

*Being Oneself. Heidegger and Sartre on Personal Identity and Autobiography*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this presentation is to define Sartre's contribution regarding the issue of autobiography, but also to explain why his phenomenological approach stands out from the analyses made by Heidegger on this question. Indeed, Sartre's writings show that his phenomenology of autobiography is inspired by *Being and Time*, where – on the basis of the concept of *Selbstheit*, which could be translated by “selfhood” – Heidegger develops an existential definition of the concept of “personal identity”. Owing to this influence, many thinkers esteem that the phenomenology of autobiography formulated in *Being and Nothingness* on the basis of the concept of “circuit of selfness” (*circuit de l'ipséité*), is nothing else than a reread of *Being and Time*'s conception of *Selbstheit*. According to them, Sartre develops just like Heidegger an “internalist” conception of autobiography because he thinks that the origin of individuation is an intentional movement thanks to which the individual turns away from an unauthentic and alienating world, in order to focus on himself. This interpretation – which is problematical, in my opinion, because it gives the impression that Sartre is a subjectivist and antisocial thinker – was made by Bourdieu (1980), but also by many Sartrean commentators (Flajoliet, 2005) who, given that they read *Being and Nothingness* starting from *Being and Time*, do not see the originality of Sartre's phenomenology of autobiography.

For my part, I will adopt the opposite stance by supporting the hypothesis that Sartre and Heidegger formulate different analyses of personal identity and autobiography (two concepts that will be synonymous in my presentation, because these two thinkers don't really draw a distinction between these notions). In order to support this assumption, I will present Heidegger's conception of selfhood and its reception by Sartre in the context of the Second World War. Then, I will study the objections raised by the latter against Heidegger, and how they led him to invent a phenomenological method named “existential psychoanalysis” whose function is to decipher everyone's autobiography. And the two parts of this presentation will be based on the following sources: paragraphs 10 and 64 of *Being and Time*, books III and XI of Sartre's *War Diary*, and *Being and Nothingness*' fourth part.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Heidegger's conception of selfhood and its reception by Sartre
2. The Sartrean indictment against Heidegger, and the invention “existential psychoanalysis”

MAIN REFERENCES

- Heidegger M. (1927, 1962), *Being and Time*. Trans. J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson. Oxford: Blackwell
- Sartre J.-P. (1939-1940, 1984), *War Diaries*. Trans. Q. Hoare. London: Verso classics.
- Sartre J.-P. (1943, 1993), trans E. Barnes. Washington: Washington Square Press.