

# **A Comparative Study on the Ethical Accounts of Ontology in Heidegger and Levinas**

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- I. Introduction
- II. Main understandings of human beings by Heidegger and Levinas
- III. The different understandings of the ontology of both philosophers
- IV. Conclusion

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• 국 문 초 록 •

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## 하이데거와 레비나스의 존재론적 윤리 비교

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20세기 전쟁의 공포를 경험하면서 존재의 파멸의 위협에 직면하며 살아온 인류는 현재 환경 파괴로 인한 대멸종의 가능성에 직면해 있다. 본 연구는 이런 상황에 대한 윤리적인 답을 찾기 위해서 존재의 의미를 탐구하고자 한다. 이를 위해서 본 연구는 20세기 전쟁의 상황을 지나면서 존재의 의미에 대해서 가장 치열하게 탐구한 두 철학자 하이데거와 레비나스에 주목한다. 20세기 타자 윤리학을 정초한 레비나스는 현대 존재론을 정초한 하이데거를 따르면서, 또 가장 심하게 하이데거를 비판하였다. 따라서 본 연구는 하이데거와 레비나스의 존재론적 차이를 윤리적 의미를 중심으로 탐구한다. 존재론에 대한 두 철학자의 이해는 인간화와 책임이라는 측면에서 그들의 철학적, 윤리적 함의를 보여준다. 인간의 주관성은 인간 관계에 대한 이해 없이는 인간 진보를 위한 진정한 대리자가 될 수 없다. 인간화는 세계-내-존재에 대한 자각에서 나오며, 존재가 '인간성'을 지닌 '인간'으로 인간화되기 위해서는 즉각적인 대응(책임)이 필요하다. 두 사상가의 차이점은 20세기 윤리학의 철학적 토대를 포스트모더니티 관점에서 이해하는 데 도움이 될 것이다. 더 나아가서 존재의 대멸종의 가능성에 직면한 오늘 이 시대에 필요한 윤리적 성찰을 제공할 것이다.

주제어: 하이데거, 레비나스, 존재론, 인간화, 책임

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## I. Introduction

Currently, humanity is facing the possibility of mass extinction due to environmental crisis. As if the terrible wars that took place in the 20th century made us worry about the destruction of humanity, now humanity is anxious about the extinction of life on Earth. Haraway argues that humans and other life forms must live together to live in this era rather than the existentialist notion of humans that Heidegger and his followers advocated.<sup>1)</sup> This way of life speaks of the ability to respond, but this is not a way of life that follows the ethical absolute command that is the priority of life related to Levinas' way of thinking. Just as Levinas' claim that ethics precedes ontology is not a method of deleting ontology and adding ethics,<sup>2)</sup> Haraway's claim is not a denial of ethical commands but a new way of life to achieve symbiosis and sym-poiesis in reality with her ethical propose, "Thou shalt not make killable."<sup>3)</sup> This study started from Haraway's thoughts on the limitations of anthropocentric ontology in the 20th century. However, paradoxically, Haraway's thinking made me ask again about the ethical meaning of existence rather than the limits of ontology. Accordingly, to explore

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1) Donna J. Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 12-13. Also see, to think about Heidegger's followers, Samuel Fleischacker, ed., *Heidegger's Jewish Followers: Essays on Hannah Arendt, Leo Strauss, Hans Johan, and Emmanuel Levinas* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2008).

2) Peter E. Gordon, "Fidelity as Heresy," in *Heidegger's Jewish Followers* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2008), 201.

3) Donna J. Haraway, *When Species Meet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 80. Sym-poiesis means to produce living materials together.

the meaning of existence, this study focuses on Heidegger and Levinas, the two philosophers who most intensely explored the meaning of existence as they experienced the Second World War and totalitarianism.

After World War II, Levinas developed his philosophy while criticizing Heidegger most severely. Levinas criticized Heidegger's ontological thinking as the basis for German totalitarianism and argued that the first philosophy should be ethics, not ontology. However, if we understand that Levinas's criticism results from questions and reflections on Heidegger, Levinas is connected to Heidegger. There may be no more faithful reader of Heidegger in the world than Levinas.<sup>4)</sup> For example, Levinas wrote his early work, *Existence and Existents*, with Heidegger's *Being and Time* in mind and his later work, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, with Heidegger's later works in mind. In this context, rather than reading Levinas's thoughts as a break with Heidegger, this study seeks to read Levinas from the perspective of connection and comparison.<sup>5)</sup> In particular, this study explores the ethical thinking developed by Heidegger and Levinas, concentrating on philosophers' early works such as *Being and Time* and *Totality and Infinity* since these works explain the significance of ontology.

Ontology is a philosophical study of the essence and existence of

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4) Tina Chanter, *Time, Death and the Feminine - Levinas with Heidegger*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 171.

5) For further reading on this perspective, see John E. Drabinski and Eric S. Nelson, ed., *Between Levinas and Heidegger*, (Albany: New York University Press, 2014). Twelve authors participated in this book, attempting to compare the philosophical ideas of two thinkers. Each chapter explores the meaning of violence, transcendence (religion), history, language, time, ethics, responsibility, ownership, otherness, and residence.

human beings. In particular, ontology is one of the leading academic themes in the contemporary Western intellectual tradition. It asks about the significance of human beings and the ethical issues of human predicaments such as wars, class, gender, sexuality, and environment. Among these traditions, Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas ask about the significance of human beings as they delve into the meaning of human subjectivity and relatedness. Heidegger concentrates more on the meaning of subjectivity in terms of his argument of *Dasein* (being-there); meanwhile, Levinas focuses on human relatedness in terms of the meaning of alterity (otherness) and ethics. This research compares both philosophers' foci of the ethical accounts of ontology as it demonstrates their differences in their main philosophical concentration, philosophical logics, and final philosophical loci.

## II. Main understandings of human beings by Heidegger and Levinas

Heidegger begins his philosophical work with a question about universality and the entity of human beings. Being is not definable but self-evidential.<sup>6)</sup> We can figure out the signification of Being when we try to understand the facticity or possibility of Being that Being is there. Heidegger names this being as *Dasein*, Being-there, that is, Being-in-the-world. He demonstrates, "*understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein's Being*. *Dasein* is ontically distinctive in

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6) Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans., by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1962), 22-23.

that it *is* ontological.”<sup>7)</sup> “Therefore *fundamental ontology* must be sought in the *existential analytic of Dasein*.”<sup>8)</sup> He elaborates:

Dasein accordingly takes priority over all other entities in several ways. The first priority is an *ontical* one: Dasein is an entity whose Being has the determinate character of existence. The second priority is an *ontological* one: Dasein is in itself ‘ontological’, because existence is thus determinative for it. But with equal primordiality, Dasein also possesses—as constitutive for its understanding of existence—an understanding of the Being of all entities of a character other than its own. Dasein has therefore a third priority as providing the ontico-ontological condition for the possibility of any ontologies. Thus Dasein has turned out to be, more than any other entity, the one which must first be interrogated ontologically.<sup>9)</sup>

Because of this ontical aspect of Dasein, Heidegger suggests a new word, “*existentiell*” as a possibility of the Being of each existing Dasein. *Existentiell* manner becomes “at all possible to disclose the existentiality of existence and to undertake an adequately founded ontological problematic.”<sup>10)</sup>

Based on this demonstration of Being as Dasein, Heidegger illustrates the basic tenets of Dasein in terms of time and space: everydayness and temporality, and disclosedness, thrownness, falling, and projection. *Existentiell* interpretation brings us to think of the significance of every-

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7) Ibid., 32.

8) Ibid. 34.

9) Ibid.

10) Ibid.

dayness of Dasein as something possible and necessary. Dasein's everydayness tells us about the *provisional* entity of the Being related to the existentiell interpretation.<sup>11)</sup> At this point, the issue of time is coming up to Dasein as it understands the temporality of Being. Because Being makes itself visible in its temporal character, the issue of time becomes another central problem of ontology.<sup>12)</sup> Everydayness implies that Being exists between birth and death as existence has its place for *potentiality-for-Being-a-whole*. Everydayness reveals itself as a mode of temporality which is the primordial ontological basis for Dasein's existentiality. Dasein's Being *cares* his or her existential space in terms of temporality.<sup>13)</sup> Everydayness makes Dasein care not only for the self but also for others. At this point, Heidegger uses the term "ecstatic-horizon in its being" in terms of temporality to make a connection between existence and temporality, which means our existence is always outside of itself, and our existence always has a direction. Thus, everydayness is unauthentic because of Dasein's temporality; however, Dasein can be authentic while Dasein analyzes the ontological structure of everydayness.<sup>14)</sup>

The ontological structure of everydayness and temporality makes Dasein care of the world in terms of thrownness, projection, and falling as Being-in-the-world. Heidegger deals with the issue of truth before he begins to demonstrate the spatial signification of the ontology of

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11) Ibid., 37-38.

12) Ibid., 40.

13) Ibid., 277-278.

14) Ibid., 418-423.

Dasein. Disclosedness or uncoveredness is related to the understanding of the truth of Dasein, which is thrown and projected toward the world. The possibility or potentiality of Being is the disclosedness of Being-in-the-world in the process of *thrown projection*. The projection of Dasein means that Dasein becomes the possibility for Being, so projection always pertains to the full disclosedness of Being-in-the-world.<sup>15)</sup> The disclosedness of Dasein's Being is related to truth because truth is presuppositional as such Being belongs to Dasein as "to presuppose 'truth' means to understand it as something for the sake of which Dasein is."<sup>16)</sup> Heidegger argues more profoundly, "*because this presupposing of itself belongs to Dasein's Being, 'we' must also presuppose 'ourselves' as having the attribute of disclosedness.*"<sup>17)</sup> Namely, "Being is something which 'there is' only in so far as truth is. And truth is only in so far as and as long as Dasein is."<sup>18)</sup> Thus, human beings are disclosed, thrown, projected, and fallen in the world as the potentiality of being in the form of Dasein, Being-there.

On the other hand, Emmanuel Levinas starts his philosophical wrestling with the question, "is ontology fundamental?" Ontology has primacy among the branches of knowledge, "for all knowledge of relations connecting or opposing beings to one another implies an understanding of the fact that these beings and relations exist."<sup>19)</sup> The question of be-

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15) Ibid., 264-265.

16) Ibid., 270.

17) Ibid., 271.

18) Ibid., 272.

19) Emmanuel Levinas, *Entre Nous, On Thinking-of-the-other*, trans., by Michael B. Smith and Barbara Harshav (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 1.

ing is not concluded within the answer of the self; instead, the answer is in the relationship among beings. The question of being does not simply rely on the understanding of being since “the understanding of a being consists in going beyond that being—precisely into openness—and perceiving it upon the *horizon of being*.”<sup>20)</sup> Levinas asks, “how can the *relation* to a *being* be anything, initially, but the understanding of it as a being—the fact of freely letting it be as a being?”<sup>21)</sup> Interestingly, the answer to this question of ontology is not such ontological as, Levinas says, “the relation to the other is therefore not ontology. This bond with the other which is not reducible to the representation of the other, but to his invocation, and in which invocation is not preceded by an understanding, I call religion.”<sup>22)</sup> Such a concept of religion makes us understand religion differently in that the relation between humans has a religious indication not only because of “its distance from the exercise of power,” but also because of “the human faces which joins the Infinite.”<sup>23)</sup>

Levinas develops his thought of ontology by illustrating the relation between ipseity and alterity. Levinas searches the issue of disclosure of being, and he poses the issue of “*essence* as a perpetual vigilance and self-possession.” He develops his argument that “the disclosure of being to itself involves a *recurrence*,” and the issue of recurrence has its issue of “the Same,” “the knot of ipseity,” and “the play of

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20) Ibid., 5.

21) Ibid.

22) Ibid., 7.

23) Ibid., 8.

*consciousness.*”<sup>24)</sup> He asks, “what is the relation between the “oneself” and the *for self* of representation?”, “is the “oneself” a recurrence of the same type as consciousness, knowledge, and representation, all of which would be sublimated in consciousness conceived as Mind?” and “is the “oneself” consciousness in its turn, or is it not a quite distinct event, one which would justify the use of separate terms: Self, I, Ego, soul?”<sup>25)</sup> He answers as follows:

To be sure, reflection *upon* the self is possible, but this reflection does not *constitute* the living *recurrence* of subjectivity, a recurrence without duality, but a unity without rest, whose un-rest is due neither to dispersion of exterior givens nor to the flux of time biting into the future while conserving a past. The living identity of oneself is not distinguished from the self and does not lend itself to either a synthetic activity or recollection or anticipation. To present the knot of ipseity which is tied into the straight thread of *essence* according to the model of intentionality of the *for itself*, or as an opening on the self, is to presuppose a new ipseity behind ipseity. Ipseity is an indefeasible unity that has never been separated from the self.<sup>26)</sup>

This restlessness of ipseity cannot make beings enter into “discourse, to be thematized, and to appear to consciousness;” instead, it experiences the un-rest “ontological adventures” such as negativity of non-

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24) Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed., by Adriaan Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 83.

25) Ibid.

26) Ibid., 84.

being, recurrence of contraction of being, and persecution of “the an-ar-chic passivity of obsession.”<sup>27)</sup> These negativities, contraction, and pas-sivity are the ontological categories that make the ipseity become “a hostage” of the Other as such, “the word “I” means to be answerable for everything and for everyone.”<sup>28)</sup>

The Infinite and the Transcendent is where ipseity has the ontological adventure. Ipseity encounters alterity as being experiences of the Infinite and the Transcendent. Levinas recapitulates, “this way of being, without prior commitment, responsible for the other, amounts to the fact of human fellowship, prior to freedom.”<sup>29)</sup> With this process of fel-lowship, human beings experience the absoluteness of alterity, related to Infinity and Transcendence as such, “being takes on a meaning and becomes a universe not because there exists among thinking beings a being pursuing ends, a being thereby structured as an Ego. There is abandonment, obsession, responsibility, and a Self because the trace of the Infinite is inscribed in proximity. The noninterchangeable, par excellence, the I, substitutes itself for others. Nothing is a game. Thus, being is transcended.”<sup>30)</sup> It is unconditional that being has to respond to alterity, not because he or she intends to become responsible, but because they are the hostages of this ontological absoluteness. Thus, Levinas demonstrates his ontological thoughts regarding the relatedness of ipseity and alterity as the unconditional characteristics of human

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27) Ibid., 84-87.

28) Ibid., 90.

29) Ibid., 91.

30) Ibid.

beings.

### III. The different understandings of the ontology of both philosophers

The first difference between both philosophers comes from their different understanding of how human beings encounter the world and how they have the notion of their subjectivity. Heidegger defines human beings as beings who are “care” or “anxious” of their subjectivity and the world as Being-in-the-world. On the contrary, Levinas begins his philosophical approach with his main concern of how human beings respond to the reality that there is “the Other.”

In Heidegger, “care is the basic state of Dasein.”<sup>31)</sup> Heidegger defines Dasein as “ahead-of-itself-Being-already-in (the world) as Being-alongside entities which we encounter (within-the-world). In this are expressed the fundamental characteristics of Dasein’s Being: existence, in the “ahead-of-itself”; facticity, in the “Being-already-in”; falling, in the “Being-alongside.”<sup>32)</sup> That is, Dasein’s Being cares about the existential-ontological space as the form of thrownness, existence as projection, and falling. This space is not materialistic, but it is the expression of a state of mind where Dasein needs to be cared and cared for.

To begin with, projection, in terms of existence, has its trait into the fundamental structure of world-formation in that it is the primordial

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31) Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 293.

32) Ibid.

structure of the fundamental occurrence in terms of our everyday com-  
partment and its completion.<sup>33)</sup> Projection as an opening process of the  
possibility of Dasein's Being can make the *occurrence of the distinction  
between being and being*.<sup>34)</sup> The world is formed in the occurrence of  
projection.<sup>35)</sup> In addition, the certainty of Being is Being-there, Dasein,  
which is called, "thrownness," of Being as factual as "that it is and has  
to be."<sup>36)</sup> Heidegger articulates thrownness in terms of the state-of-mind  
as Dasein has a mood that "Dasein is always brought before itself, and  
has always found itself, not in the sense of coming across itself by  
perceiving." Namely, the thrownness of Dasein "belongs to the dis-  
closedness" and "reveals itself in its current state-of-mind." This  
state-of-mind shows "more or less authentically face to face with the  
fact" of the potentiality-for-Being as "that it is, and that it has to be  
something."<sup>37)</sup> Simultaneously, the thrownness of Dasein, Dasein's  
Being-in-the-world makes Dasein itself anxious of the nothingness of  
the world. While Dasein's Being is falling into "they," Dasein is lost in  
its 'world' because of the ambiguity and uncertainty of the world. This  
state-of-mind of fallenness brings Dasein itself to "*face to face* with the  
"nothing" of the possible impossibility of its existence."<sup>38)</sup> Anxiety is a  
basic state-of-mind because of this fallenness in that this self-under-

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33) Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, trans., by William  
McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 362.

34) Ibid., 364.

35) Ibid., 365.

36) Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 174.

37) Ibid., 321.

38) Ibid., 310.

standing of Dasein, individualization of self becomes sure of potentiality-for-Being. Dasein constantly surrenders itself to the “world” and the “matter” of the world as it tries to “evades its very self.” This evasion becomes an apparent “phenomenon of falling.”<sup>39)</sup> The thrownness of Dasein’s Being, however, makes Dasein try to flee from the “they-self” which is described as “individualized Being-in-the-world.”<sup>40)</sup> Thus, Dasein’s Being “cares” for the projection, thrownness, and fallenness of human beings as the potentiality-for-Being.

On the contrary, “how to respond” to the ontological absoluteness of the Other is the main concentration of Levinas’s philosophical works. Interestingly, this response is not a conditional reaction of human beings toward others, but rather, it is an unconditional state of human beings. In particular, Levinas’s analysis of the other’s faces shows us this aspect of the absoluteness of the Other. Levinas argues that the other’s face is unconditional, using religious terms such as ‘revelation’<sup>41)</sup> and ‘epiphany.’<sup>42)</sup> Levinas points out that the selves of others reveal themselves through such an epiphany as the infinite being through the phenomenon of other’s face. He demonstrates, “the Other remains infinitely transcendent, infinitely foreign; his face in which his epiphany is produced and which appeals to me breaks with the world that can be common to us, whose virtualities are inscribed in our *nature* and

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39) Ibid., 178-179.

40) Ibid., 321.

41) Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969), 66-67.

42) Ibid., 194.

developed by our existence.”<sup>43)</sup> The face brings the first signification to establish its signification itself into being. Levinas says more, “the epiphany that is produced as a face is not constituted as are all other beings, precisely because it “reveals” infinity. Signification is infinity, that is, the Other.”<sup>44)</sup> Thus, the existence of the other is the signification of infinity; simultaneously, infinity is significant when the other’s face reveals itself in the relation among beings. Namely, the other’s face has its absoluteness because the epiphany occurs as a face.<sup>45)</sup>

The other’s face, however, does not reveal its epiphany with its formation of the glorification of power; instead, it reveals the weakness and powerlessness such as orphans, widows, the bereaved, the destitute, and so on.<sup>46)</sup> Also, the other’s face has the extreme possibility of exposure to violence or negation because of its nakedness before others. Levinas explains the nudity of the face:

A face approached, a contact with a skin – a face weighted down with a skin, and a skin in which, even in obscenity, the altered face breaths – are already absent from themselves, fallen into the past with an unrecuperable lapse. The skin caressed is not the protection of an organism, simply the surface of an entity; it is the divergency between the visible and the invisible, quasi-transparent, thinner than that which would still justify an expression of the invisible by the visible.<sup>47)</sup>

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43) Ibid.

44) Ibid., 207.

45) Ibid., 196.

46) Ibid., 231-215.

47) Ibid., 89-90.

Furthermore, Levinas posits the face opens the possibility of murder, the total negation, because “the other if the sole being I can with to kill” when the I exercises, enjoys and acknowledges a power.<sup>48)</sup> Levinas argues that the possibility of murder, ironically, opens the ethical resistance against the power because the infinity of being is stronger than the power of murder in that “the infinite paralyzes power by its infinite resistance to murder in the nudity of the absolute openness of the Transcendent.”<sup>49)</sup> Levinas says, “there is here a relation not with a very great resistance, but with some absolutely *other*: the resistance of what has no resistance—the ethical resistance. … The epiphany of the face is ethical.”<sup>50)</sup> Levinas elaborates on the ethical notion of the face in terms of responsibility, “it is precisely in that recalling of me to my responsibility by the face that summons me, that demands me, that require me – it is in that calling into question – that the other is my neighbor.”<sup>51)</sup> Thus, the Other accosts us with his or her face as a unique accessibility, the impossibility of total negation (murder), the purity of being itself, the signification of par excellence, and the opening to a surrounding plentitude.<sup>52)</sup> Thus, Levinas’ concentration on ontology is how human beings respond to the absoluteness of the Other, especially when we see other’s face.

The second different feature of both philosophers’ understanding of

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48) Ibid., 198.

49) Ibid., 199.

50) Ibid.

51) Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity & Transcendence*, trans. by Michael B. Smith (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 24-25.

52) Ibid., 9-11.

ontology is their philosophical logic to figure out the leading causes of the human predicament. Heidegger suggests humanization is the logical process through the configuration of human beings in terms of human subjectivity, whereas Levinas criticizes Heidegger's account of human subjectivity and suggests human responsibility as a new human relationship as an asymmetrical understanding of the Other.

Based on the interpretation of Dasein's Being, Heidegger develops his argument of humanism as he tries not only to reevaluate the traditional concepts of humanism related to metaphysical understandings of God, logic, and ethics but also "restore" the significance of "the truth of Being" for humanization. Heidegger suspects and reevaluates "isms"<sup>53)</sup> as such that "isms" are kinds of technology that are oblivion obtained by education. This technique is initiated by the sense of subjectivity that is superior to existence in that it makes humans think of themselves as the lord of beings.<sup>54)</sup> However, thrownness and projection teach us "man is the shepherd of Being," and "the neighbor of Being."<sup>55)</sup> Heidegger demonstrates the importance of the truth of Being as "existence" is "ecstatic dwelling in the nearness of Being" in terms of the process of humanization.<sup>56)</sup> Heidegger suggests redefining "'Humanism" now means that the essence of man is essential for the truth of Being," to restore the sense of humanization.<sup>57)</sup> For instance,

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53) Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed., by David Rarrell Krell (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1977), 219.

54) Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 244-245.

55) *Ibid.*, 245.

56) *Ibid.*, 246.

57) Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 248.

Heidegger reevaluates the meaning of transcendence, which comes from God in the Christian sense. He argues that the world in the concept of Being-in-the-world does not imply the earthly world as opposed to the heavenly world, but rather, the world is “the openness of Being.” Man stands out in “the openness of Being” based on his thrownness and projection into “care” of this openness.<sup>58)</sup> In addition, Heidegger asks about the place of ethics, as he inquires about the origins of the word “ethics” with the Greek word “*ethos*,” which means the dwelling of being. Ethics is based on ontology rather than its traditional concept of human action related to “isms.”<sup>59)</sup> Thus, Heidegger tries to reevaluate the significance of human existence as he explains the projection, thrownness, and falling of Dasein’s Being. This demonstration of existence and humanization is the basis of Heidegger’s understanding of ontology.

On the other hand, Levinas criticizes the concept of humanization in that it is based on the significance of human subjectivity. He develops his argument that the symmetrical relationship between subject and subject was the main cause of totalitarianism in the first half of the twentieth century because this subjective relationship can become a collectivism that emphasizes the internal power of the self rather than the external world of the self. Instead, he proposes the asymmetrical relationship among human beings that is looking forward to forming a new relationship among beings.<sup>60)</sup> The dynamics between ipseity and alter-

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58) Ibid., 252.

59) Ibid., 256-258.

60) Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 215-216.

ity make people respond to one another while interacting. This is the pace of responsibility. Thus, selfhood, in Levinas, does not come from self-identity, but it comes from human relatedness in terms of responsibility. He illustrates, “responsibility for the creature, for that which the ego had not been the author. To be a “self” is to be responsible before having done anything.”<sup>61)</sup> Moreover, not only does responsibility make people be “self,” but it also lets human beings resist the power of nonbeing. When people recognize their ipseity and its relation with alterity, they begin to acknowledge that this recognition of responsibility is the root of resistance against the power of non-being. This acknowledgment of self-responsibility can make people become a “supporter of the universe” which originates “happiness,” because it makes them possible “the most radical engagement,” that is, “total altruism.”<sup>62)</sup> Thus, Human beings can recognize their responsibility to the Other in terms of asymmetrical relations, and this understanding of human relatedness can answer the total mass destruction of totalitarianism.

Lastly, another difference between both philosophers is that their loci was their first philosophy. In Heidegger, it is ontology, whereas, in Levinas, it is ethics. Interestingly, both philosophers have a similar basis for their philosophical interpretation of ontology in terms of Nietzsche’s philosophical methodology of reevaluation of modern philosophy and

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61) Emmanuel Levinas, *Basic Philosophical Writings*. ed., by Adriaan Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 94.

62) *Ibid.*, 18.

his diagnosis of it as “the eternal recurrence of the same.” Both philosophers criticize the contemporary concept of human beings as such that it is based on “the subject-object relation” or “the subject-subject relation.” For instance, there are several modern philosophical concepts that are based on these relations, such as Descartes’ philosophical maxim of *cogito ergo sum*, Kant’s critique of practical reason, and Hegel’s interpretation of consciousness and spirit. These philosophers account that human subjectivity and reason are so potential and capable that those make human beings able to think correctly and build an ideal society. Heidegger and Levinas doubted these modern understandings of ontology because of human beings’ horrible experience of totalitarianism like fascism and communism. They thought that the basis of ontology should be re-interpreted with the acknowledgment of human relatedness rather than individual subjectivity, human reasons, or consciousness. Both philosophers, however, have different philosophical loci in their “first” philosophical works such that Heidegger bases his philosophical locus on “ontology” in terms of the concepts of humanization, whereas Levinas does on “ethics” related to recognition of responsibility.

Heidegger’s Dasein shows us his first philosophy: that Dasein’s Being is being-in-the-world is projected, thrown, and fallen, and that these conditions are the focal points of the truth of being in terms of disclosedness of being. That is, Heidegger values Dasein’s Being as his first consideration of ontology more than the traditional concept of human existence and essence. Awareness of this condition of human be-

ings, as Dasein's Being, is part of the process of humanization. He believes this newly formed human being can rebuild an ideal society against the human beings' predicament of the first half of the twentieth century. This is, perhaps, one of the reasons why Heidegger joined the Nazis movement in that he might read a possibility of humanization under this political system. He found, however, that his interpretation and his good intention of the Nazis regime were not legitimate because Nazis rendered another totalitarian dictatorial regime. Heidegger quit his position of rectorship of his university under this regime. Instead, he still tried to figure out the significance of human existence in terms of humanization during his lifetime. Heidegger's philosophical driving force, thus, is the significance of the existence of human beings, so he tried to follow his philosophical way of humanization based on ontology.

Ontology in Levinas, however, is not his philosophical locus; rather, ethics is his "first philosophy." He argues that ontology has a clear limitation in terms of totalitarianism. Levinas tries to overcome the Westernized understanding of being as symmetry or identity—the basis of totalitarianism—and he developed his ontological and ethical thought based on his recognition of the absoluteness of the Other and on his emphasis on the human relationship of dissymmetry or asymmetry. The focal points of ontology in Levinas are his understandings of ipseity, alterity, and other's face. The awareness of ipseity does not come from the acknowledgment of human individual subjectivity but from the encounter of alterity, which can be called inter-subjectivity or human

relatedness. This is the place of Levinas ethics, as “first philosophy.” Thus, ethics can become a legitimate answer about the human predicament, such that responsibility occurs into human beings like a divine command, “love (or respond) your neighbor.”

#### IV. Conclusion

Thus, this research delved into the ontological difference between Heidegger and Levinas by focusing on their ethical signification. Both philosophers’ understandings of ontology show us their philosophical and ethical implications in terms of humanization and responsibility. Human subjectivity cannot become the truthful agency for human progress without an understanding of human-relatedness. Humanization comes from the awareness of Being-in-the-world, and the immediate response (responsibility) is necessary for beings to be humanized as “human beings” who have “humanity.” The differences between both thinkers would be helpful in understanding the philosophical foundation of ethics during the twentieth century in terms of post-modernity.

All in all, this study explored the meaning of the ontology and ethics of these two philosophers. This study can serve as a source of reflection on the current crisis mentioned in the introduction. However, as a result of focusing on early works to approach ontological ethics while conducting this study, this study cannot address several critical themes to discuss the ethical meaning of ontology, such as justice, politics, and community, since those themes appear clearly in their later works. Additionally, it needed to sufficiently address the part where Levinas

reexamined his understanding of ontology while arguing with Ricoeur and Derrida in his later period. This study leaves these themes and discussions as future research topics and concludes as above.

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• ABSTRACT •

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## A Comparative Study on the Ethical Accounts of Ontology in Heidegger and Levinas

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Soongsil University)

Humanity, who has experienced the horrors of war in the 20th century and lived while facing the threat of destruction of existence, is currently facing the possibility of mass extinction due to environmental crisis. This study seeks to explore the meaning of existence to find an ethical answer to this situation. To this end, this study focuses on Heidegger and Levinas, the two philosophers who most intensely explored the meaning of existence during the 20th century's war situation. Levinas, who founded the ethics of the Other in the 20th century, followed Heidegger and criticized Heidegger most severely. Therefore, this research delves into the ontological difference between Heidegger and Levinas by focusing on their ethical signification. Both philosophers' understandings of ontology show us their philosophical and moral implications regarding humanization and responsibility. Human subjectivity cannot become the truthful agency for human progress without understanding human-relatedness. Humanization comes from the awareness of Being-in-the-world, and the immediate response (responsibility) is necessary for beings to be humanized as "human beings" who have "humanity." The differences between both thinkers would be helpful in understanding the philosophical foundation of ethics during the twentieth century in terms of post-modernity. Furthermore, it will provide the ethical reflection necessary in today's era when we face the possibility of mass extinction of existence.

**Key words:** Martin Heidegger, Emmanuel Levinas, Ontology, Humanization, Responsibility