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THE CONCEPT OF LIFE BETWEEN GADAMER AND RICOEUR

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Abstract

Life. Such a simple word. Yet, such powerful meanings. The purpose of this paper is to show how life is seen by two strong names that hold a leading place in our history and in our minds. It is important to know where we are standing, what points of view we can have as guidance and how we can shift from one to another in order to achieve the perspective that truly defines us. We might agree with what others have to say but at the same we might be in complete denying of what they have to say. And it is more than alright to be this way. Because it all comes down to life, as one sees it, as one perceives it, as one describes it, as one feels it. This life is filled with paradoxes, almost everywhere we look. But I believe, that in the end, this is the beauty of it. You can never get tired or get bored because there will always be something else to look forward to or to try and comprehend.

Keywords: life; perception; mind; knowledge; understanding;

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of life can be seen from two different points of view. The first one is the fact that we only have one life and we should make the most out of it. This translates into giving it our all, living every second like it is the last one, not wanting to please everyone around us but needing to please ourselves because it is our life after all. The second one is the fact that this life ends with our deaths and we should be careful just how we live it, what we leave behind and maybe dare to think is there is another life and it will turn out to be...for us, for me, for you.

“In thinking through the connection between different ideas we see that the soul as a life principle is necessarily connected with an idea, namely, with the idea of life, an idea that cannot be reconciled with death.” (Hans-Georg Gadamer, 2001,55). This is the vision that Gadamer stood by. And it is the right one for him. But that does not mean that it is the only right one. It is a starting point, it is a belief and it is true, but it is definitely now the general truth. I cannot stand by this belief because I stand behind other principles and other visions.



But his perception opens up another path, a path towards immortality. What that means and how people react to it is another different level of understanding because we are talking about a field that has somehow managed to draw attention from different parts and now it is being discussed by people who have such opposite points of view over the entire concept of life and death, that it is truly amazing what conversations are floating away from the field of immortality and into this current world. But again, we are faced with both positive and negative perceptions.

“The most widespread interpretation that puts particular emphasis on this passage is that, ultimately, immortality has really only been proven for the idea of life, for the idea of the soul, not for the indestructibility of the discrete individual.”(Hans-Georg Gadamer, 2001,58). As far as this perception is regarded I am both in acceptance of it and in denying of what it stands for. Yes, we are faced with a lot of different interpretations even for the smallest things or thoughts, and yes they can have a great impact on how we perceive life but at the same time, they are just interpretations, they are not the real truth. We can be influenced by something only if we let that become stronger than us or stronger than our values.

Immortality is a way of living for some people or for some religions. It is not seen as the end of this human life and the begging of another one but as a continuous road, a continuous path that leads us through different spaces, different life styles, different ways of thinking, different ways of understanding and different ways of coming together with who we are in the present.

2. THE CONCEPT OF LIFE FOR GADAMER

“...Gadamer’s work always manifests a deep fidelity to the continuing effort of thinking out of a sense of the finitude of understanding and the enigmas of factual life.” (Hans-Georg Gadamer, 1994,18). I tend to believe that Gadamer was blown away by life, in general, by how it can change one person, how it can change perceptions, how it can change cultures and just how much influence it has, overall. I stand behind this idea because it represents me in some ways. And I say that because I am also fighting to think outside the box, to go further into what everything means, to try and find out where it is all coming from.

“Philosophical hermeneutics displays the éclat of a life-affirming mode of thought that recognizes that the (tragic) endurance of its own negativity contains the promise of its redemption. It understands that the possibility of hermeneutic transcendence follows on the affirmative embrace of its own negativity.”(Nicholas Davey, 2006, p.15). And yet, we cannot always stay on top of the situation, we cannot always control it. Sometimes we are being controlled by it and that is alright. We deserve to have a break from time to time. But it is something hard to understand. We tend to want to be at our maximum level all the time and have and also share just good and positive energy. And this is just the problem. It is something that we cannot achieve as long as we hold on to a non-realistic thought which in time transforms into negative energy. We need to learn to let go of it or to embrace it, not fight it.

Life is just a complex word. It is made out of everything and nothing at the same time. We cannot touch it but we can see it somehow. We cannot pin-point it, yet it is somehow everywhere. “For Gadamer, hermeneutics embraces the whole of the human life-world as its practical understanding of itself in all of its dimensions (art, scientific reason, the ethical, law, philosophy, the social and political relations of everyday life).”(Bruce Krajewski, 2004, p.44). And just like that, he has captured everything in a few words and has made us realize the fact that all is nothing and vice-versa and that life, as we know it, is an untouchable concept that touches everyone.

3. THE CONCEPT OF LIFE FOR RICOEUR

“Ricoeur approaches the relationship between narrative and life by examining the repertoire of existential resources that emplote themselves discursively.”(Gadamer and Ricoeur, 2011, p.122). It is a completely different point of view which emerges from a person that has managed to make his own way of seeing this life. And I can agree with this because I believe that it starts from the bottom, it starts to analyze how everything has come into place and by doing this, it gives me the feeling that I might be able to understand at least where some things are going to be or how they are going to evolve.

“Ricoeur's critical hermeneutical ethics proposes a view of the moral life that is oriented in praxis, formed in tradition and community, responsive to plurality and otherness, and grounded upon core human capacities for interpretation, dialogue, and imaginative moral mediation.”(Paul Ricoeur And Contemporary Moral Thought, 2002, p.3).

What is interesting is the fact that he has so much confidence in what people can do, in their abilities, is like he has never been afraid of putting his faith in human kind. And it is indeed something that I admire and even the type of person I aspire to be. Because this is the life, the real life. Doing your own part but also expecting the best from the people around you.

The philosophy behind Paul Ricoeur's way of thinking and of seeing life helps us understand the main importance of narrative or human life in at least three fundamental ways:

(1) “as foundation of temporal identity and in particular of the more or less coherent lifestory of everyone by which he or she understands himself or herself as agent and person;” .”(Paul Ricoeur And Contemporary Moral Thought, 2002, p.33).

- I believe that we tend to be temporal human beings just in a small part of our lives and that is because we want to be able to reach everything that we consider to be major in this current history, or at least the part that we are aware of.

(2) “as foundation of the ethical identity of a person, by offering narrative models of life that express intentions of the good life and give rise to ideas about liberation from evil and creation of happiness;” .”(Paul Ricoeur And Contemporary Moral Thought, 2002, p.33).

- this stand with the vision in which in order for us to evolve we must embrace who we really are. One must accept the way he is portrayed in this world in order to be able to cut everything that might hold him back. And in most of the cases that “everything” is just the negative part of his life. But it is not because he wants it to be there but because this is how life works: it is filled with both good, positive and bad, negative energies and feelings. This is why the concept of life is just like the concept of “yin and yang”.

(3) “as foundation of the identity of a society by offering ideologies that are in permanent tension with a utopian guide for common social life and law.” .”(Paul Ricoeur And Contemporary Moral Thought, 2002, p.33).

- I believe that Ricoeur's way of seeing life was not to go with everything that you are told to be real or true but to ask yourself where is everything coming from. Just by doing so, we can reach the real life, where we start to behave how we feel like and how we see as we put into this scenario. It is an interesting point of view and I can go along with it because it definitely resonates with who I am as a person and with this current life.

4. CONCLUSION

I do not believe that the vision which Gadamer portrays over life is much different from Ricoeur's. And I stand by this because they both have original perspectives which are not very far from one-another. They both have a huge power in changing this life, although the way in which they can do such thing is very interesting. They do not have the physical power, yet they can reach many just with the words they put out a long time ago.

This life will always be a paradox because it is based on things that are yet to happen, on people that are yet to be born, on thoughts that are yet to be expressed, on laws that are yet to be implemented. But they both found ways to reach us and to show us how we can cope with this. It all starts from the bottom. It all starts with our own persons and our own selves. We are not the problem. In fact we are the solution. And although it might seem as a non-ending fight, we just need to have faith in human kind and in humanity seen as a general aspect.

In life, we need to learn how to trust others, just like Ricoeur said, we must learn how to let go of the negative parts and negative energies, just like Gadamer said, and I strongly believe that we must learn

to trust our own strengths and our own minds. We have different ways of seeing life, we have different fundamentals and different values but despite everything it is the same world in which we are living.

Don't you think that life is just something that we all have to deal with, at the same time and somehow in the same aspects? Because I do. And I sure that the answer to coping with this situation is faith. Just like the authors mentioned in this paper do. It all comes down to faith however one might perceive it. Faith comes in all shapes and sizes but this also how the impact of life is seen.

Due to everything that is going on we need to try and go back in time, just a little bit, in order to find some answers to how it all started and from there to find the answers on how to manage the current situation. The concept of life is seen as something far from the normal definition. It is something that covers everything that surrounds us, everything that we know or that we want to know, it fully covers our thoughts, dreams and desires. But it also makes us embrace it all because just like the two authors mentioned in the title believe, there is no way around it, just through it, and just with the help of others. In the end, life is what makes us who we really are.

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