[Review] Felix Ó Murchadha (2013) The time of revolution: Kairos and Chronos in Heidegger

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Felix Ó Murchadha. *The Time of Revolution: Kairos and Chronos in Heidegger*. Bloomsbury, London/New York, 2013.

Felix Ó Murchadha's recent book on Heidegger is a translation and reworking of a book he first published in German in 1999 – *Zeit des Handelns und Möglichkeit der Verwandlung. Kairologie and Chronologie bei Heidegger im Jahrzehnt nach 'Sein und Zeit'* (*Time of Action and the Possibility of Transformation, Kairology and Chronology in Heidegger during the decade following 'Being and Time'*). Ó Murchadha's avowed aim is to examine in particular the role of revolution in Heidegger's thought with a view to demonstrating that Heidegger is a revolutionary thinker in multiple senses. Ultimately, Ó Murchadha wants to argue that Heidegger, as the thinker of time par excellence, is looking to distinguish between kairological time and chronological time, with kairological time, in particular, being integral to revolution.

One of the major differences between this revised English edition of Ó Murchadha's book and the earlier German edition is the inclusion of a new chapter that tackles the political controversy surrounding Heidegger's thought in the context of a discussion of kairological time where the goal is "to understand Heidegger's political engagement in terms of his account of historical time, and specifically of revolutionary, kairological time." (2) Given that the earlier version of the text has been in existence for some time and that Ó Murchadha himself sees the major difference between the earlier version and this most recent one as consisting in his attempt to resolve the political controversy surrounding Heidegger's thought – it is this chapter in particular which will, perhaps, draw the most attention, not least given the current furore surrounding the recent publication of Heidegger's *Schwarze Hefte* from the 1930s and 1940s.

In looking at the role of time, especially historical time, Ó Murchadha's book "concerns the relation between chronos and kairos" and argues that the 'split' in time which Heidegger examines as his "main thesis" is "between chronological and kairological time". This is an important distinction in Heidegger of course and Ó Murchadha manages to creatively and artfully analyse many of Heidegger's positions and arguments against this backdrop; notwithstanding, there are occasions when the reader can't help but wonder if the relationship between kairological and chronological time is being foisted on the issues somewhat artificially. That is to say, it is not always obvious that the discussions in question are best understood from that particular vantage point. As with any of the major themes, motifs or vehicles in Heidegger's extensive writings, none of them function as *the* axis around which everything else turns, with the obvious exception of the infamous *Seinsfrage* itself. To be fair, Ó Murchadha does look to obviate such concerns with certain disclaimers in his introduction, writing that the

aim of these investigations is *not* to interpret Heidegger 'correctly'. To interpret Heidegger is to go beyond his texts in order to understand the phenomena (*die Sache*) which his texts bring to light. The aim of this work is not in the first instance to criticize, supplement or, for that matter, to interpret Heidegger, although in the course of these investigations he will be criticized, supplemented and interpreted. The aim is rather, through a repetition of his texts, to pose the question concerning the relation of kairos and chronos. Repetition (*Wieder-holung*) is understood here in Heidegger's sense – which itself is influenced by Nietzsche and Kierkegaard – as the revitalizing re-(*wieder*) trieval (*holen*) of an event. In this case, the event is Heidegger's own texts, which in their uniqueness cannot be subsumed under a generalizing thought, but can only be worked through again anew. (p.8)

Nonetheless, while Ó Murchadha's sophisticated and creative attempts to examine the complex question of the relationship between kairological and chronological time are masterful and compelling, there are times when the text does drift into what reads as straightforward Heidegger interpretation. Moreover, some of the discussions focussed on don't really lend themselves to an investigation of the relationship between kairological and

chronological time at all. For example, in terms of Heidegger's discussions of *techne* and *poiesis*, it is not at all clear that the relationship between kairological and chronological time figures centrally in any of Heidegger's treatments of these notions. Moreover, if indeed one *is* going to claim that the split between kairological and chronological time is the 'main thesis' in Heidegger's work then it would seem that the strategy proposed in the disclaimer above is precluded from the outset. That is to say that such a claim demands some kind of 'justified' interpretation, not least when there are times when the author explicitly criticizes Heidegger's failure to deal adequately with the role of kairological time in the text in question. These criticisms are not indicative of any 'fatal' flaws in Ó Murchadha's project; the reader still stands to learn a great deal from the book's novel and innovative interpretations of Heidegger.

Over the course of five chapters, Ó Murchadha examines the importance of kairological and chronological time in Heidegger's thought, beginning in chapter one with what he takes to be a failed attempt to found historicity on the temporality of Dasein. Heidegger's failure here, Ó Murchadha argues, is based on his inability to see that authentic time should be seen "in terms of the relation between kairological and chronological time". This 'critique' is developed further in the second chapter where Ó Murchadha argues that Heidegger illegitimately prioritizes individual, almost solipsistically conceived, authentic existence when he should instead have underlined the indubitably intersubjective, communal nature of that existence and, again, this is due to his failure to give the centrality of the conception of kairological time its full due. Ó Murchadha's criticisms of Heidegger in this respect are telling and manage to put pressure on the manner in which Heidegger's account of authenticity begins to prioritize the notion of a singular Dasein when the intersubjective, communal nature of Dasein cannot and should not be suppressed.

In Chapter Three Ó Murchadha examines the importance of the role of freedom to Heidegger's thought in the years immediately following *Being and Time* and how, in terms of revolution, one must adopt the perspective afforded by kairological time rather than the deterministic conception that obtains under the auspices of chronological time. Chapter Four delves even further into the relationship between *praxis* and *poiesis* and pays particular attention to Heidegger's famous essay on the work of Art as well as his lectures on Hölderlin in the 1930s. Finally, in chapter five, the relationship between Heidegger's philosophy and his politics is discussed.

In terms of the split between kairological and chronological time being the key to Heidegger's thought, Ó Murchadha argues in chapter five that

To think revolution is to think the possibility of radical, abrupt, sudden and transforming change, or rather to think such change as possibility. For Heidegger, the question of being articulates the basic insight that thinking is thinking in relation to a time and that the present time – Heidegger's present time – was one in which the positive possibilities of thought had been exhausted and a new thinking was necessary. (p. 157)

Ó Murchadha is quick to acknowledge the shortcomings of Heidegger's attempt to articulate a political philosophy:

In his own terms – that is, in the terms of his philosophical project – Heidegger's political engagement was, as he said himself, a 'great stupidity' (*große Gummheit*) because he mistook the Nazi seizure of power – really Hitler as an historical 'event' – as genuine revolution, that is, as an authentic repetition of the original question of being.

Notwithstanding, Ó Murchadha is keen to offer an apologetic reading of Heidegger's political philosophy insisting that

A people are those who understand themselves as 'we' in terms of a common historical moment. Being a people is a decision, a decision with respect to a historical situation in which, as a people, 'we' find ourselves. As such, the uniqueness and singularity of a people has nothing to do with race. (p.161)

However, when we read in Heidegger's by now infamous 1933-34 seminar *Nature, History, State* that being part of a people *does*, in fact, very much depend on straightforward ethnic criteria and relies heavily on notions such as stock and race – then one would expect that these attempts to exonerate Heidegger will find little sympathy given the further shocking revelations which have emerged in Heidegger's recently published and notorious *Schwarze Hefte*. In his 1933-34 seminar we find Heidegger insisting:

And with this we come to the entity that belongs to the state, its substance, its supporting ground: *the people* [*das Volk*]...But closely related to this is a term such as 'public health' [*Volksgesundheit*], in which one also now feels the tie of the unity of blood and stock, the race. But in the most comprehensive sense, we use the term *Volk* when we speak of something like 'the people in arms': with this we mean nothing merely like those who receive draft notices, and also something other than the mere sum of the citizens of the state. We mean something even more strongly binding than race and a community of the same stock: namely, the nation, and that means a kind of Being that has grown under a common fate and taken distinctive shape within a *single* state. (NHS 42/43)

Heidegger goes on to write

For a Slavic people, the nature of our German space would definitely be revealed differently from the way it is revealed to us; to Semitic nomads, it will perhaps never be revealed at all. This way of being embedded in a people, situated in a people, this original participation in the knowledge of the people, cannot be taught; at most, it can be awakened from its slumber. (NHS 56)

Ó Murchadha insists however that Heidegger is only interested in the way that a people can be called on to share a common destiny as an historical people in keeping with the theoretical underpinnings to these ideas which Heidegger had already begun to gesture at in *Being and Time* insisting, moreover, that "There is nothing either racist or fascist about this". And while the theoretical apparatus of historicity and the concomitant notion of an historical Dasein of a people are clearly incompatible with fascism or indeed totalitarianism more generally, one must do a little more than Ó Murchadha recommends as a response to the manner in which Heidegger looked to use these ideas in the service of a noxious political vision, namely, an

ironic smile (176/177), not least when the more unsavoury elements of the antisemitic undercurrents inherent in Heidegger's anti-modernism are confirmed again in his notebooks from the 1930s and 40s.

Ó Murchadha's book is destined to elicit some critical responses, not least as a result of the controversial stance adopted on the question of Heidegger's attempts to articulate a political philosophy. Other readers may argue that Ó Murchadha, in places, *is* in fact trying to interpret Heidegger's texts 'correctly' in order to demonstrate that the split between kairological and chronological time is implicitly or explicitly what motivates the same texts. Nevertheless, none of that should detract from Ó Murchadha's sophisticated and compelling treatment of the interplay between kairological and chronological time and how the concomitant notion of revolution plays a key role in Heidegger's philosophy throughout his career.