

Heideggerian and Theravada Buddhist View on the Motility of Life^{*}

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Abstract

In this essay, I offer a comparative analysis on the ontological perspective from Heidegger and Theravada Buddhism on the motility of life, the essence of the organism belonging to living beings whether human or non-human animals. To question about the innermost essence of life by considering birth, maturing, aging, and death, Heidegger finds out later that his approach is incomplete and inadequate because his existential analytic of human Dasein cannot explain the animal motility as captivation. However, in Theravada Buddhist philosophy there is some doctrine in 'The Four Noble Truths' mentioning the same point of those processes of life, birth – decay - death, as 'Dukkha'. Next, from the analysis I offer an argument to show that if the Buddhist conception of Dukkha is read into the motility of life, we can find a new Heideggerian concept of 'underlying motility' as a result which can give an answer to his question.

Keywords : Motility of Life ; Dukkha (Buddhist Concept)

1. Introduction

Some previous comparative philosophical works depict an affinity of Heidegger's thought with Asian philosophical ideas, especially those stemmed from Zen Buddhism (Parkes (ed.), 1990), Mahayana Buddhism (Batchelor, 1983 ; Zimmerman, 1993), or Taoism (May, 1996). Interestingly, some says that Heidegger's philosophy is influenced by Eastern Asian thoughts especially from Buddhist aspect through conversation with some scholars or students who travelled from East Asia to Europe (May, 1996 : 1-2).

But comparative philosophical works on Heidegger and Theravada Buddhism can hardly be found, let alone comparative study between the two on a specific point such as the motility of life in ontological aspect. Some scholars are interested in Theravada Buddhist view on life carried out in the aspect of life in Buddhist ethics (for example, Ratanakul (2004) and Promta (2008), but they say nothing about Heidegger).

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In his work *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (1995) Heidegger says something about the essence of life, and he mentions some processes of life considered from the motile character of living as can be seen in birth, maturing, aging, and death (Heidegger, 1995 : 265-266). These same processes of life were also mentioned by the Buddha. Therefore, I am interested in taking seriously a comparative study on this point between Heidegger and Buddhism especially from the side of Theravada.

2. Heidegger's Interpretation on the Essence of Motility Belonging to the Living Being

The word 'motility' here is not to be confused with its usgae that can be more often seen as biological concept of cell motility or cell movement. It is used as an English word to translate the concept of German *Bewegtheit* in Heidegger's writings. Its former translation is 'movement' as appeared in *Being and Time* (1962). However, when it is involved with the movement of living being as Heidegger talks about in his later writing *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (1995), the translators use 'motility' instead for that specific concept of movement.

Moreover, the word 'motility' is neither to be understood as the ability of living being to move, nor to do activity such as walking or running. The movement [Bewegtheit] is not the motion [Bewegung] of something present-at-hand (in our awareness) (Heidegger, 1962 : 427). Heidegger talks about motility of life in his way of doing ontological conception of 'motile character of life' which is one among many concepts forming his inquiry into what is the essence of organism.

Human being is understood by Heidegger in term of 'Dasein', the being that has ability to understand the being of other beings, its own being, and Being as such. This is the phenomenon of the understanding of Being, the phenomenon in which something like Being becomes accessible when Dasein finds its own being as 'Being-in-the-World'. Therefore, the essence of life of human being, as understood by Heidegger, must be answered through another question of 'What is Being?', because Being is the primordial understanding of Dasein that he calls 'the possibility of care' primordially conditioned by temporality. Concept of 'Dasein's totality' is therefore carried out to talk about the whole life of human being:

..Have we indeed brought the whole of Dasein, as regards its authentically *Being-a-whole*, into the fore-having of our existential analysis ? It may be that a formulation of the question as related to Dasein's totality, possesses a genuinely unequivocal character ontologically. It may be that as regards *Being-towards-the-end* the question itself may even have found its answer. But death is only the 'end' of Dasein; and, taken formally, it is just *one* of the ends by which Dasein's totality is closed round. The other 'end' however' is the 'beginning', the 'birth'. Only that entity which is 'between' birth and death presents the whole which we have been seeking... Dasein has been our theme only in the way in which it exists 'facing forward', as it were' leaving 'behind it' all that has been. Not only has *Being-towards-the-beginning* remained unnoticed; but so too, and above all, has the way in which Dasein *stretches along between* birth and death. The 'connectedness of life' in which Dasein somehow maintains itself constantly, is precisely what we have overlooked in our analysis of *Being-a-whole*. (Heidegger, 1962 : 424-425)

Heidegger explains further that:

Dasein does not fill up a track or stretch 'of life' – one which is somehow present-at-hand – with the phrases of its momentary actualities. It stretches itself along in such a way that its own Being is constituted in advance as a stretching-along. The 'between' which relates to birth and death already lies *in the Being* of Dasein... Factual Dasein exists as born; and, as born, it is already dying, in the sense of *Being-towards-death*. As long as Dasein factually exists, both the 'ends' and their 'between' *are*, and they *are* in the only way which is possible on the basis of Dasein's Being as *care*. (Heidegger, 1962 : 426)

Protevi (1994 : 143-147) clarifies this point of Heidegger's sense of Dasein's motility, along with the notion of historicity, as not that of a straight line, but that of a self-stretching between two ends. Moreover, it is not of something present-at-hand. He interprets from Heidegger's own statement "The motility of existence is not the motion of something present-at-hand..The specific motility in which Dasein is stretched along and stretches itself along we call it *historizing*. (BT 375) The motility of historicizing in which something 'happens to something' is not to be grasped in terms of motion as change of location.. which comes along, has presence, and then disappears (BT 389). He also understands Heidegger's concept of Dasein's motility not at all as the motion of present-at-hand. Dasein's primordial temporality is not to be understood as 'clock time' measuring in units of date and time because in that way it is conceived in present-at-hand 'now' instead. (BT 417) To conceptualize in this way, Protevi sees some point of Heidegger's philosophizing which he calls explaining with 'exteriority'. Dasein's temporality is installed in an economy of exteriority, and Heidegger's temporality provides a unitary out and back movement in a rebounding vectoral sense without a starting point. (Protevi, 1994 : 142)

Next step, Heidegger gives us an ontological interpretation on the essence of organism whether it is human or non-human animals that can be found in part two of *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (1995). Some may be led to think that Heidegger is also interested to explain human being like a biologist or zoologist when reading this part of Heidegger's work on animality. But we have to keep in mind that his main point is still on the Being of Dasein and the question of 'What is World?'. There are three theses that Heidegger develops in his inquiry; 1) the stone is worldless, 2) the animal is poor in the world, and 3) man is world-forming. The first thesis is not difficult to be understood, the stone is neither able to transpose itself into other beings nor to understand its own being. The third is to reconceptualize about Dasein's access to Being-as-a-whole which is clearly manifested when Dasein is in the mood of profound boredom. This mood occurs when Dasein sees no more meaning of its circumstances, when Dasein sees everything around as meaningless. That is when its true Being is unconcealed when questioning its own Being when other beings are meaningless and it is left empty. (Heidegger, 1995 : 274-278)

However, the second thesis is more difficult to analyze in what way that animal is poor in the world. This is because the explanation can only be given indirectly from the theses on stone and man. It can be seen that animals can be in a lot of activities like human being, such as a cat stepping to its bowl of milk or running away from a dog. The cat can react to other beings in the world. However, Heidegger analyzes that animal is poor in the world, its poverty is a deprivation of world. Animal can *behave* in an instinctual drivenness while Dasein can *comport* itself towards beings, and can experience another beings as *being*. This is because for animal there is an absorption in itself as captivation in disinhibiting ring, it *behaves within an environment but never within a world*. (Heidegger, 1995 : 238-239)

Kuperus (2007 : 16) explains further on Heidegger's concept of '*disinhibiting ring*' which is to mark the difference between human animal and non-human animal. "Disinhibiting ring' is the surrounding environment to which the animal has access, this access is characterized as drivenness and instinctual behavior. It is how animal is related to other things, but this relatedness is not a genuine comportment towards beings which is the ability only in human Dasein (to understand beings as *being*). Dasein is capable of keeping a distance towards the beings that surround it. And when Dasein is in a mood of losing the world around when Dasein has profound boredom, we may be led to say that the world is deprived from Dasein. This is not true, animals are always deprived of world, but Dasein's loss of world brings new opportunities for itself, the opportunities which are impossible for animals. (Kuperus, 2007 : 26)

Although animals are so much different from human Dasein, there is one thing that the two share, and it is their belonging to the living being. Therefore, the question is still left 'what is the essence of organism?'. Heidegger accepts that his approach is incomplete to determine the essence of motility belonging to the living being. Why his is incomplete? Heidegger explains that to interpret the essence of the organism with respect to the captivation of the animal is inadequate. All life is not simple organism but is just essentially process, or in motion. But it is not motion in the sense of a sequence of unfolding events. Processes of life as we are familiar with in our everyday experience are birth, growth, maturing, aging, and death of animals. All this reveals to us a motility of a peculiar kind which is the captivation of animals. Captivation is at the same time motility,

and this belong to the essence of the organism which lacks determination. In the case of man, those processes of life as birth, maturing, aging, and death reminds us of man as living being. It could be said that for our case we recognize them as historical. But to explain in this way is still incomplete because we do not know what sort of history that the animals possess if there is any. If we are to consider the question of the essence of life by considering '*death*', in the case of human being it is apparent that death is indispensable to unfold the motility of life. But in the case of animals, we cannot know that that the death of animal is a *dying* or a way of *coming to an end*. His approach can only explain that animal is poor in world, but it is not to be exaggerated that it can solve the problem of the essence of animal life at the same time. (Heidegger, 1995 : 264-267)

3. Theravada Buddhism on Dukkha of Birth, Decay, and Death

In the Buddhist doctrine of 'Paticcasamuppada' or the Dependent Origination, there is saying about birth (Jati), decay (Jara), and death (marana) as the cause of all sufferings or Dukkha. Paticcasamuppada can be explain as Buddhist doctrine of cause and effect in the manner of dependent origination in sequence from ignorance → karma-formation → consciousness → mind and matter → six sense-bases → contact → feeling → craving → clinging → becoming → birth → decay and death (together with the whole mass of suffering (Dukkha) ; sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair). To explain in this manner is called 'direct dependent origination'. In reverse dependent origination (or dependent extinction) is to explain the total cessation from the ignorance to decay and death (through the total fading away and cessation of ignorance, cease karma-foundations, through the cessation of karma-foundations, cease consciousness, ..and so on). (Phra Dhammapitaka (P.A. Payutto), 1995 : 301-305 ; 1999 : chapter 4)

In The Four Noble Truths, Dukkha is defined as suffering, unsatisfactoriness such as in birth, decay, and death. Moreover, Dukkhatta is the state of being subject to suffering, painfulness, stress, and conflict. Sankhara Dukkhatta or the state of being subject to Dukkha of any compounded or conditioned things depending on formative factors is therefore not to be liable. This state of Dukkhatta is not the unconditioned (Asankhatadhamma) like Nibbana which is the way out of suffering or the cessation of all ignorance (Nirodha).

Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (2008 : 52-56) explains the 'world' (loka) in the level of Dhamma language as the same thing as Dukkha. The world refers to impermanent and unsatisfactory things that are low, shallow, not profound, and fall short of their highest potential.

Buddhist view on life is involved with Buddhist doctrines of cause and effect. The very first cause of birth is ignorance which means that one does not know yet about the truth of non-self (anatta), but one is still attached to the belief in persistent self (attavadupadana). Therefore, when birth arises, decay and death also arises. And according to the Buddhist law of cause and effect of karma, every living being, whether man or animal, that is still trapped in the wheel of ignorance, their consequence of karma (karma vipaka) will form a new birth on and on without end.

4. Underlying Motility of Life

From a comparative study, there is a same point that Heidegger shares with Theravada Buddhism when considering life, it is that life is not stable but always in changes. Birth, decay (or aging), and death is therefore considered together to depict the essence of life within environment or world. The stretching of life of human Dasein is seen as the temporality that temporalizes the Being of Dasein. It is found later that life is always in motile character, stretching from birth to death. Life is essentially not in a state of being stabilized. Therefore, birth and death is intimately bound up with the motility of life. Death is already there when birth arises. Nevertheless, if this is to be called the same aspect sharing between Heidegger and Buddhism, we can see that it is rather not saying from the same phenomenological methodology that Heidegger uses. Therefore, we may have to call it only as a Heideggerian view.

However, there is a difference between Heideggerian and Theravada Buddhist view. While the Buddhist view is considering life in the manner of Dependent Origination as effect from ignorance, Heidegger considers life as a phenomenon as can be seen in human and non-human animal. Life of man and animal, if to be considered from birth, decay, and death as seen in Buddhist view, it is an effect formed by and with other causes. So, the motility of life is also an effect of those causes. It is already there when all of its conditions are there. And it is the same with man or animal, because the underlying

reality of human or animal life is 'conditionedness' (sankhatadhamma). But in Heideggerian view, there is none of explanation in this way. Heidegger says about the interdependence between Dasein and beings in the world that there is no Being if there is no one who is capable to thematize about Being. But that characteristic of explanation by the notion of interdependence is not exactly the same with Buddhist doctrine of Dependent Origination.

Nevertheless, I see an other perspective to view at the motility of life with no problem stemmed from the fundamental difference between man and animal that Heidegger found. Heidegger may have to view the motility of life at its deeper ground to see the underlying reality. The stretching between birth and death is considered present-at-hand which can be in our awareness both man's and animal's, because we know what it means for life to be in motile character. But in the level of readiness-to-hand that always withdraws itself from our awareness, there must be a 'cause' or 'conditions' of which that stretching is effect, and that makes the motile character of life reveal as a phenomenon of meaningfulness to Dasein. However, the presence-at-hand and readiness-to-hand is always interdependent in an ontological explanation although the latter is not for us to get direct to. The motile character of organism is therefore explained by its own underlying cause or conditions of its meaning.

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