

Individuals in the Social Lifeworld:

A Social Philosophy of Heidegger's Dasein

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Introduction

How people interact with their fellow human beings is a significant philosophical question for philosophies of epistemology, mind, language, ethics, and politics. In this book, I will use several key concepts in Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* to craft a theory of human intersubjective relations and individuals' social identity. Heidegger's concepts and terminology are idiosyncratic and at times opaque and off-putting, but I argue that some of them can be understood as connecting with areas of philosophy not frequently associated with Heidegger—specifically, ethical, social, and political philosophy.

“Dasein” is Heidegger's term for the distinct entity that humans are. Heidegger portrays Dasein as an inherently social being that responds to its environment in a pre-theoretical manner. Because Dasein is present in a social world—Being-in-the-world—Dasein is a way of life that is shared among members of a community. This conception is helpful in acknowledging that we live in our interrelations with others, and, further, understanding who one is as an individual is a relation of being with others. Embedded in a shared public world, individuals are constituted by other people, including much of the contents of their own minds.

But being formed by the world is only half of the story of Dasein. Heidegger says that care (*Sorge*) is the Being of Dasein. People are not only acted on by the world, but they are also involved in it, acting in the world on the basis of their concerns (*Besorgen*). The social world and the individual person are codetermined, meaning that individuals are influenced by the people around them and that individuals influence the people around them. Social groups are composed of their individual members. The social world is a public, shared world to which individual people contribute.

We need to incorporate both sides of this dynamic—the social world affecting the person and the person affecting the social world—into our view of intersubjective relations. We then can apply this view to questions of epistemology, mind, language, ethics, and politics. Heidegger's concept of Dasein is strong on the point that people are affected by the social world but is

problematically vague on the experiences of individual people and vaguer still on how individuals respond to and affect their world. Incorporating subjective experience into Heidegger's conception of Dasein's Being-in-the-world will give us a more encompassing picture of how people interact and contribute to the workings of society.

If we understand Dasein as Being-there, then how do we understand the different, individual experiences of Being-in-the-world? We can craft from Heidegger's Being and Time an account of how Dasein exists and acts in the midst of social contexts if we take a different direction than Heidegger did. The elements are present in the early sections of Being and Time, but Heidegger decides to develop other ideas both later in Being and Time and later in his career.

The crux of my conception combines two of Heidegger's insights—that Dasein's knowing is a mode of Being and that Dasein brings entities close into significance and places them into regions. The insight into Dasein discussed in this book is that bringing close into significance extends to Dasein's knowing, which reveals the concept of Being-sphere—the mode of Being that differentiates each individual Dasein in its involvements and possibilities in its everyday Being-in-the-world. I have no eagerness for neologisms, but “Being-sphere” is my term for a new combination of several of Heidegger's points that will yield a clearer and deeper view of Dasein. This book describes the ontological structure of Being-sphere through a phenomenological analysis of how Dasein appropriates experiences and social norms into its differentiated and individuated experience of the world. Being-sphere enables a fuller explanation than Heidegger supplied of how individual Dasein responds in the face of das Man and other Dasein and how Dasein is individuated in the social lifeworld, thereby providing a foundation for answering questions of interpersonal relations and social and political theory.