privilege the future ek-stasis and which does not admit of any present ek-stasis.

My second remark will be about the time scale able to correspond to time of meaning.

According to Heidegger, 'time of meaning' already happens in ordinary experience of the world: we relate to the *Zuhanden* in our neighborhood, and we take A for B, along some referring function belonging to *Bedeutsamkeit*. This taking A for B has its existential status or phase, and then yields some statement: we go from the existential-hermeneutical *as* to the apophantic *as*. I have just argued that this first story of explicating is not equivalent to the story of thought path in §63 of *Sein und Zeit*. But for Heidegger, it is. So for him, the time scale of such concrete existential interpretation in the context of the workshop would be a possible time scale for time of meaning. We could call that Heidegger's naturalism. Formulated in standard objective terms, this

³. Cf. Salanskis, J.-M., *Herméneutique et cognition*, Lille, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2003.

would correspond to short time intervals, a few minutes at most. If we follow the suggestions of contemporary neurophysiology, we could naturalize a little more, considering the basic operations of primary consciousness, as Edelman describes them⁴, as cases of the hermeneutical scheme, and the objective interval would be inferior to one second. But, as I said, it is not clear that the function of the question, that an authentic overlapping of familiarity and dispossession really happen in those cases. Although I have followed such hypothesis, up to a certain point, in the introductory paper of *Le temps du sens* and in my 2003 *Herméneutique et cognition*.

But if we consider now the typical scenario of meaning move according to Gadamer, a quite different time scale appears. We receive the question, now, in the culture we inherit, as member of some generation, having been educated with and by such and such books, having grown in the context of such and such ideas and customs. And we take this culture as transmitting questions, that we assume, to the effect that we come to make our answers explicit, following both the teaching of our familiarity and our dispossession. Here, the time scale would be something like ten or twenty years.

And we also have the case of what Heidegger calls hermeneutics of Being. As we know, it shows some big periods, called ‘epochs’. We have the epoch of ancient times, where Being is conceptually understood as constant presence, or the epoch of modern times, where Being is understood as objectivity for the subject. Here, understanding seems to give rise to something like a temporal deployment, rather than some internal history or intrigue. But this deployment happens at a quite different scale, eventually enfolding a plurality of centuries.

As I already suspected in my 1997 book, but did not really state, it is far from clear that time of meaning shows some real unity among these three figures. The hermeneutical scheme I have disengaged in order to show its involvement in contemporary mathematics corresponds more or less to the second figure, but neither the original temporality of existential understanding nor the epochal temporality display the same form, or better the same rhythm. Still, according to Heideggerian philosophy, we have to think their unity. The simple and basic fact that fundamental temporality is prior to any objective measurement, and therefore to any temporal scale, entails for Heideggerian approach that temporality is one and the same, as temporality governing meaning, in each of the free figures. But even from the very quick examination we just went through, it appears that our three figures do not only differ at the ‘quantitative’ level, but also at the qualitative one.

Let us say nothing more about this first ‘post-phenomenological’ discussion of time under the inspiration of hermeneutics.

Time of subject

I have readdressed the issue of time in my 2007 book *Territoires du sens*⁵, dealing with what I called etho-analysis of subject. Some words of explanation are required here.

Etho-analysis is the name of my philosophical program. It intends to describe the various ‘sense regions’, as I call them, slightly modifying Husserl’s notion of *object region*. As Husserl wants phenomenology to teach us which specific intentional formula stands behind each object region, I plan to describe what stands behind any

⁴. In Edelman, G.M., *The Remembered Present A Biological Theory of Consciousness*, New York, Basic Books, 1989.

⁵. Cf. Salanskis, J.-M., *Territoires du sens*, Paris, Vrin, 2007.

sense region, that is to say any manifest sense sharing, as it appears as ongoing between members of an implicit collectivity.

So the basic intuition is that of sense sharing: I discover them as induced by some specific words of our language, which do not convey the extensional meaning of some class of items falling under the concept, but rather sound like a kind of call. The words mean asking us to behave in a way satisfying their requirement, putting ourselves at the level of their associated stakes. They enfold requirement, and address it, through each of us, to some collectivity, rather than they picture some part of the world's furniture.

My best example is that of the word love. We do not usually understand love as the common conceptual value, under which love episodes or loving things fall. Love is more likely used in order to signal that something we are talking about connects to love's stakes. Around love, so to say, a collectivity of people aiming at entertaining relationships deserving to be considered as love relationships takes place. This collectivity has a geographical aspect – people may evaluate other ones and compare themselves with them as far as respect of love's requirement is concerned, they attempt at satisfying it in front of each other – and a historical aspect – to participate in the sense region of love also means transmitting love's requirement to ulterior agents.

The key word (in our example love) is called the *sollicitator* (translation of the French *sollicitant*). Etho-analysis aims at uncovering and making explicit some list of prescriptions expressing the implicit requirement of the sense region. These requirements are not the rules people entertaining the region actually obey, they are the rules they refer to: when they break them, they know that they did wrong to the splendor of what the sollicitator calls to. I call the list corresponding to some sense region its 'sensation' (translation of the French *sémance*): so the sensation is something like the implicit 'table of laws' of the sense region. A last terminological point: under the authority (often bypassed) of such sensation, some collective life happens, which I call the ethos. Thus love is a sollicitator, determining the sense region or sense territory of love. We analyze the sensation of love, governing the ethos of love. And we are done with etho-analysis' extra-vocabulary.

Time comes to be concerned when I attempt at describing the sensation of the *subject* region. This means that I take subject as a sollicitator, which makes a big difference with classical stance: I hear in 'subject' something else than the name of a class of items in the world. This, literally, means that I do not take subjectivity as a type of being. So the usual debate about what Foucault, Canguilhem and Cavailles called 'philosophy of subject' cannot occur: in my approach, there is no chance that subject or subjectivity will receive too much being, or a too privileged place in the metaphysical system of being, as far as subject is from the onset taken as 'outside being', as related with some 'ought to be' rather than with some mode of being.

I understand subject, beyond its possible ontological and referential use, to convey some requirement, to signal some stakes. Subject means something we are called to realize, some game we play as long as we are sensitive to 'subject call': to the call of the sollicitator. Etho-analysis of subject makes explicit the prescriptions of the game of subjectivity. These prescriptions have various aspects (behaving like a subject – first person – behaving towards a subject – second person – picturing a subject – third person).

In my 2007 book, I claim that there is a specific temporality that we could call time of the subject, and which is mandatory as far as we play subject game, as far as we answer to subject sollicitator, and connect ourselves to subject ethos. This temporality is determined by two 'functions': irresponsibility and meta-life, as I call them. The

corresponding behaviors get inserted in the overarching ‘task of identity’, which is also part of the sensance.

I begin with the ‘task of identity’. My claim is simply that part of what is asked from us, if we wish to belong to the circle of subjectivity, is to build some identity. For sure, classical anti-subjectivism was right to argue that there is as a matter of fact nothing like some fixed sum of properties allowing to recognize, recover and warrant some human individual’s identity. Everything goes, flows and changes, as it is well known since Heraclites. But this does not discharge us from having to show some identity, to unify the multifaceted episodes of our personal story, in order to display some identity. In terms of Ricœur’s philosophy, our *ipse* has to make the diversity of our *idem* in some way one (as manifesting one and the same style, or as aiming although always differently at some constant goal, for example). That being offers no ground for identity, that it even more or less destroys it all the time, does not change anything here. Still, intervening like a subject means building one’s identity, along circumstances. We may forget of this requirement, but this means resigning from playing existence as subject. The task of identity is taken as a basic prescription of subject’s sensance.

What I call irresponsibility, then, is the typical gesture of rejecting the authority of what we have been, as a subject. I take the example of this coffee place which I visit every evening after work. Even if, since two years, I always order the same beer, the waiter is not allowed to take for granted that I will again, each time: he should ask me. I know perfectly well that he perhaps will judge it more commercial to bring me my usual drink without asking. And he could be right, I could enjoy very much his initiative. Still, what I know of myself as subject is that I keep the right of changing, in a perfectly unpredictable way. And without having explanations to give, to begin with to myself. Because being a subject means, for me, that I am some kind of arbitrary prince, never committed by any habit of mine. This concerns every possible regularity, not least the ones issuing from my choices. I am not bound by myself as freely displaying regularities, and this is part of what rules my behavior as behavior of some subject.

To prevent possible mistakes, I have to say that what I am describing here is not the intrinsic immorality of subject. For sure, to take an easy uncontroversial example, I do not have the right of stopping preparing breakfast for my child. But this is related to my child: it does not mean that I have to respect my regularity of taking care as such, as my tradition. On the contrary, true ethics asks from me to be able of overcoming my regularities in order to help. Irresponsibility as I take it is a way of relating to our past as built by us and showing regularities and predictabilities: a way that enfolds the command of not respecting, or at least the right to deviate.

I now come to what I call meta-life. I usually introduce it on the basis of a precise memory: the memory of some evening in Lille, at the end of the nineties, where we were supposed do play bridge at one of our colleague’s flat. He had told us the address and advised us about how to reach there. Arriving 15mn too early, I decided that I would take the opportunity of buying ‘things to drink’ for the little bunch of friends. I spotted some supermarket 50m further in the street, and went there. While I was inside the shop, I realized that from the moment I had formed the project of buying drinks, I was entertaining in my mind the precise schedule of all steps to follow (walking 50m, crossing the street, taking some trolley, finding the drink department, putting bottles in my trolley, and so on). And I was carrying the heavy weight of this sequence in parallel with immediate life, as a kind of additional burden. I analyze such phenomenological move as a consequence of the identity task. That we have to build a narrative of

ourselves as such and such identity entails that our future is at our charge, that we shape future as a narrative: and this gives place to meta-life, to this strange way of imposing some sequence-structure to what is happening, making it fulfilment. The funny thing being that much energy is spent in this apparently perfectly absurd supplement to life.

As a comment, meta-life explains partly, I guess, why and how anti-subjectivist philosophy could be so popular among subjects. It seems straightforward that meta-life is a kind of disease, and that we wish to get rid of it: to relate to the future in a much healthier way, by simply welcoming the new present at every moment. And we do in fact try to escape meta-life, for the sake of happiness, in many ways and many moments. Still, the logic of ‘simply welcoming the new present’, ultimately, contradicts the stakes of being a subject, of behaving as subject, of participating in the shared tradition of subjectivity. Because, to begin with, it leads us to forget of the task if identity. And shaping the future as the narrative of us is part of this task.

So, according to my etho-analysis of subject, time of subject enfolds two basic gestures, two commanded gestures: irresponsibility towards the past, meta-life towards the future.

If I look at this conception of time from outside, I think there are two possibly important features: on the one hand, that time is considered in the perspective of prescription, that temporalization occurs as required; on the other hand, that there is no ‘present’ in this temporalization.

Some comment on the first point: in our tradition, time is very strongly connected to being. We may accept Heidegger’s result – and even reiterated result – that being arises in the horizon of time, is best understood in that horizon, or that being refers to happening of being and that such happening, already, enfolds some ‘time matrix’. In one or another formulation, such considerations are probably inevitable as long as one thinks of time in the classical perspective of ontology. I think there is even a stronger connection: that time seems to enforce being more than being itself. When you say that something ‘is’, maybe you do not mean that it actually is, only that you consider it, that it has some intentional status; but when you say that something occurs, has some date, counts in temporal dimension, then as such it enjoys the full dignity of being (even if your refer to some mind state, the very fact that you consider it as temporal makes it real). It is therefore a radically new perspective that the one describing time as correlative of some temporalization which it itself prescribed: time of subject appears as contingent, as part of some subject tradition that we could forget. So we depart from the necessary all encompassing time we are used to. To put it more explicitly: our conception of time is framed in the anontological context of prescription.

Some comment on the second point: one could say that the task of identity, presented as a kind of overarching command under which irresponsibility and meta-life stand, plays the part of the present. I think this reading is not the best. To begin with, even if you account for time of subject in that way, then you have a level discrepancy between present on the one hand and past and future on the other hand: and this changes importantly the time structure. But if we enter the discussion deeper, I don’t feel that the task of identity refers to some present. We are tormented by the requirement of making our trajectory the trajectory of one and the same individual, keeping some identity, and this burden concerns the global narrative of us, that we always constitute by putting together pieces of past and anticipations of future. This narrative has two status: it is required, and anticipated by us, and as such it takes place in the future; or we have issued some synthesis, expressing some text subject, and in that sense identity takes place in the past. Thus I think that to locate identity in the present, or to understand the identity task as associated to the present, does not respect our actual

experience, as I just tried to picture it. Identity task is precisely uncomfortable because it divides us between past and future.

Last words

I shall add only a few words, only in order to establish some communication between my two parts. As it should have already become clear, the feature of ignoring the present is common to what I tried to articulate in Heideggerian and Gadamerian terms and named ‘time of meaning’, and what I offered in a levinasian framework and named ‘time of subject’. In both cases, we have a twofold time structure: in the case of time of meaning, we have the preunderstanding pole of past and future, and the explication pole of meaning accomplishment, in which we deliver some present without aiming at it; in the case of time of subject, we have the irresponsibility pole of past, and the meta-life pole of future.

At first sight, our two times are not analogous as far as the relation to being is concerned. Indeed if our model is Heidegger’s and Gadamer’s conception of hermeneutics, then we should regard hermeneutics, as they did, as always hermeneutics of being. We should do so on the one hand because being is always what we aim at interpreting along hermeneutical paths, and on the other hand because being is what so to say speaks, while hermeneutical circle and path achieve themselves. But, as I explained already in *Le temps du sens*, such is not my perspective. In this book I was trying to find the unity of hermeneutical time in the way a community was taking responsibility for questions, assuming them as sent. The temporalization structure between pre-understanding and explication has then to be read as tension from question to answer, or between question and answer, each one relaunching the other. What stands behind is dialog rather than being. The unity of time of meaning is ethical. It is remarkable that such language already surfaces in Gadamer’s writings, even if he maintains the horizon of language as house of being. In this early work I was not doing anything else than formulating explicitly the levinasian part of Gadamer’s discourse.

To conclude, I think that there is strong unity in these ways of trying to think of time as time of meaning and time of subject, even if the two constructions differ in many ways.