

THE ONTOLOGICAL PROBLEM OF FUTURITY TEMPORALITY AND POSSIBILITY IN PHENOMENOLOGY, MESSIANISM, AND HYPER-CHAOS

Abstract: This article discusses what I call the ontological problem of futurity. On the one hand, the future escapes any attempt to reduce it to a phenomenologically given set of possibilities, while it, on the other hand, must be somehow experientially given in order to have any bearing on life as we know it. In the article, I first discuss how the ontological problem of futurity appears in the post-phenomenological conceptions of temporality and possibility found in both Derridian and Levinasian messianism as well as Meillassoux's hyper-Chaos, which each in their own way conceptualize the future as something *opposed* to the structure of intentionality. I then proceed to propose a more traditional phenomenological — or rather Heideggerian — solution to the problem. In short, I show that Heidegger's understanding of world-entry offers a distinction between innerworldly possibilities and possibilities of the world and argue that this twofold concept of potentiality, as well as the two corresponding attitudes towards the future, are sufficient to give the future its due (as that which exceeds the horizon of expectability) while still retaining an intimate relation to the structure of intentionality and the phenomenological horizon.

Keywords: Future, Intentionality, Phenomenology, Possibility, Temporality.

The issue of the human future calls to mind all sorts of questions about technology, our historical epoch, climate change, and all of the social and political processes that are currently going wrong. All of these questions are urgent questions. Yet the issue of the human future also calls for a different kind of

inquiry, since all these questions presuppose that we have a good answer to the fundamental question: What is futurity? This question is embarrassing, and we quickly end up in the same predicament as St. Augustine, who once said of the issue of time: “If no one asks of me, I know; if I wish to explain to him who asks, I know not.”

The issue of futurity is not just a metaphysical puzzle. Even though it is in important ways similar to the general metaphysical problem of time as we know it from thinkers from Zenon to McTaggart, the issue of futurity, as I understand it, constitutes a problem pertaining to lived experience in a particular urgent manner since it, in some sense, defines the possible meanings of *urgency*. At issue is what we, as finite beings, can expect; what we can hope for, to use the Kantian trope; or, simply, what is even possible for us. That being said, the main aim of the present essay is not to analyse specific socio-cultural, environmental, or technological challenges. Underlying these contemporary discourses is a more fundamental problem. My suggestion is that we need an ontological inquiry into the structures of human temporality to get our thinking straight: What do we even talk about when we talk about the future?

With my invocation of Augustine, I do not intend to suggest that there has been no advance in philosophy since the fourth century. Indeed, the philosophy of the 20th century saw numerous competing approaches to the ontology of temporality and processes from Whitehead and Bergson to phenomenology. In this article, I will focus on the advances of phenomenology concerning the issue of futurity and, in particular, Martin Heidegger’s early interpretation of the human being as the entity that opens up for a temporally structured understanding of being. In short, Heidegger made temporality *the* fundamental issue of human being-in-the-world. For this reason, hermeneutic phenomenology offers a promising point of departure for the questions: What does a phenomenological approach to futurity look like? How is the “not yet” experientially given?

Despite his monumental impact on contemporary philosophy, it remains controversial whether Heideggerian ontology — and perhaps even phenomenological ontology as such — is capable of grasping the elusive character of futurity. The problem is the following: Given that phenomenology investigates the structure of intentionality (the correlation between human experience and being), phenomenology necessarily investigates futurity as it appears *to me* or *us*. Does phenomenology undermine the radicality of futurity addressing it from the perspective of intentionality? Is there something

fundamentally non-phenomenological about futurity? Is futurity, perhaps, characterized by *not* being given to intentionality and its analysis?

In short, the ontological problem of futurity is that the future, on the one hand, escapes any attempt at reducing it to a determinate set of possibilities that appear on the phenomenological horizon, while it, on the other hand, must be somehow given within such a horizon if it is to be understandable at all and not just a form of empty, speculative possibility without any bearing on what we might call lived or existential temporality.

In the following, I will discuss whether or not phenomenological ontology can actually address the ontological problem of futurity and critically ask how the problem of the future relates to the phenomenological problem of the world. Doing so, I will draw heavily upon Heidegger's early work and show that the dynamic of possibilities that characterizes Heidegger's understanding of world-entry helps us solve the ontological problem of futurity.

In Section 1, I will provide a more detailed outline of the ontological problem of futurity by pointing to two recent attempts at conceptualizing futurity as something that necessarily lies beyond intentionality. I will use as my examples Derridian/Levinasian messianism and Meillassoux's hyper-Chaos. In Section 2, I will briefly clarify the basic structure of Heidegger's existential temporality and sketch the argumentative strategy that I will pursue to give futurity its due without abandoning the phenomenological project. In Section 3, I show that Heidegger's conception of possibility is more complex than usually understood and that a twofold concept of possibility will enable us to understand the structure of being-in-the-world as inherently dynamic. This allows me, in Section 4, to conceptualize futurity not only as a phenomenologically given and thus expected (or expectable) possibility but also more radically as that which makes any horizon of expectable possibilities possible in the first place. Futurity, in this sense, is not a possibility available on my horizon but the possibility that this horizon itself might become radically transformed. I conclude by summarizing the advantages that this phenomenological approach holds over messianism and hyper-Chaos.

1. The Problem of Futurity and Its Relation to Intentionality

The worry that phenomenology reduces futurity to something that it is not by taking it to be futurity *for me* was already raised by Emmanuel Levinas in his essay "Time and the Other." Levinas takes this issue to be a central part of

his larger worry that an exclusive focus on the structures of intentionality will render us unable to account for any relation to that which is radically other than us, namely, the Other: “[T]he future is what is not grasped, what befalls us and lays hold of us. The other is the future. The very relationship with the other is the relationship with the future.” (Levinas 1987: 77)

Levinas argues that there is a structural similarity between our relation to the future and our relation to the other since they both aim at something that lies *beyond intentionality or consciousness*. The ontological problem of futurity and the ontological problem of alterity are similar, insofar as they both aim to describe a phenomenon that by definition lies beyond the horizon in which we live. Levinas’ worry that we might end up in a form of solipsism where the Other is constantly reduced to the Same can thus also be formulated in temporal terms that underlines his distance from Heideggerian ontology: As that which is beyond my temporally structured horizon, the Other opens up a form of temporality that I cannot control and grasp but that befalls me and lays hold of me. The Other is, precisely, that which I cannot see coming and what I can only find myself passively exposed to. Similarly, futurity is that which I cannot foresee, that which surprises me. The future is that which happens to me.

The relation to the Other and the future is, hence, liminal and elusive. Levinas thus compares it to the phenomenon of caress:

It is like a game with something slipping away, a game absolutely without project or plan, not with what can become ours or us, but with something always other, always inaccessible, and always still to come. The caress is the anticipation of this pure future, without content. (Levinas 1987: 89)

Levinas takes the relation between the future and intentionality to be asymptotic: it marks a limit that we can never coincide with fully, a limit that we are constantly oriented towards but which never arrives and which, therefore, always eludes our grasp. As a “pure future, without content” that is “always still to come,” Levinas’ attempt to grasp futurity as lying beyond intentionality becomes a form of *messianism*. According to him, intentionality is radically open to the future but in such a way that the future can never be reduced to the future *for us*. Intentionality is open to a register of the future that can, in principle, never arrive, never become present.

This corresponds to what Jacques Derrida calls *messianicity without messianism*. Derrida writes that he takes messianism to be a “universal structure

of experience” that “cannot be reduced to religious messianism of any stripe” (Derrida 1999: 248). By this, he means to say that an openness towards or an expectation of a future capable of completely transforming the present characterize experience, but in such a way that this transformation cannot be ascribed to any concrete event. This type of messianism thus points beyond the horizon of expectation in a way that can never be fulfilled by any ontic content. If we are to conceptualize the future, we must, in other words, go beyond the paradigm of intentionality, since futurity cannot be reduced to a future–present, to any potential intentional content or intentional correlate. No Messiah can fulfil the expectation of this messianism. Futurity, in this sense, is nothing but the inability of the present to close in upon itself; it is the asymptotic relation to that which always lies beyond the intentional relation.

More recently, Quentin Meillassoux’s *After Finitude* has developed an alternative attempt to grasp temporality beyond the phenomenological correlation. Instead of challenging phenomenology by invoking the issue of “radical alterity,” he does so by inquiring into what he calls “the great outdoors” (Meillassoux 2014: 7). Meillassoux’s argument concerns itself primarily with our relations to the past — in particular the pre–historic past that lies before the emergence of correlationist life — but his argument extends to an ontological problem of temporality as such. In his famous example of the *arché–fossil*, Meillassoux poses the question: How do we account for that which lies radically beyond the correlation, e.g. a fossil that preexists life by millions of years? Meillassoux then argues that once the correlationist concedes that there was something before life and thought, she has also admitted that the correlation is not exhaustive of the world in itself. The correlation is, in other words, by no means necessary. It follows that the structures of intentionality are not transcendental structuring principles of the world, and thus we end up with what Meillassoux calls *the necessity of contingency*: If there is no transcendental principle to govern the world, nothing is necessary except contingency. This means that there are no necessary entities, events or laws. Concluding this line of argument, Meillassoux writes:

Everything could actually collapse: from trees to stars, from stars to laws, from physical laws to logical laws; and this not by virtue of some superior law whereby everything is destined to perish, but by virtue of the absence of any superior law capable of preserving anything, no matter what, from perishing. (Meillassoux 2014: 53)

Meillassoux calls this radical state of contingency for *hyper–Chaos* (Meillassoux 2014, 64). This echoes the ontological problem of futurity since the

question of the arche–fossil poses the question about that which lies beyond the temporal structures of intentionality. Furthermore, Meillassoux’s conception of a non–correlationist contingency pits one form of possibility against another: What is the ‘not yet’ — the possible — that lies beyond my grasp? If contingency is the only necessary thing, then it is possible that the temporal structuring of the world that takes place as my correlation can become radically undone. It is possible that my possibilities (or, put in transcendental terms, the conditions of possibilities that constitute any experience for me) will perish. Meillassoux’s questioning of correlationist temporality thus opens up for a conception of *absolute contingency* which is also a conception of *absolute possibility*: “The absolute is the possible transition, devoid of reason, of my state towards any other state whatsoever” (Meillassoux 2014: 56).

Hyper–Chaos is thus something...

akin to Time, but a Time that is inconceivable for physics, since it is capable of destroying, without cause or reason, every physical law, just as it is inconceivable for metaphysics, since it is capable of destroying every determinate entity, even a god, even God. This is not a Heraclitean time, since it is not the eternal law of becoming, but rather the eternal and lawless possible becoming of every law. (Meillassoux 2014: 64)

Both hyper–Chaos and messianism identify an ontological problem of futurity that haunts any phenomenological approach to temporality and tries, albeit in different ways, to conceive of a kind of temporality that lies beyond intentionality. Levinas and Derrida take our relation to futurity to be equivalent to our relation to the absolute other, namely, as implying an openness towards something that always eludes us. They take the radical future to be an asymptotic but necessary structure of intentionality itself. Meillassoux, on the other hand, rejects even this implicit primacy of the correlation and argues that the correlation itself is entirely without necessity. Hyper–Chaos thus names a structure of possibility that is completely unthinkable from within the correlational structure, since it is a lawless potentiality that can undo the very structure of intentionality itself.

These two post–phenomenological responses to the problem of futurity leave us with a dilemma: Should we accept the reduction of futurity to the available possibilities and conceive of futurity as the horizon of expectability or do we have to say that the future is an absolute possibility that necessarily exists beyond this horizon (either in the form of an asymptotic messianism or a speculative hyper–Chaos)? In the following, I will argue that these two

options are not exhaustive and that it is indeed possible to account for a non-expectable futurity from within the structure of intentionality and, hence, that the ontological problem of futurity does not require that we go beyond the horizon of expectability but only that we understand this as sufficiently dynamic. It is, in other words, possible to account for the difference between existential temporality and a non-available, non-expected futurity without abandoning the phenomenological project. This requires, first, that we clarify the interrelation between existential temporality, possibility, and the phenomenological horizon.

2. Existential Temporality and Possibility

Instead of locating futurity in what lies beyond intentionality as the elusive Other or as the contingency of this structure itself, I will show that it is possible to solve the ontological problem of futurity through a closer examination of the structure of intentionality itself — or, rather, the structure that makes intentionality possible, namely, the phenomenon of the world.

My solution proposes that there is a temporal equivalent to what Eugen Fink has called the cosmological difference, namely, the distinction between the innerworldly and the world. Following Heidegger, I will argue that any horizon of intelligibility (any world) is a temporally organized structure of possibility. Futurity names the possibilities of this structure that are not yet present. I will, however, argue that this is not the only kind of possibility (and therefore futurity) at play in Heidegger's ontology since we must understand this temporally organized structure of possibility as itself somehow contingent. This means that we have both innerworldly possibilities and the possibility that this horizontal structure becomes otherwise. My solution to the ontological problem of futurity hinges on this complex, dynamic, and largely implicit understanding of potentiality.

Following Heidegger, I propose the following phenomenological ontological claims: Temporality is the process that opens up a horizon of understanding for the human being. In this horizon, the three ecstases (past, present, and future) appear as a unitary phenomenon. This is what Heidegger calls *care* [*Sorge*]. In this unitary phenomenon, futurity is what appears possible for the human being to be or do.

The ontological problem of futurity (as we find it in both Levinas/Derrida and Meillassoux) criticizes this kind of futurity. It reduces, they argue, futu-

rity to available possibilities. It is my hypothesis, however, that this structure hinges on another and more radical concept of possibility and therefore also of futurity. I will thus argue that the world is a *particular* set of possibilities and that this means that other sets of possibilities are somehow possible. For this reason, the phenomenological–ontological concept of the world hinges on two distinct concepts of possibilities: the possibility *within* the world and the possibility *of* the world. Furthermore, if our relation to futurity is equivalent to our relation towards possibilities, then the two concepts of possibility correspond to two different orientations towards futurity. I will argue that these two different orientations towards the future correspond to two different affective modes or registers: expectability and the surprise that open up a horizon of expectability, respectively. I will thus maintain that futurity, in the strong sense, is not identical to the horizon of expectable possibilities but rather the happening of such a horizon of expectability. This radicalizes the phenomenological ontological project rather than abandoning it without reducing futurity to the possibilities that appear to me.

2.1. What is Existential Temporality?

Heidegger's hermeneutic approach to phenomenology claims that we need something more than just the *intending* and the *intended* to account for the meaning of intentionality. We also need what he calls an *understanding of being* to meaningfully intend something.

To uncover an entity of a specific kind, I must already be somehow familiar with its kind of being. I must already be familiar with a horizon or disclosure that gives me a preliminary understanding of the entity. This preliminary understanding is not a mental state but is rather a worldly background structure. To take an institutional fact as my example, it is evident that to understand the piece of paper in front of me *as* money, I must already have an understanding (however basic) of the institutions that make money possible, of what money usually looks like, of what can be done with money, etc. The perception of money cannot be reduced to a relation between an intending subject and an intended object but presupposes a tacit understanding of a highly complex social practice. The argument in *Being and Time* is that this background structure is, in its ontologically most basic form, a kind of temporality.

He thus argues that an understanding of being is the condition of possibility for encountering something as something. The horizon, accordingly,

precedes the intentional relation and enables the entity to appear as the kind of entity that it is. This background understanding is not first established in the intentional relation but presupposed by it. This is what Heidegger calls *facticity* or *thrownness*. Whether I understand the banknote in front of me as money, as counterfeit, or as a material with a certain chemical composition, all of these intentional relations presuppose a prior disclosure or horizon in which the entity can be uncovered or understood as something particular. They all presuppose that I am *already* embedded within a whole of significance — whether this is the world of finance, organized crime, or chemical analysis.

The facticity of always already understanding being corresponds, of course, to the existential ecstasis of the past. It is, in addition, easy to see how it also refers to the second ecstasis, namely, the present in so far as we are already at or alongside entities in the world. I am always already “out there” among the entities that I understand through my prior understanding of being. Furthermore, any understanding of an entity involves the third ecstasis — futurity — since the uncovering of something within a horizon lets it come forth as something within a teleologically and normatively structured set of possibilities. When I understand something, I understand it through its location in a space of possibilities. If I understand money, I understand it as something that can be used to buy stuff. Not only do I uncover that thing in front of me as something based on a previous background familiarity, but this act of understanding also necessarily and simultaneously projects a structure of potentiality ahead of itself, which gives shape to the experience of the thing I have in front of me. I simply do not understand a piece of paper if I do not, at the same time, have a (however vague) understanding of the potential uses of it. In this way, the three ecstases are a single unitary phenomenon, namely, care. This structure of temporality is, simply put, constitutive of the way in which things can matter to us.

2.2. Futurity and Possibility in *Being and Time*

This explains why the concept of possibility is so central to Heidegger’s project. In a certain sense, Dasein simply is its possibility since it is always thrown into determinate possibilities due to its facticity. As itself a thrown possibility of being something, Dasein itself projects possibilities whenever it understands the world. “As long as it is, Dasein always has understood itself and always will understand itself in terms of possibilities” (Heidegger 1962: 185).

Heidegger opposes this concept of possibility with what he calls “empty logical possibility” (Heidegger 1962: 183), which he associates with traditional ontology. Possibility should neither be understood as the contingency of a present-to-hand entity nor as the opposition to what is actual or what is necessary. Instead, Heidegger urges us to understand possibility *as existential* (Heidegger 1962: 183), which means that there is a distinctive kind of possibility that characterizes Dasein, i.e., the human being defined as the entity for whom its own being is at issue (Heidegger 1962: 32). Dasein cares about its world, which also means that its own sense of itself is intrinsically bound up with the space of possibilities in which it is thrown. My embeddedness in a world uncovers some factual possibilities to me, and these possibilities matter to me as something that I, in particular, have to deal with.

Dasein can thus be thought of as a temporal unfolding of possibilities. It exists in an orientation towards the future because it cares for its own being as being something particular within that space of disclosed possibilities. Based on these possibilities, it understands itself; its possibility of doing this or that comes towards it “from” the existential sense of the future. The indifferent possibilities of *liberum arbitrium* ignore and obscure this structure. Originally, possibilities appeal to us; we are engaged in them. We come towards ourselves in these possibilities, because we see them as something that relates to us in our very being. As Heidegger writes: “This letting-itself-come-towards-itself in that distinctive possibility which it puts up with, is the primordial phenomenon of the future as coming towards” (Heidegger 1962, 372). This is an existential concept of futurity and possibility that is rooted in the structure of care. The future is something that appeals to us; it is a constitutive aspect of our care for the world and ourselves.

3. The Possibilities of the World

Yet if we accept the claim that futurity is the possibilities that appear to us — if it is to be understood based on the particular set of possibilities that offer themselves to us as our horizon — we have already excluded a whole range of other possibilities. It is contingent whether I understand the entity within this or that horizon of possibilities; this bears witness to the fact that *other possibilities than the ones currently appearing to me are somehow possible*. We thus face the ontological problem of futurity once again: Futurity as such cannot be reduced to that which seems possible to me.

The contingency of the care–structure follows from its facticity: certain possibilities appear to me but this temporal configuration of possibilities could be otherwise. Heidegger says something to this extent in a lecture course from 1928:

World, as the totality of the essential *inner possibilities* of Dasein as transcending, surpasses all actual beings. Whenever and however they are encountered, actual beings always reveal themselves — precisely when they are disclosed as they are in themselves — only as a restriction, as *one possible realization of the possible, as the insufficient out of an excess of possibilities*, within which Dasein always maintains itself as free projection. (Heidegger 1992: 192)⁽¹⁾

The horizon, as that which lies beyond or behind all things and thereby gives them meaning, is described as a set of *inner possibilities*. These inner possibilities allow entities to appear as the entities that they are (e.g., the piece of paper *as* money). Yet this is only a *restriction* of a wider set of possibilities. The horizon or the world is *one possible realization of the possible*; it carves out a small area of an excess of possibilities.

The phrase “*one possible realization of the possible*” testifies to the fact that there must be two different concepts of possibility at play here: a narrow, “inner” concept of possibility, and a wider concept of possibility that makes the “inner” kind of possibility possible. In other words, another kind of possibility lurks behind the existential concept of possibility. This is not an addition or afterthought but is rather a presupposition — a condition of possibility — of the phenomenological–ontological concept of the horizon.

If our experience of futurity is linked to our experience of possibility, and we have, indeed, two different concepts of possibility, do we, then, also have two different experiences of futurity?

One could, of course, argue that this distinction merely separates a phenomenological concept of futurity (the orientation towards inner possibilities) from a post–phenomenological or speculative concept of futurity (the orientation towards the excess of possibilities). Yet this glosses over the intimate connection that Heidegger proposes in the above passage: the phenom-

(1). This is not to suggest that this is the first time that Heidegger sheds light on the ontological problem of futurity, even though I believe that this particular lecture course offers a particularly illuminating interpretation of the phenomenological–ontological problem of time. Below, I argue, however briefly, that the problem of futurity also underlies his earlier analyses of the experience of time in early Christianity — especially his interpretation of Saint Paul. I thank an anonymous peer–reviewer for the suggestion to clarify this connection.

enological concept of possibility presupposes the other concept of possibility. The crucial point is that we do not have two unrelated concepts of possibility. The “inner” possibilities available to us are one possible realization of the other sense of possibility. A successful answer to the ontological problem of futurity requires that we illuminate the connection between these two orders of possibility from within the phenomenological horizon. How do we stand in relation to the condition of possibility that underlies the possibilities that are possible to us? How, if at all, can these possibilities themselves appear?

A little later in the lecture course, Heidegger talks about *world–entry* (Heidegger 1992: 194ff). This is crucial for our problem, since, as we have seen, the inner possibilities make up the world. The movement that makes this set of inner possibilities possible is, exactly, world–entry. It follows that a change in the second order of possibility — the order of world–entry — upsets, disturbs, or transforms the first order of available inner possibilities. Our inner possibilities are fragile and contingent, insofar as they are functions of the possibility of the world. (One could read Heidegger’s analyses of anxiety and death along these lines, but that exceeds the scope of this article.)

The world confers upon entities *their* possibilities; entities can only appear within a world. The happening of the world, on the other hand, is of a different ontological order that takes place when the horizon itself takes place. The order of possibility that characterizes the happening of the world — the very fact of world–entry in its indeterminateness — is ontologically prior to the possibilities that are disclosed *within the world*, that is, that provides determinate possibilities [*bestimmte Möglichkeiten*] of doing and being something. The fact of world–entry is thus what transforms the indeterminate excess of possibility to the restricted possibility of a particular world and its particular inner possibilities.

This allows us to distinguish between two different kinds of possibility: (1) The innerworldly possibilities that appear as something I can do or be. (2) The possibility of the world that does not appear as such but which indicates the vast excess of possibilities that are narrowed down by the fact of world–entry. The second kind of possibility makes the first possible. Innerworldly possibilities are the possibilities that offer themselves to us on a specific horizon, while the second sense of possibilities indicates that this horizon or world could be otherwise.

This shows that the existential conception of futurity — as the possibilities that appear to me, that comes towards me, and for which I care — are not exhaustive of the phenomenological ontological conception of futurity as

possibility. It is possible that my world changes — suddenly, unexpectedly, in a way that did not even seem possible to me. This indicates another orientation towards the future, namely, futurity as possibility in the other sense possibility; futurity as the possibility that both makes possible and upsets the horizon of innerworldly possibilities.

4. Expectability and Surprise

When trying to grasp futurity, we must be terminologically precise when invoking the different phenomenological registers of possibility. The possibility that the world changes is possible but it does not seem possible from within the world. *The worldly possibility can be an innerworldly impossibility.* In this sense, discontinuity marks one of our orientations towards the future, while the other is marked by continuity and expectability, i.e., the temporal organization of possibilities into a distinctive mode of care. By using the term expectability, I do not mean to say that we only care for *probable* possibilities but that the various degrees of salience that various possibilities exhibit (often independently of their probability) depend on our individual engagement with them. My commitment to, say, certain religious beliefs thus structures possibilities into an order of expectability: something appears as almost certain (e.g., that the divine entity will punish the sinners) while others appear as completely insignificant and unlikely. The structure of possibilities of a particular world corresponds to a horizon of expectability since these particular possibilities are organized into various degrees of expectation due to my engagement with them.

The idea that certain possibilities are possible even though they seem impossible echoes Derrida's conception of the future and the event:

The history of philosophy is the history of *being* or *being possible*. This great tradition of the *dynamis*, of potentiality, from Aristotle to Bergson, these reflections in transcendental philosophy on the conditions of possibility, are affected by the experience of the event insofar as it upsets the distinction between the possible and the impossible. We should speak here of the im-possible event, an im-possible that is not merely impossible, that is not merely the opposite of possible, that is also the condition or the chance of the possible. (Derrida 2007: 254)

For Derrida, the event is that which “upsets the distinction between the possible and the impossible,” because it designates that which seems im-

possible but takes place nonetheless. The event is that which I cannot see coming, that I cannot predict, and hence that which I cannot pursue as an innerworldly possibility. Derrida argues that if the possibility is *accessible to me*, then it brings nothing new, and therefore, it does not constitute an event. Rather, the event is that which does not appear to be a possibility — that which I cannot even pursue; it dawns on me as “*an absolute surprise*” (Derrida 2007: 450).

Is the Derridean event a transformation of the world or does it remain asymptotic? To answer this, we must take a closer look at how he understands the relation between surprise and expectation:

In the arrival of the *arrivant*, it is the absolute other who falls on me. I insist on the verticality of this coming, because surprise can only come from on high. When Levinas or Blanchot speak of the “*Très Haut*,” the Most High, it is not simply religious terminology. It means that the event as event, as absolute surprise, must fall on me. Why? Because if it doesn’t fall on me, it means that I see it coming, that there’s an horizon of expectation. Horizontally, I see it coming, I fore-see it, I fore-say it, and the event is that which can be said [*dit*] but never predicted [*prédit*]. A predicted event is not an event. (Derrida 2007: 451f)

Derrida associates the vertical with Levinas and Blanchot, and even though he says that it is not “*simply*” a religious terminology, he nonetheless addresses the event as the arrival of the *arrivant* and the Other. This Levinasian perspective explains the event as the arrival of an *entity* (however strange and radically other) rather than the world as such. In this sense, Derrida conceives of the relation between expectation and surprise (horizontality and verticality, the two senses of possibility) differently than I have proposed. For Derrida and Levinas, the surprise is asymptotically opposed to the expected, whereas I have proposed that we understand the surprise as the possibility that *underlies* the phenomenological horizon. In this sense, the vertical is intrinsically related to the horizontal and not merely its opposite. *Verticality upsets the horizon in the sense that it opens up the (new) horizon.*

Verticality is that which cannot be accounted for by the intentional relation but that which precedes it and determines it. In this sense, the dimension of verticality is not something that lies *beyond* intentionality. As the dynamicity of the understanding of being, it is, rather, that which *grounds* intentionality. According to this perspective, the verticality of the event is not, as Levinas and Derrida suggest, *opposed* to ontology and the world. It is not the asymptotic

alterity of the future that never arrives. Instead, the event is itself worldly; it is nothing but the emergence of the world.

The difference between these two perspectives is that Derrida and Levinas consider the event to be that which brings something new, something that was unaccountable for within the old horizon of intelligibility. The event breaks open the horizon to which it remains, in principle, foreign and inexhaustible. With Heidegger, on the contrary, the event does not necessarily refer to something new; in fact, the event does not concern *something* at all. The event is that which opens up and sustains a horizon of intelligibility in the first place. This notion of futurity was already operative, although implicitly, in Heidegger's lecture course from 1920–21 on the experience of time and the messianic in Saint Paul. In line with the Pauline understanding of the call [*klesis*], Heidegger argues that we do not await the second coming of Messiah by putting aside our this-worldly and factual occupations nor indeed by expecting him to arrive at a specific, objective point in time. Instead, Paul, as Heidegger interprets him, takes the radical moment [*kairos*] to consist in nothing but a specific enactment [*Vollzug*] of our facticity, the establishing of a "new fundamental comportment [*Grundverhalten*] to it" (Heidegger 2010: 84); it is a radical orientation towards the future in which, however, "all worldly facticity remains the same" (Heidegger 2010: 83, translation modified). (For an extended discussion of the theme of revolutionary temporality, see Knudsen 2015, where I compare Heidegger's and Agamben's interpretations of Saint Paul.)

As the appropriation of our facticity (e.g. Heidegger 2010: 85), the event, in the Heideggerian sense, does not point *beyond* correlation but rather back towards the very taking place of the correlation, back towards world-entry. This implies an awareness of the possibility *of* the world that does not appear *within* the world. This possibility is not directly accessible from within this horizon, and yet it is not something other than this horizon. It is the very possibility that sustains this horizon and therefore also the possibility that this horizon might change.

The event is that which does not appear as a possibility but which breaks into this constellation of possibilities by reconfiguring it; it is that which changes the phenomenological horizon. If the innerworldly possibility is accessible to me, then it operates within a *mode of expectation*. It is that which I can see coming, that which I can predict or calculate. The possibility of the world, on the other hand, does not appear *within* my horizon but is the appearance of the horizon itself. In this sense, I cannot see it coming, it comes

from above, it falls upon me and surprises me, and it does so only by reconfiguring the innerworldly possibilities that are indeed accessible to me. The future as surprise does not emerge from the horizon nor does it constantly retreat from the horizon in the infinite flight of the Other. Futurity in the sense of the possibility of the world is that which *changes* the horizon.

If the ontological order of futurity as innerworldly possibility corresponds to the affective register of expectability, this second order of futurity as possibility of the world corresponds to a *radical notion of surprise*. Surprise, in this sense, is not just the opposite of that which I expect or calculate; it is not the unexpected or the unlikely since these remains within the order of expectability. Instead, futurity in this second sense is the radical event of surprise since it is that which exceeds any established measure of expectation by resisting and transforming this measure. Surprise as world–entry exceeds the register of expectation, because it is the *genesis* of the possibilities that are organized as care and, hence, measured through expectation.

To follow through on the example from above, the understanding of a specific currency can change radically in the light of, say, an economic catastrophe. The phenomenon of hyperinflation does not appear as a possibility that can be actualized or pursued by me when I stand with a banknote in my hand even though I know that it is a theoretical possibility — it requires a transformation of the background conditions of this comportment. Once these background conditions change I cannot “unsee” it; my understanding of these pieces of paper and the possibilities that they offer me suddenly change as a result of a transformation that is in itself opaque to me. The world changes; the impossible suddenly becomes possible, fetishised objects become utterly profane.

The surprise is not cognitive. I *know* that hyperinflation is possible. And, yet, in another sense, it never appeared to me that it was possible, that the future I had built for myself — that I expected — could become undone in this way, that I could, say, lose all my savings, go bankrupt, lose my home. This is a radical reconfiguration of my possibilities — it is the surprise of the future that undermines and rearranges the future as expected and cared for.

Conclusion

I have argued that the elusive character of the future can be formulated as an ontological problem of futurity. On the one hand, futurity escapes any

attempt at reducing it to a determinate set of possibilities that appear on the phenomenological horizon. On the other hand, futurity must be somehow given to what takes place within such a horizon if it is to be understandable at all and not just a form of empty, speculative possibility without any relation to our lived experience.

The idea of messianism, as we find it in Levinas and Derrida, addresses this ontological problem of futurity by insisting that our relation to the future is structurally similar to our relation to radical alterity. We remain open to futurity even if futurity remains irreducible to our horizon of expectation. Futurity is messianic in the sense that it is always yet to come, always beyond intentionality, but it is also radically unfulfillable. Meillassoux's hyper-Chaos takes another approach since it abandons even the limited primacy afforded to intentionality (namely, as that which we must go beyond) by post-phenomenological messianism. Instead, he suggests that the temporal structuring of intentionality itself is completely contingent and that it could perish any moment without any reason. In this sense, the pure possibility or pure contingency of hyper-Chaos points to a kind of temporality or futurity that lies decisively beyond the grasp of the correlation between human experience and being.

Yet both of these approaches to the ontological problem of futurity account for the radical elusiveness of futurity by opting for the second horn of the dilemma: they end up (albeit in different ways) making futurity unintelligible. Levinas and Derrida render futurity asymptotic and ever retreating, incapable of ever arriving, while Meillassoux juxtaposes it to the order of intelligibility as such. If the ontological inquiry aims to clarify what we talk about, when we talk about the future, both of these approaches are wanted since they can offer only a negative conceptualization of futurity, i.e., say what it is *not*.

On this point, I believe we are better off if we adopt the more traditional approach of Heideggerian ontology. While Heidegger is often deemed to fail by reducing futurity to the future of my existential possibilities, I have argued that a more radical concept of possibility underlies his conception of the world, namely, the possibility of world-entry. These possibilities are not given to me on the phenomenological horizon (for me to care about and to expect) but are rather the possibility *of* the horizon.

Once we see that our orientation towards possibilities and impossibilities structure our orientation towards the future, it becomes clear that these two types of possibility correspond to two different orientations towards the future. I have argued that our orientation towards inner possibilities corre-

sponds to the register of expectability and that our orientation towards the possibilities of the world corresponds to a radical notion of surprise, namely, the surprise that exceeds all measures of expectability by affording us with new measures.

Futurity is thus neither reduced to the future for me (e.g. my inner possibilities) nor is it rendered unintelligible by being radically separated from the phenomenological horizon. Instead, we have the future as expectable, as it is given to me within the world, and the future as surprise, which renders my world inherently fragile and capable of becoming otherwise.

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