

Desiring the Other: Reading Zizioulas' Genealogy and Ontology of the Person Between Heidegger and Levinas

This paper explores Zizioulas' sustained engagement with the existential philosophies of Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas against the backdrop of his broader genealogical critique of pre-Christian Hellenism and philosophical modernity from the standpoint of an Orthodox personalism. More specifically, it interrogates how Zizioulas' notion of desire as a movement of ecstatic self-transcendence shapes his personalist ontology's proximity and distance from both Heidegger's fundamental ontology and Levinas' ethics of alterity as well as their respective criticisms of western metaphysics. By rethinking self-transcendence as an erotic openness to communion, Zizioulas simultaneously avoids both the totalizing and essentialist tendencies of the broader western philosophical tradition without alternately negating the Other's alterity or evacuating otherness of its properly ontological dimension. Where Heidegger, on the one hand, understands self-transcendence as the temporal ecstasy of our Being-towards-death, and Levinas, on the other, inverts this very structure to affirm our infinite expropriation by the Other, Zizioulas's affirmation of our ecstatic movement as a dynamic capacity for love allows him to reorient ontology toward a radically relational conception of existence. By examining how Zizioulas' revises and even reconciles Heideggerian and Levinasian categories from the standpoint of a kind of existential and post-postmodern Christian anthropology, this paper argues that he resituates the relationship between theological discourse and continental philosophy in implicit confrontation with his phenomenological interlocutors.

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