Time and the Shared World

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Introduction

Time and the Shared World

This book analyzes the implications of Heidegger’s critique of traditional theories of subjectivity for any conception of “intersubjectivity,” demonstrating that one can benefit from Heidegger’s radically new characterization of human selfhood without being committed to the distorted and solipsistic social ontology that is often deemed to be its direct consequence. Dominant interpretations tend to misunderstand Heidegger’s work in this regard by characterizing the Heideggerian self—Dasein—as either too solipsistic or too selfless. In response I develop an account of Dasein’s social nature that is grounded in Heidegger’s notion that Dasein’s originary temporality expresses itself in a heedful accommodation of the temporalizing presence of the other Dasein. In doing so I am able to provide an account of Dasein-to-Dasein relationships as a type of mutual recognition of individuated personhood within everydayness. Such an “interdasein” relationship is neither suffocated under das Man anonymity nor dependent on a previously accomplished authenticity.

Despite the many interpretations to the contrary, I argue that Heidegger’s work on the social nature of the self must be located within a philosophical continuum that not only builds on Kant and Husserl’s work regarding the nature of the a priori and the fundamental structures of human temporality, but also points forward to the ways in which these themes will be further developed both in his own later work and by such thinkers as Sartre and Levinas. By demonstrating the manner in which Dasein’s fundamental being-with-others is first and foremost a responsive acknowledgment of the other’s particularity, I am able to provide a Heidegger-inspired account of respect and the intersubjective origins of normativity. I thereby show how Heidegger may serve as a valuable resource for developing an appropriately complex understanding of the relationship between persons—a novel contribution not only to contemporary Heidegger scholarship but also to the philosophical tradition as a whole.

Unlike the common interpretive tendency to view Heidegger’s scattered commentary on ethical and intersubjective themes as disinterested asides, then—a view that reads their unsystematic and incomplete nature as betraying moral and philosophical flaws in both Heidegger and his work—this book takes these comments to offer more extensive resources...
than is generally recognized. Focusing not only on Heidegger’s *Being and Time* but also on his *Basic Problems of Phenomenology, History of the Concept of Time, and Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, as well as a wide variety of recently published lecture courses ranging from his 1921 *Introduction to Phenomenological Research* through to the *Zollikon Seminars* of the 1960s, this discussion demonstrates that Heidegger’s corpus displays a consistent concern with the problem of intersubjectivity.

It is important to note, however, that an enormous amount of interpretive and reconstructive work is necessary in order to produce a feasible “Heideggerian intersubjectivity.” Heidegger himself only provided fragments—which means that this book is not so much an interpretation as a creative restructuring of his work aimed at building from it a coherent, unified position that explicitly addresses this issue. Why Heidegger failed fully to develop his own position—whether out of a tendency to take Husserl’s extensive work on this topic for granted, because he was primarily interested in examining the conditions for the possibility of the solitary task of philosophizing, or simply out of moral bankruptcy—will not be considered. The issue of Heidegger’s reprehensible personal orientations will be bracketed in the interest of fleshing out the undeveloped social implications that are undeniably present in his work.

To understand what Heidegger has to offer to debates on intersubjectivity requires one to first recognize the novel way in which he transforms the notion of subjectivity. Heidegger rejects traditional characterizations of selfhood largely because they present the self as an isolated, independent substance required to “bridge the gap” to reach or recognize the world and others like itself. This stance is evident, for example, in the traditional “problem of other minds,” which takes as its starting point the independent subject and then seeks to provide an epistemological account of how it is possible to know that others have an inner life analogous to one’s own, despite the fact that one only ever has access to one’s own inner life. Taking such an epistemological orientation means that the problem of other minds is derivative of the “problem of the external world”; an investigation into the reliability of knowledge that purports to be about anything other than the thinking self. Rooted in modern skepticism, both the problem of the external world and the problem of other minds thus rely on a conception of the self as a type of autonomous subject that can be radically isolated and distinguished from the world, the others who share the world, and even the thinker’s own body. Unsurprisingly, Heidegger typically refers to such a picture of selfhood as “Cartesian,” since it finds its most profound expression in the self-enclosed independence of Descartes’ *cogito sum.* Having assumed at the outset that there is a gulf between self and world, the philosophical game since Descartes has been to “prove” that the gulf is not unbridge-
able. Even in cases where an explicit proof of the external world or of other minds is not the primary purpose of the philosophical analysis, the tendency has not been to dismiss the demand for such a proof as illegitimate and misguided, but to assume that it has been or will be achieved. In doing so, such stances simply assume the isolated subject and its “inner” life as the philosophical starting point.

This starting point has infected all accounts of intersubjectivity, which tend to derive an understanding of social/political relationships on the basis of the nature of the individuals that are taken to be the basic units comprising them. This stance is evident, for example, in social contract theory’s attempt to characterize the nation-state on the basis of a particular understanding of “state of nature” individuals. By beginning with the notion of a rational individual struggling for survival, one produces a characterization of the nation-state as an institution designed to maximize the effectiveness of that struggle. The social arena is merely a reflection of the inner life of the self-enclosed subject. Theories of empathy also demonstrate this orientation toward characterizing the sociality of the self in terms of the individual’s “pre”-social qualities or capacities—qualities that are then simply mapped onto other persons and social contexts after the fact. According to such approaches, empathy does not mean a particular way of existing in terms of some other specific person—as in “Neil was empathizing with her sorrow”—it also refers to the condition for understanding other humans qua humans at all. As a result, empathy is supposed to “provide the first ontological bridge from one’s own subject, initially given by itself, to the other subject, which is initially quite inaccessible” (*BT* 124/117).

In contrast, Heidegger refuses to adopt the starting point from which such problematics arise. Rather than seeking an ontological bridge from self to other, Heidegger rejects the philosophical commitments underpinning the traditional problem of other minds according to which such a bridge is needed. We can no longer begin with an isolated self who must then “reach” the others through explicit acts of knowledge or inferences from analogy. Heidegger argues, rather, that there is no human self in the absence of the other. Beginning with a particular characterization of an “a”- or “pre”-social form of human existing is a seriously misleading approach, then, because it means that the capacities by virtue of which we might recognize and interact with others are assumed in advance, thereby ignoring the role that encounters with others play in structuring and developing these very capacities. For Heidegger, we need others to become knowers at all. As Frederick Olafson notes: “In such an approach, the philosophical inquirer is supposed to be already situated in and familiar with a world that lends itself to the kind of comprehension that eventually finds full expression in the sciences of
nature. At the same time, however, he is supposed to be in a position that enables him to raise doubts as to whether there is any other being that is like him in this respect.” These two demands are contradictory, however, insofar as the situated familiarity with the world characteristic of the first assumption is dependent on the very others who are brought into question in the second. For Heidegger, engaging in an inquiry regarding the problem of other minds implies the capacity to treat this question as just another “fact” to be ascertained in the absence of any recognition that the endeavor itself—with its public, inherited language of inquiry and its collaboratively determined conceptions of proof—presupposes this very existence.

The problem is not the failure to produce a compelling account of how one bridges the gulf between two isolated self-enclosed subjects. Contrary to Kant’s claim, Heidegger argues that “the ‘scandal of philosophy’ does not consist in the fact that this proof [of the external world] is still lacking up to now, but in the fact that such proofs are expected and attempted again and again” (BT 205/190). The existence of the external world and of other minds is only problematic insofar as we engage in a highly theoretical characterization of subjectivity that is modeled on the existence of things; a characterization in which one subject is trapped in its cabinet-like self with no key to the “cabinet doors” of others. Theories that begin with such an autonomous self cannot hope to overcome the solipsism with which they have begun.

In contrast with these problematic approaches, Heidegger engages in a radical break with the tradition by refusing to engage in a characterization of human existence that allows these topics to appear as problems at all. The self does not need to “find” a way to the world and the others who share it since it is always already defined by its worldly commitments, activities, and relationships. As we will see, to be Dasein is to already be “in” the world: defined in terms of its structures, skillfully coping with its tasks, responsive to its claims. For Heidegger, any philosophical position that demands an account of how the self “reaches” the world has already failed to recognize the phenomenon to be explained. Rather than accounting for how one isolated subject encounters another, then, Heidegger argues that the whole endeavor must be dismissed as a dramatic misrepresentation of human experience: “a mere subject ‘is’ not initially and is also never given. And, thus, an isolated I without the others is in the end just as far from being given initially” (BT 116/109).

In contrast to traditional starting points, then, the Heideggerian account of the self is an attempt to transform this Cartesian picture of the isolated or monolithic subject. In doing so, Heidegger introduces a notion of social subjectivity that accommodates the other-directed nature
of selfhood such that it becomes ontologically defined by its “being-with-otherness.” Unlike other theories that emphasize the fundamental sociability of human existing, however, Heidegger does not characterize this essential “being-with” (or *Mitsein*) in terms of a primal struggle for recognition or participation in a language community. Others are encountered, rather, in terms of a shared immersion in the public roles, orientations, and norms through which Dasein understands itself. Others play a necessary role in the very constitution of one’s being because each self is dependent on the others to institute and maintain the shared world in terms of which it understands who it can be.

Despite this attempt to accommodate the necessary role that others play in Dasein’s very being, however, Heidegger’s approach has been subject to significant criticism. Since the Heideggerian self is immersed in the world and understands itself and others through the world’s public meanings and general categories, one such self does not seem able to directly encounter this or that other person in her concrete individuality. Indeed, the actual presence of the individual other appears to be completely irrelevant in Heidegger’s view, since this co-being with others constitutes a necessary structural characteristic of human existence itself and is not “something which occurs at times on the basis of the existence of others” (*BT* 120/113). By simply stipulating that human being is a “being-with” others—a “being-with” that is not accomplished or created through direct encounters—Heidegger appears to move the generality, anonymity, and mediation that may characterize particular social roles to the level of an a priori category that characterizes one’s very way of being. In defining human selfhood as fundamentally characterized by with-others-ness, Heidegger seems to be guilty of advocating a position that cannot accommodate the immediate experiences of others in their concrete particularity. Rather, one can only ever encounter other persons as representative types able to trigger particular preexisting categories—be they ontic social categories or the overarching ontological category *Mitsein*. Individual persons do not play a role in constituting or developing these categories, but are interchangeable instances whose uniqueness is subsumed to the category by which one knows them. By simply stipulating that a self is always with others, then, Heidegger cannot do justice to the social encounter in all its particularity—the role that being with this or that other person plays in the very constitution of the self. Variations on this criticism have haunted Heidegger’s position since Jean-Paul Sartre made it famous in *Being and Nothingness*. Emmanuel Levinas’s elaboration on its implications has only served to entrench this reading such that this interpretation of the social dimension of Heidegger’s work has by now come to have the status of established
fact. The verdict appears to be in: Heidegger’s very efforts to accommodate the self’s fundamental other-directedness seem to have the ironic consequence of preventing it.

In attempting to avoid such a conclusion about Heidegger’s position, commentators have traditionally focused on the individuating role that Angst and authenticity play in Being and Time, arguing that Heidegger makes room for the possibility of direct encounters between individuals because of the individuating nature of the conditions picked out with these concepts. But characterizing the possibility of any concrete encounter between individuals in terms of a prerequisite authenticating individuation will condemn social encounters to an extremely rarefied status, since Heidegger is clear that these conditions are not the norm. Though authenticity and the capacity for authenticity will be important aspects of the social encounter, my purpose in this book is to show that concrete encounters between individuals are possible from within the confines of everyday existing. In doing so, I demonstrate that such encounters are not contingent on a prior, rare authenticity—indeed, it becomes evident that direct encounters between individual selves can be conducive to authentic existing in one or both participants. In contrast, the many Angst and authenticity-focused attempts to escape this critique are particularly problematic insofar as they encourage the view that Heidegger is advocating a type of existential solipsism—thereby undermining whatever he may claim elsewhere about the self’s fundamentally social nature.

The task of the book will be to articulate the manner in which a self can be both dependent on others to be what it is and yet display an individuation that prevents it from being merely an interchangeable token of the type “Dasein.” This book’s agenda, then, is to navigate the Scylla and Charybdis of a self that is too dependent on others and one that is too independent. Heidegger’s account of selfhood, I will argue, provides such a middle ground. In order to make this case, however, I must do a great deal of philosophical construction. The majority of this text is an articulation of what I believe Heidegger ought to have said—or was “trying” to say—based both on his other philosophical commitments and the nature of the “things themselves.” Since this type of constructive interpretation was characteristic of Heidegger’s own approach to the history of philosophy, it seems only fitting that his own work should be subject to the same treatment. Though it will be impossible to avoid importing aspects of my own interpretive agenda, I hope to avoid doing violence to Heidegger’s work and to provide, instead, a realization of the strengths of his account of subjectivity by working out its necessary implications for any account of intersubjectivity.
Though Heidegger supplied the foundation, then, the house must still be built, and in this text I do so by developing the above argument in the following steps:

Chapter 1: “The ‘Subject’ of Inquiry”

This chapter outlines the reasons for Heidegger’s reformulation of human subjectivity and explains the terms and concepts necessary for understanding his account of the structures that define Dasein. According to Heidegger, Dasein’s way of being is a transcending immersion in the world that is grounded in its care for who it is to be. This care structure is defined by the fact that (1) Dasein finds itself in a situation in which things matter to it, (2) Dasein must address itself practically to different possibilities of response in the face of the world’s mattering, and (3) Dasein is never alone, but always finds itself with others and understands itself—and them—in terms of the public norms and practices that they share.

Chapter 2: “Mineness and the Practical First-Person”

Here I show that, despite the anonymity and averageness that this worldly conception of the self seems to entail, Heidegger has room for an everyday understanding of the first-personal, individuated nature of the self without having to restrict this individuated selfhood to the condition of authenticity. Though the capacity to experience authenticity involves existential structures that are essential conditions for Dasein’s everyday way of being “mine,” they need not be authentically grasped or appropriated as such for them to manifest themselves in Dasein’s everyday way of being. Since my primary concern here is our everyday existence as social selves, the extremes of authenticity and inauthenticity are not addressed in detail until chapter 7. This everyday way of being mine is instead analyzed in terms of Heidegger’s characterization of the self as defined by intentionality. This chapter demonstrates that Heidegger’s account of the type of first-person self-presence characterizing intentionality offers an attractive middle way between the extreme positions put forth in the debate on this issue between Hubert Dreyfus and John Searle.
Chapter 3: “Being and Otherness: Sartre’s Critique”

This chapter illustrates how, based on Heidegger’s reformulation of traditional concepts of subjectivity, a Heideggerian account of intersubjectivity faces the objection outlined above. I provide the details of this objection through the lens of Sartre’s criticism as it is articulated in *Being and Nothingness*. There Sartre argues that Heidegger’s characterization of the fundamentally social nature of human existing fails because it simply stipulates an a priori category specific to others without explaining how the individual selfhood of these others could be directly encountered as such. For Sartre, Heidegger cannot move from the ontological to the ontic. As I will show, however, Sartre’s account itself falls victim to a difficulty that Heidegger’s does not: namely, Sartre’s emphasis on the facticity and contingency of the intersubjective encounter will not allow him to account for the fact that such encounters leave a trace—that the public nature of the world and the structures of subjectivity itself continue to speak of the presence of others even when they are not concretely present. In his failure to accommodate this, Sartre essentially cannot move from the ontic to the ontological. In light of the difficulties that the Sartre discussion raises, it becomes clear that Heidegger’s existential category “being-with” must not only preserve its ability to explain this residue of social presence which remains despite the absence of concrete others—but it must do so while avoiding the danger of losing the individual other to the anonymity of an a priori category.

Chapter 4: “Heideggerian Aprioricity and the Categories of Being”

Chapter 4 addresses this issue by turning to an analysis of the manner in which Dasein’s structures can be understood as a priori categories. I argue in this section that Heidegger’s existential analytic is essentially a reformulation of traditional transcendental aprioricity aimed at both maintaining the categorial nature of human experience—the view that our way of being contributes to what and how something is experienced—and preserving a type of realism whereby what is encountered shapes the categories of experience. In following this path, I argue that Heidegger’s reconception of the a priori both follows Husserl in its recognition of the fundamental responsiveness of the categories to the concrete existences in which they are operative, and follows Kant in charac-
terizing the existences to which these categories are responsive in terms of temporality. The authority of the categories—how they permit us to immediately encounter things other than the self—will therefore lie in their ability to allow things encountered to be experienced in their particular temporal mode of existing. On this basis, I show that Heideggerian being-with must allow one self to directly encounter another because it is a category responsive to the other in her temporal particularity.

Chapter 5: “The Temporality of Care”

This chapter explains the structure of the responsive, temporally particular intersubjective encounter. According to Heidegger, understanding our way of being in the world demands that we recognize the unique temporality on which it is based. This temporalizing existing is characterized by an ecstatic relationality to otherness which accounts for the fact that (1) time has a duration relating the present to past and future, (2) Dasein’s temporalizing can be indexically tied to worldly events and meanings, and (3) time’s relational structure involves the direct encounter of one temporalizing self with another. In this chapter I demonstrate how the mutual accommodation that occurs in this shared temporal presence constitutes the public measures and meanings of the world. In doing so, I provide an original interpretation of Heidegger’s account of Dasein’s temporality—emphasizing the role that others must play on the most basic levels of Dasein’s being-in-the-world. Because these encounters occur on a level prior to anonymous public categories and involve the direct acknowledgment of the other in the particularity of her temporalizing care, they cannot be understood as simple subsumptions of the other’s particularity to a preexisting general category. This reading thereby undermines Sartre’s claim that Heidegger’s position does not allow for such immediate, particular encounters.

Chapter 6: “Fürsorge: Acknowledging the Other Dasein”

On the basis of the analysis in chapter 5, chapter 6 turns to an elaboration of this temporal recognition of the other, articulating how all modes of human social encounter fall within a continuum characterized by this recognition—which Heidegger calls “solicitude” (Fürsorge). Though it is
possible to act in ways that subsequently contradict the immediacy of the acknowledgment that occurs when I recognize others as persons, I show in this chapter that we cannot but first recognize them as such. I compare Heidegger’s position in this regard to Kant’s person/thing distinction and examine the manner in which this type of acknowledgment can be considered a type of respect. This chapter concludes with an analysis of discourse and other modes of being-with in which this minimal acknowledgment of the other’s personhood discloses itself in an everyday way. I demonstrate that Heidegger’s account of discourse is irreducible to language or to understanding, but instead explains the shared orientation to the world that is the essence of communication. In doing so, I show how Heideggerian discourse is the foundation for language—though irreducible to it—because it makes possible the co-appropriation of meaning necessary for the publicity of linguistic intelligibility.

Chapter 7: “Authenticity, Inauthenticity, and the Extremes of Fürsorge”

Having considered the everyday modes of interaction, the final chapter turns to the extremes of the solicitude continuum. I demonstrate first why even the most reifying and abusive ways of being toward others can still be deemed modes of temporalizing accommodation and recognition, despite their deficient character. In doing so, it will be necessary to examine why Heidegger dubs such modes of being-with inauthentic. The answer lies in their tendency to treat the others in terms of temporal categories appropriate to things, thereby covering over the role that these others play as temporalizing co-constituors of the shared space of world time. The opposite pole of the social continuum designates those attitudes and behaviors in which recognition of the other in all his temporalizing complexity is taken as one’s guiding principle. Because such a mode of being toward the other demands an explicit awareness of this temporalizing way of being—an awareness resistant, therefore, to the inauthentic tendency to interpret persons using temporal categories appropriate for things—Heidegger characterizes such relationships as authentic. This chapter considers objections to the view that relationships between persons can be genuinely understood as authentic in Heidegger’s view, considering the tendency to interpret Heideggerian authenticity as a form of solipsism. The discussion will conclude by examining some of the moral implications of this type of relationship, focusing particularly on the call of conscience—the way in which authen-
ticity manifests itself qua discourse—and the manner in which another person can thereby summon me to a greater fullness and responsibility in being.

Notes on Method

Contemporary Heidegger scholarship is a field dominated by a number of mutually exclusive interpretative tendencies. This book endorses a primarily philosophical rather than historical treatment of Heidegger’s work. Unlike many Heidegger scholars, I take his contributions to be another moment in the history of philosophy and not such a radical break with it that one must henceforth speak only in Heidegger’s idiom. As a result, this book reads Heidegger as a transcendental phenomenologist deeply indebted to the innovations of Edmund Husserl. Though Heidegger’s contributions to enriching phenomenology were extraordinary—providing, above all, an existential grounding for Husserl’s analyses of meaning—these contributions cannot be fully understood or appreciated without recognizing the manner in which they were a development of, and not a simple break with, Husserl’s work. Understood as such, this discussion presents Heidegger as a phenomenologist concerned with the first-person experience of meaning—despite the fact that his project was aimed at transforming the way in which the first-person is to be understood. Similarly, I read Heidegger as a transcendental philosopher insofar as he was (a) concerned with the philosophical articulation of the conditions for the possibility of such first-person meaning, and (b) committed to a rigorous understanding of the norms that must govern such a philosophical endeavor.

This is not an uncontroversial stance. Heidegger’s critique of the tradition and reformulation of the notion of subjectivity have prompted some readers to view Heidegger’s project not as a development of but as a fundamental break with the philosophical tradition and its struggle to analyze the nature of the self. On this interpretation, Heidegger’s notion of Dasein is taken to be radically other than what philosophers historically (or presently) designate by concepts such as “subjectivity,” “subject,” or “self.” Dasein has nothing to do with these concepts because it is a notion differing so fundamentally that we cannot speak as if these terms all designate roughly the same thing.

In contrast to such interpretive tendencies, I take Heidegger’s transformation of these notions as an effort to more accurately characterize what these terms are all attempting to designate. Dasein is the “sub-
ject” or the “self” insofar as each of these terms is attempting to pick out the I who exists, who cares about its own existence, and who is capable of philosophical inquiry into the nature of that existence. Though it is true that the later Heidegger was interested primarily in the responsivity of a self who simply lets the “event of Being” be, we cannot interpret this shift to mean that Heidegger did away with subjectivity. Rather, he asks his readers to think of the subject in terms other than the willful autonomy championed by modernity. Thus he continued to speak of the responsivity of the thinking self until the end of his life. For Heidegger, there is no philosophy or “thinking” without the self. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine what that would even mean.

No doubt there will be many who argue with this reading. It is not my purpose in this text to convince them of its wisdom, however, and as a result those who are not amenable to this view may find much to quibble with in the following pages. One such quibble might focus on my choice to continue to use words like “subjectivity” and “intersubjectivity” interchangeably with Dasein and Mitsein—despite Heidegger’s attempts to overcome the conceptual baggage of the former terms through his introduction of the latter. My purpose in this book is to explain and examine these terminological transformations, however; a project that requires me to analyze the parameters of the general condition or mode of being that the term “Dasein” is meant to designate, rather than simply taking the meaning of this term to be both straightforwardly obvious and yet entirely unrelated to conceptual analogues such as “subjectivity.” As Heidegger himself said, his interest is in articulating the “subjectivity of the subject” (BT 24/21). By reading the concept of Dasein as the true definition of subjectivity, so to speak, it becomes possible to recognize both the problems afflicting the Cartesian position and the manner in which Heidegger succeeds in solving them. If “Dasein” in no way designates the same self picked out by terms like “subject” then he is not transforming the tradition—he is simply changing the subject (no pun intended). Since the work of escaping the negative aspects of the modern self mostly occurs in Heidegger’s pre-1930 works—and since it is there, I believe, that he stays most true to the existential developments of transcendental phenomenology that I take to be his greatest achievement—this book’s focus lies there. Though I will reference some of his late works, Being and Time—along with the texts immediately before and after it—will be of primary interest.