



## The Subject's Embodiment In The Midst of Ontology And Ethics: A Phenomenological Survey of The Body In Martin Heidegger And Emmanuel Levinas' Thoughts

Mohammadreza Rikhtegaran\* | Alireza Sayadmansour\*\*

Received: 01/02/2018 | Accepted: 09/04/2019

### Abstract



In his *Being and Time*, Heidegger does not illustrate Dasein's embodiment but he postpones his illustration for some time in the future, namely in his *Zollikon Seminars* (1959-1969). In the seminars, Heidegger provides his clearest elucidation for this primordial fact that Dasein's embodiment is openness to the world; Dasein's existence extends beyond and over its physical body thereby construing and analysing the world from an existential standpoint. He puts forward the title "bodying forth" for this primordial fact. Dissimilarly, Levinas, by adopting his peculiar ethical approach, criticises the Heideggerian Dasein: Heideggerian Dasein is sufficiently not human (i.e. "from flesh-and-blood"). Levinas lays stress upon the fact that the subject's face-to-face encounter with the Other can be taken from the perspective of embodied reality. A novel wisdom of the body will be constituted in the context of the I's ethical relationship with the Other and the I's widely open receptivity to fulfilling the Other's demands and needs. In this paper, having made an investigation into the subject's embodiment in both philosophers' different phenomenologies, a serious scrutiny will be given to the Levinasian critique of Dasein as it is insufficiently constituted "from flesh-and-blood".

### Keywords

Embodiment, Emmanuel Levinas, Ethical Phenomenology, Fundamental Ontology, Martin Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*.

\* Associate Professor of Philosophy, Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Letters and Humanities, University of Tehran | rikhteg@ut.ac.ir

\*\* PhD Student of Philosophy, Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Literature and Humanities, University of Tehran | sayadmansour@ut.ac.ir

□ Rikhtegaran, M., & Sayadmansour, A. (2019). The Subject's Embodiment In The Midst of Ontology And Ethics: A Phenomenological Survey of The Body In Martin Heidegger And Emmanuel Levinas' Thoughts. *The Journal of Philosophical - Theological Research*, 21(79), 71-96. <https://doi.org/10.22091/jptr-pfk.2019.2889.1825>.



## **Introduction**

Embodiment occupies a peculiar place in both German and French phenomenologies; giving it a meticulous scrutiny can characterise phenomenologists' attitudes and approaches towards the world, thereby specifying the correlation between (human) existence and the world. Among different phenomenologists, Heidegger and Levinas have been selected as two opposite cases for comparison just because of their basic differences in attitudes to the subject-matter: Dasein's embodiment comes finally in line with understanding and interpreting fundamental ontology, that is, Dasein's existence is always able to interpret the world from outside/beyond its physical borderlines so as to come to understand the world. Thus, being-in-the-world, according to Heidegger, finds a specific interpretation of embodiment with an ontological analytic import. Unlike Heidegger's, Levinas' phenomenologisation of the body is in line with his Other-oriented ethics. A novel wisdom of the body takes its form from the I's ethical relation with the Other, and is also constituted out of the I's mere receptivity towards the Other's demands and needs. With this in mind, the sort of possibilities embodiment provides for the ethical I is a sort of sensibility and vulnerability -, namely of absolute passivity.

## **Objective and Method**

The authors' main objective, in this paper, is to put forward a new comparison between two distinctive kinds of attitudes and approaches towards embodiment within philosophical tradition of phenomenology: ontology and ethics. What makes this investigation into the subject-matter necessary is the fact that the whole presence of the subject in the world comes to reality with its bodiliness; the reality about which Heidegger and Levinas are not in agreement with each other, and therefore are on the two opposite sides. Heidegger gives an excellent example of ontological analysis of embodiment to which Levinas stands in striking contrast; it can apparently be feasible to ground embodiment theory on the subject's moment of encounter with the Other. The body already gives the first and foremost motive for being an ethical subject (= ethical embodiment). Since this research is classified in the realm of basic (and not applied) research, the authors' advocated approach to the main questions about, and possibilities of both ontological and ethical embodiments is phenomenological; and accordingly, the method adopted to proceed with the subject-matter is a descriptive-interpretative one in order to bring about a justifiable reading of the from-library-taken notes.

## **Conclusion**

Two significant approaches to embodiment within German and French phenomenologies stand in apparent contrast with each other: ontology and ethics.

A brilliant exponent of the former is Heidegger and that of the latter is Levinas. Levinas' criticism of Dasein's embodiment is reliant upon its abstractness and (pure) ontological directedness; for (human) existence to be in relation with itself and its surrounding world it is necessary to be sensitive and receptive toward the Other's demands and material needs (= ethical embodiment).

## References

---

- Aho, K. A., (2009). *Heidegger's Neglect of the Body*, SUNY, Albany NY.
- Cohen, R. A. (1986). *Face to Face with Levinas*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Dreyfus, H., (1991). *Being-in-the-World. A Commentary on Heidegger's "Being and Time"*, MIT Press, Cambridge MA.
- Heidegger, M., (1977). *Sein und Zeit*, Klostermann, Frankfurt.
- Heidegger, M., (2001). *Zollikon Seminars. Protocols—Conversations—Letters*, tr. by F. Mayr and R. Askay, Northwestern University Press, Evanston IL.
- Levinas, E., (1991). *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, tr. by A. Lingis, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht.
- Levinas, E., (1969). *Totality and Infinity*, tr. by A. Lingis, Duquesne University Press, Pittsburgh.

