

Otherwise than Being-with: Levinas on Heidegger and Community

Chantal Bax¹ 

Published online: 12 June 2017

© The Author(s) 2017. This article is an open access publication

Abstract In this article I argue that Levinas can be read as a critic, not just of Heideggerian being, but also of being-with. After pointing out that the publication of the *Black Notebooks* only makes this criticism more interesting to revisit, I first of all discuss passages from both earlier and later writings in which Levinas explicitly takes issue with Heidegger’s claim that there is no self outside of a specific socio-historical community. I then explain how these criticisms are reflected in Levinas’s own account, arguing that Levinasian subjectivity and alterity are precisely defined by their *not* belonging to a larger unity; to the extent that they partake in a multi-personal collectivity, this does not take the form of a traditional community. In the final section, I look into a different and seemingly opposing argument Levinas makes against Heidegger: on the basis of the latter’s reflections on death, he argues that *Dasein* is anti-social rather than overly immersed in the socio-historical. Arguing that this rests on a misreading of *Being and Time*, I use this opportunity to raise questions about Levinas’s interpretation of Heidegger and his “otherwise than being-with” more generally, for Levinas’s account runs into several problems as well. Yet as I will conclude, this in fact offers a valuable insight, not just for the present-day reception of Heidegger, but also for thinking community today. It indicates that a radical break with human situatedness does not automatically fare better than a firmly enrooted account of (co)existence.

Keywords Levinas · Heidegger · Being-with · Community · Alterity · Singularity

✉ Chantal Bax
c.bax@ftr.ru.nl

¹ Center for Contemporary European Philosophy, Radboud University Nijmegen, Postbus 9103, 6500 HD Nijmegen, The Netherlands

Introduction

The recent publication of Heidegger's *Black Notebooks* have reignited the debate about the relationship between his philosophy and politics. Containing several anti-Semitic passages, the notebooks from the 1930s and 1940s have once again confronted readers with the question to what extent Heidegger's philosophy is inherently compromised and what this means for the continued relevance of Heideggerian thought. As important as it accordingly is to have a renewed look at Heidegger's own writings, it is also an interesting time to revisit the critics who, long before the publication of the *Black Notebooks*, identified fundamental problems in the Heideggerian system and dedicated much of their own work to the prevention of these. In what follows, I will therefore turn to the thinker who was perhaps most unrelenting in his criticism of Heidegger and already in 1947 spoke of "a profound need to leave the climate of that philosophy" (1947/1978: 4): Emmanuel Levinas.

Best known as the philosopher of radical alterity, Levinas famously argues that Heidegger wrongly privileges ontology over ethics and offers a suffocating account of being without room for what is otherwise. My focus in this article will however be on Levinas's response to Heidegger's notion, not of being, but of being-with. His criticism of Heidegger, or so I will argue, can also be explained in terms of his resistance to the latter's seeing *Dasein* first and foremost as a member of a particular socio-historical community. This not only offers a new perspective on Levinas's well known—and by now perhaps even well worn—arguments against Heidegger; it also addresses what can be said to be a key notion behind the latter's problematic politics.

Heidegger (in itself harmlessly enough) argues against the idea of a solitary subject for whom the existence of other human beings is essentially irrelevant. In the terms of *Being and Time*, *Dasein* is always already *Mitsein*: from the outset, the human being finds itself among others in an inherently social world. This account however becomes increasingly problematic as Heidegger claims that *Mitsein* comes in two forms. Our everyday being-with should be called inauthentic, thoughtlessly conforming as we do to pre-given social norms without considering the larger meaning of our being-together. *Mitsein* only becomes authentic, as Heidegger notoriously contends in § 74 of *Being and Time*, when the human beings who find themselves in the same socio-historical situation resolutely take up their specific heritage and actively give shape to their proper place in history. It is, in other words, in the form of a self-assured *Volk* that being-with is at its most *eigentlich* (Critchley 2014: 117f.; Duff 2015: 174–184).¹

While the term *Volk* is only used a couple of times in *Being and Time*, it becomes an increasingly important notion for Heidegger, accordingly making numerous appearances in all of the *Black Notebooks* (Philips 2005; Radloff 2007; Escudero 2015: 29–34; Malpas 2016: 12). And while Heidegger does not defend a biological

¹ Duff (2015: 108–110) also mentions the connection between inauthenticity and uprootedness, which plays a crucial role in the *Notebooks*.

concept of *Volk*-hood along National Socialist lines (Radloff 2007: 126–133²; Trawny 2014: 59–69; Escudero 2015: 36–40; Malpas 2016: 5f.), his account nonetheless brings him to depreciatingly speak of the Jews as a people without roots and history (1938–1939/2014: 96f.; 1939–1941/2014: 243): as a people strictly speaking not worthy of that name because their diasporic existence personifies all that is wrong with the modern age.

For under the reign of technology, the world is made into a place without borders and without distinctions, hence without a proper people able to hear that being is beckoning for a new beginning. Even if Heidegger does not uniquely hold the *Weltjudentum* responsible for this situation, it is clear that he wants to defend the local and particular in the face of what we would today call cosmopolitanism or globalization.³ So if there is no such thing as a solitary subject for Heidegger, there is no such thing as a *Mitsein*, or at least an authentic *Mitsein*, that encompasses the whole of humanity either. It always concerns a specific socio-historical community that has to be distinguished from other such communities, and apparently also has to be defended against them when its distinctive destiny is under threat (Heidegger 1938–1939/2014: 191f.; 1939–1941/2014: 44–46, 52f., 133, 146f.; Nancy 2015: 18f., 27, 38f., 45, 74).

It is, to return to the main focus of my article, this very embedded or enrooted perspective on human (co)existence that much of Levinas's work is devoted to overcoming. In what follows, I will argue that Levinas can be read as trying to disembed or uproot the subject again.⁴ That is to say, he wholeheartedly agrees with Heidegger's critique of relationless subjectivity, but maintains that this is not remedied by inserting the self in a community of like-minded subjects. If the Levinasian self is heteronomous rather than autonomous, this is because of its relation to the absolutely other rather than because of its belonging to a larger socio-historical unity; the radical alterity of the Levinasian other is likewise due to its coming from outside of every communal context. Levinas thus provides a clear alternative to the idea of a firmly enrooted subject, the treacherous nature of which has only been reinforced by Heidegger's ruminations in the *Black Notebooks*—as well as, it can be added, by the contemporary resurgence of thinking in terms of “us” versus “them”.

In what follows, I will first of all discuss some of the passages in which Levinas explicitly takes issue with Heidegger's social account of human existence. From his earliest to his latest writings, Levinas frequently contrasts his philosophy, not only with the Heideggerian account of being, but also with the idea that there is no self outside of a specific socio-historical community. In the third part of this article, I will show how these criticisms are reflected in Levinas's main works. I will explain that Levinasian subjectivity and alterity are precisely defined by their *not* belonging

² Writing in 2007, however, Radloff can still claim that “Heidegger, by all evidence, is philosophically opposed to anti-Semitism” (2007: 171).

³ Heidegger's terms for these phenomena would be *Machenschaft* and *Planetarismus*: see, e.g., Heidegger (1939–1941/2014: 52f., 125, 260f., 264–266) (note the resemblance with the analysis of *das Man*); see also Malpas (2016: 15f.).

⁴ Indeed, in, e.g., “Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us,” Levinas also presents the Jews as a fundamentally rootless people, but precisely celebrates Judaism's resulting ability to free mankind from the spells of “family, tribe and nation” (1961/1990: 234; see also Trawny 2015: 14f.). I will come back to this in the final section.

to a larger unity; to the extent that they are part of a multi-personal collectivity, this does not take the form of a traditional community.

In the final section, I will look at another and seemingly opposing argument that Levinas makes against Heideggerian *Mitsein*, for he also ascribes Heidegger the claim that an authentic relation to finitude undoes all ties to other people, which would make *Dasein* anti-social rather than overly immersed in the socio-historical. Arguing that this rests on a misreading of *Being and Time*, I will use this opportunity to raise questions about Levinas's interpretation of Heidegger and about his alternative explanation of coexistence. For not unlike Levinas, Heidegger explicitly opposes impersonal forms of the social bond, so even if one disagrees with his account of authentic *Mitsein*, why reject the notion of being-with *tout court*? Indeed, I will point out that Levinas's perspective runs into several problems as well, indicating that a radical break with human situatedness does not automatically fare better than a firmly enrooted account of (co-)existence. Yet as I will conclude, this in fact offers a valuable lesson, not just for the present-day reception of Heidegger, but also for thinking about community and communities today.

Levinas as a Critic of Being-with

Initially one of Heidegger's most devoted followers, Levinas became very critical of Heideggerian philosophy, and the latter's flirtations with Nazism seem to have played a pivotal role in this development (Peperzak 1993: 4; Moyn 1998: 26–29). Unsurprisingly, therefore, Levinas not only distances himself from Heidegger's preoccupation with being, but also from the latter's notion of being-with. This can already be seen from the 1934 essay "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism," in which Heidegger is not mentioned explicitly but during the writing of which he was surely on Levinas's mind, as a later prefatory note to the article makes clear.⁵

In the Hitlerism essay, Levinas argues that National Socialism appeals to the "German soul" (1934/1990: 64) because it offers an antidote to an idea that has long dominated Western thought: from Christianity up until liberalism, man has been presented as possessing an unconditional freedom, "infinite with regard to any attachment and through which no attachment is ultimately definitive" (1934/1990: 65). Hitlerism, by contrast, promises the "sincerity and authenticity" (1934/1990: 70) that is felt to have disappeared as a result of this driving of a wedge between man and his concrete worldly existence. And it achieves this, Levinas explains, because Nazism places the body firmly in the center of its anthropology (Critchley 2015: 30–38). Rather than constituting an arbitrary relation with materiality, after all, our corporeality forms "an adherence that *one does not escape*" (Levinas 1934/1990: 68).

Yet if Hitlerism's appeal can be explained in terms of its embodied account of human existence, this does not concern the body in a narrow sense of the word, as Levinas's analysis makes clear. In the philosophy of Hitlerism, he points out, the

⁵ The note is included in the 1990 edition printed in *Critical Inquiry*.

body functions as a symbol for man's bonds or chains more generally: it "serves as an enigmatic vehicle" for "[t]he mysterious urgings of the blood, the appeals of heredity and the past" (1934/1990: 69). Through the body, in other words, and in contrast to the free-floating subject of modern Western thought, Hitlerism reconnects the human being to history and community.⁶ It strives for a "society based on consanguinity" (Levinas 1934/1990: 69) as a result of its prioritizing close-knit situatedness over uninhibited freedom.

So while the "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism" do not mention Heidegger explicitly, they are rife with Heideggerian themes, from authenticity and the critique of unencumbered subjectivity to being-in-the-world and being-with. By criticizing Nazism's insistence on the inescapable ties between the subject and its fellow men, Levinas simultaneously casts suspicion on Heidegger's notion that *Dasein* is always already *Mitsein*. As Levinas even claims in the 1990 preface, "the possibility of elemental evil [...] is inscribed within the ontology of [...] a being, to use the Heideggerian expression, 'dem es in seinem Sein um dieses Sein selbst geht'" (1934/1990: 63).⁷ It is the tragic logic, to put it in terms of *Mitsein*, of a being only concerned with itself and its kin, at the expense of the being of others.

This unforgiving verdict reflects the fact that as Levinas develops his own, post-Heideggerian philosophy after the 1930s, his criticism of Heidegger becomes more pronounced. In the 1946/47 lectures published as *Time and the Other*, for instance, Levinas unambiguously presents his ideas as an alternative to Heidegger's claim that there is no subject outside its socio-historical context.

As Levinas explains in the preface, he will offer a rethinking of time that will also require a rethinking of intersubjectivity, because it requires a self outside of community yet in relation with a radically other. "Thus from the start," Levinas underscores, "I repudiate the Heideggerian conception that views solitude in the midst of a prior relationship with the other" (1947/1987: 40): that claims that the subject can only be alone because it first and foremost finds itself immersed in a larger social world. Indeed, Levinas continues, although Heidegger makes the relation with the other into a fundamental aspect of human life, he does not discuss intersubjectivity in much detail and offers a very unsatisfactory account of it to the extent that he does. "[T]he other in Heidegger appears in the essential situation of *Miteinandersein*, reciprocally being with one another" (1947/1987: 40), Levinas states, whereas he will try to show "that it is not the preposition *mit* that should describe the original relationship with the other" (1947/1987: 41).

⁶ Unlike Guenther (2012), Critchley (2015) does not bring out this social aspect of Levinas's analysis, focusing on the bounded nature of Levinasian subjectivity in a primarily (or more narrowly) bodily sense of the word. This allows Critchley to claim that, in Levinas's view, "National Socialism is right [...] in its critique of disembodied liberalism" because "it sees the elemental enrootedness of the human being" (2015: 34f.). I precisely read Levinas as wanting to break with the very idea of a root. To the extent that the body plays an important role in Levinas's anthropology, this concerns a vulnerability that opens the self up to the other because it shatters categories of rootedness and belonging.

⁷ Levinas here suggests that *Dasein*, rather than being subordinate to the socio-historical, is ultimately a solitary and egoistic being. This claim, which runs contrary to the anti-being-with argument I am mainly concerned with, appears in several places in Levinas's oeuvre; I will address it in the final section of this article.

Towards the end of *Time and the Other*, Levinas explains in more detail why he takes issue with this perspective on human sociality. It stands in a long tradition that conceives of the social relation on the model of fusion. From Plato onward, sociality has been thought in terms of a larger “we” circled around a communal good. “*Miteinandersein*, too,” Levinas claims, “is a collectivity around something common” (1947/1987: 93). On such an account, self and other do not face each other but stand shoulder to shoulder looking toward some greater something, which causes them to lose sight of their neighbor (Taminioux 1997: 48f.). Paradoxically, therefore, the “with” fails to establish a proper relation with the other as other. An entirely new perspective on the social is accordingly required, Levinas maintains: “Against this collectivity of the side-by-side, I have tried to oppose the ‘I-you’ collectivity”: “a collectivity that is not a communion [but] the face-to-face without intermediary” (1947/1987: 93).

In other words, a key notion of Levinas’s mature philosophy—the face-to-face relation with the other—can be understood in terms of its difference from and opposition to Heideggerian being-with. I will leave discussion of Levinas’s main works for the next section, but let me review some other texts with similar publications dates here. To start with the short essay “Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us,” which was published in the same year as *Totality and Infinity* and in which Levinas in no uncertain terms draws a connection between violence and *Mitsein* again.

Written on the occasion of the first manned journey into space, Levinas uses the opportunity to dismiss Heidegger’s negative assessment of technology. “Heidegger and the Heideggerians” (1961/1990: 231), Levinas points out, are worried that technological advances will cause man to lose touch with the world in which he is supposed to be so firmly enrooted; on their view, “[m]an inhabits the world more radically than the plant, which merely takes nourishment from it” (1961/1990: 232) and not its very *raison d’être*. Gagarin has however shown us that it is perfectly possible for someone to exist beyond the world and outside any historico-geographical situation. Even if only “[f]or one hour,” as Levinas puts it, “man existed beyond any horizon” in the very “geometrical space” (1961/1990: 233) that Heidegger argued to be contrary or at least secondary to proper being-in-the-world.

This means that Gagarin offers a counterexample to the claim that human beings are always already socially and locally situated and owe their very identity to this (Caygill 2005: 91f.). While his space flight took place within a very specific political context—indeed, if the Cold War can be understood as a battle between individualism and collectivism, Gagarin’s flight was perceived as a victory for the latter side—Levinas focuses on the fact that technology enabled the cosmonaut to precisely leave the world with all its socio-political divisions behind. Technological developments accordingly do not form a threat to humanity, Levinas maintains. It is rather Heideggerian rootedness that forms “the source of all cruelty towards men” because it results in “the very splitting of humanity into natives and strangers” (Levinas 1961/1990: 232): in a distinction between those who do and those who do not belong to a particular place or community and thus in a pitting of different groups of people against each other. By “[wrenching] us out of” this “Heideggerian world” (Levinas 1961/1990: 232), modern technology thus offers an immense opportunity. It allows us “to perceive men outside the situation in which they are

placed, and let the human face shine in all its nudity” (Levinas 1961/1990: 233), in Levinas’s words.

In 1972, so two years before the publication of *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas expresses similar ideas in an article titled “Meaning and Sense”. That is to say, Levinas here criticizes the philosophies of language developed by thinkers like Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty—according to which there is meaning only against an entire socio-cultural horizon—for implying that all cultures are equal and express their own, equally valid versions of truth and being. Yet rather than wanting to claim that some cultures are better than others (though a number of Levinas’s formulations come close to doing so⁸) he first and foremost wants to argue that the very notion of culture should be left behind. If there “exists a privileged culture,” Levinas maintains, it is one that “goes beyond cultures” (1972/1987: 84).

For while one might think that unreservedly celebrating the multiplicity of cultures is the only moral thing to do, one forgets that “incomprehension, war, and conquest [...] derive just as naturally from” (Levinas 1972/1987: 88) the juxtaposition of different cultures. One forgets that to the extent that, say, a Frenchman decides to study Chinese rather than “declaring it to be barbarian” (Levinas 1972/1987: 88), this is made possible by a particular orientation that is not tied to one specific culture but operates on the level of humanity as such. And one moreover forgets that declaring all cultures equal is to deprive oneself of the means to pass judgment on a particular society, even in the face of the most horrendous atrocities committed by it: “Morality does not belong to culture: it enables one to judge it” (Levinas 1972/1987: 100).

According to Levinas, therefore, peace and justice require a break with the philosophies of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. The socio-cultural is not the overarching horizon against which all of human life takes place. Indeed, instead of emerging from a web of cultural references, the other shatters any background of familiarity: “The cultural meaning [...] which, according to the phenomenological expression, reveals the horizons of this world [...] is disturbed and jostled by another presence that is abstract” (Levinas 1972/1987: 95) or “without any cultural ornament” (Levinas 1972/1987: 96). In contrast to Heidegger’s *Mitdasein*, Levinas’s *Autrui* remains uncontaminated by the socio-historical. He exists “‘prior to’ history and culture” (Levinas 1972/1987: 101; Bernasconi 2005: 8), as “Meaning and Sense” explicitly states.

Throughout his writings, then, Levinas protests the Heideggerian notion of being-with and tries to think the relation between self and other otherwise. This is provocatively summarized in a remark he made in a 1983 interview: “In Heidegger [...] *Mit* is always being next to... It is not in the first instance the face, it is *zusammensein*, perhaps *zusammen-marschieren*” (1983/1998: 116).

Having seen to what extent Levinas is motivated by his allergy to being-with, let me explain in more detail how this is reflected in Levinas’s alternative account of human sociality. In the next section, I will discuss the parts of *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being* in which this most clearly comes to the fore, though I will focus mainly on the former work.

⁸ I will discuss this in more detail in the final section.

Subjectivity, Alterity and Sociality Beyond Community

Without being reducible to a commentary on *Being and Time*, *Totality and Infinity* contests, among other things, the primacy Heidegger accords to ontology and his explanation of truth as disclosure. In line with the texts I already examined, moreover, Levinas's first main work challenges Heidegger's account of sociality in terms of being-with (Peperzak 1993: 144, 166, 170, 208).⁹ According to Heidegger, Levinas observes, intersubjectivity concerns "a *we* prior to the I and the other" (1961/1969: 68).¹⁰ This means that while he can be praised for showing that the social relation is not a purely cognitive matter, Heidegger ultimately fares no better than the rest of Western thought. Like his predecessors, he prefers the whole over its parts and larger processes over concrete particularity, thus rendering him unable to properly think both self, other and the relation between them—the main topics of *Totality and Infinity*.

In most of Western philosophy, Levinas explains in the preface, individual beings are seen as mere tokens of larger types and as dispensable vehicles for weightier historical processes: "The meaning of individuals [...] is derived from the totality," as he puts it, and "[t]he unicity of each present is incessantly sacrificed to a future appealed to to bring forth its objective meaning" (1961/1969: 22). This not only does away with individuality but also undermines the possibility of human sociality. For as Levinas argues in the first full section of the book, there can be no relations without independently existing beings that are precisely *not* swallowed up by community or history (Peperzak 1993: 134–137). In order for true intersubjectivity to be possible, self and other should be thought of as separated beings, independent of their socio-historical surroundings as well as of each other.

Totality and Infinity thus radically rethinks human sociality—or being-with—in no less than two ways. Arguing for "the possibility of a *signification without a context*" (Levinas 1961/1969: 23), Levinas proposes to conceive of subjectivity and alterity as existing outside of larger socio-historical horizons. Showing that self and other enter into a *rapport* "in which the terms *absolve* themselves from the relation" (Levinas 1961/1969: 64), or even form "a relation without relation" (Levinas 1961/1969: 80), moreover, he wants to explain that the bonds that do exist between human beings can never take the form of an all-embracing totality.

The second section of *Totality and Infinity* works this out in more detail for the selfhood-side of the social relation, for if the latter requires two independently existing *relata*, the first step towards rethinking sociality is to give a robust explanation of subjectivity. One striking feature of Levinas's account is that he starts by explaining the self purely in terms of its material surroundings, not in terms

⁹ In Peperzak (2000) he nonetheless argues that the face to face is simultaneous with the belonging to a larger community (2000: 60), which I do not take to be in line with Levinas's resistance to being-with.

¹⁰ See also, e.g., Levinas (1961/1969: 46, 55, 80). Like in "Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us," Levinas observes that "Heidegger, with the whole of Western history, takes the relation with the Other as enacted in the destiny of sedentary peoples" (1961/1969: 46); like in *Time and the Other*, he underscores that "the 'face to face' position is not a modification of the 'along side of....'" (1961/1969: 80); Levinas's insisting on "the possibility of an *existent* being set up and having its own destiny to itself" (1961/1969: 55) can even be said to invoke *Being and Time*'s infamous § 74.

of its social *milieu* (Fagenblat 2002: 584, 589; Dastur 2014: 135f.).¹¹ The self initially has no other company than the “wind, earth, sea, sky, air” (Levinas 1961/1969: 130); than what Levinas calls “the elemental” (1961/1969: 131). Taking issue with Heidegger’s instrumental account of the world in terms of ready-to-hand (Peperzak 1993: 149f., 155f.), Levinas describes living among the elements as a matter of purposeless “enjoyment” (1961/1969: 110). That is to say, Levinas continues, enjoyment does come with some concerns. While I may be able to bask in the sun today, the elements do no form a stable order and I can therefore never be sure what tomorrow will bring. It is for this reason that the self has to make its worldly “autochthony” (Levinas 1961/1969: 164) concrete by building an actual home. According to Levinas, “[m]an abides in the world as having come to it from a private domain [...] to which at each moment he can retire” (1961/1969: 152).

In the first half of *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas thus gives an explicitly egoistic account of selfhood, culminating in the subject retreating in its dwelling. To be sure, Levinas argues that the self encounters other human beings in its home, but these belong to the self’s own family and household.¹² Concerning “not the *you* of the face” but “the *thou* of familiarity” (Levinas 1961/1969:155), this does not yet amount to a real confrontation with alterity. At the same time, however, inhabitation precisely makes such a confrontation possible. For as soon as the ego has gathered in his home, a stranger may knock on his door to “contest” (Levinas 1961/1969: 171) his possessions. On what ground, after all, are this place and these amenities mine rather than another’s? Ultimately, Levinas contends, I cannot justify my occupying this particular refuge—except by the fact that it enables me to serve those in more dire need. The seemingly self-serving dwelling turns out to stand in the service of alterity, not of me and my kin. As Levinas accordingly declares: “The chosen home is the very opposite of a root” (1961/1969: 172).

Just like the other transforms the meaning of the home, moreover, he lets the ego “[enter] into a new dimension” (1961/1969: 171). Turning arbitrary inhabitation into something good, he “finds [...] and justifies” (Levinas 1961/1969: 197) the life of the subject. What is more, Levinas maintains that assuming care for the deprived stranger makes me into the unique person I am. It constitutes an obligation that I cannot delegate to anyone else and that thus renders me irreplaceable (Dastur 2014: 145; Drabinski 2001: 118). Or in Levinas’s own words, being a self “means to possess a privileged place with regard to responsibilities [...] from which no one can release me. To be unable to shirk: this is the I” (1961/1969: 245).

¹¹ Both Fagenblat and Dastur mainly focus on *Time and the Other*, but they also underscore that Levinas’s solitary account of worldly existence can be understood as a response to Heidegger’s *Mitsein*. Both however question whether Heidegger should not be given a little more credit – but neither of them refers to, e.g., his statements about the *Volk*.

¹² Levinas more precisely argues that “[t]he woman”—“whose presence is discreetly an absence”—“is the condition for recollection, the interiority of the Home, and inhabitation” (1961/1969: 155). In these passages, *Totality and Infinity*—not unlike *Time and the Other*—thus falls back on traditional stereotypes about the female other. This suggest, as I will argue in more detail in the final section, that not all human beings are equally free from history and community for Levinas. The last section will however not so much focus on his androcentrism; see Chanter (2001) for more elaborate discussions of Levinas from a feminist perspective.

Hence, the confrontation with a destitute other provides the uniqueness that Levinas takes to be so sorely missing from accounts such as Heidegger's, in which the self effectively disappears into larger socio-historical structures. Contrary to "[t]he judgment of history" that "is always pronounced in absentia" (Levinas 1961/1969: 242), the response to the other requires "singularities [...] precisely as interlocutors, irreplaceable beings, unique in their genus" (Levinas 1961/1969: 252). In Levinas's view, put differently, there can be no subjectivity or individuality as long as the subject is seen as part of a larger socio-historical unity. It is only in the responsibility for another person that I truly come into my own.

Something similar holds for that other pole of the social relation, namely, the other. As is the case with subjectivity, Levinas maintains that alterity is eradicated when the other is presented as a mere token of a larger type. The other has to be understood as other, so on his own terms and not those of anyone or anything else. "What we call the face is [an] exceptional presentation of self by self" (1961/1969: 202), Levinas accordingly explains. The other cannot be qualified or categorized but is "refractory to every [...] classification" (Levinas 1961/1969: 73). He is able to make an unforgettable impact on the self precisely because he defies any familiar label.

That Levinas describes the other as a stranger "coming from another shore" (1961/1969: 171) should therefore not be misunderstood: it does not mean that he differs from me in terms of ethnicity or nationality, say. A foreigner in this sense is not radically but only relatively different from me, for if I can describe him by saying that he has a different passport, I define him by comparing his country of origin to mine. However, Levinas points out, "The alterity of the Other does not depend on any quality that would distinguish him from me, for a distinction of this nature would precisely imply between us that community of genus which already nullifies alterity" (1961/1969: 174). Moreover, saying that the other has this or that nationality means seeing him primarily as a member of a particular people, which also does away with his otherness because it "[reduces] him to what is common to him and other [human] beings" (Levinas 1961/1969: 74). The Levinasian other does not belong to a segment of humanity different from mine; he does not belong to any group or community, and that is what truly makes him other (Visker 2003: 278f.; Bernasconi 2006: 246f., 251f.).¹³

Levinas's criticism of Heidegger's *Mitsein*, to come back to my main argument in this article, can thus be said to inform his alternative account of human (co)existence. Like the self, the other is not to be understood in terms of his role in a larger historical development or his part in a particular social structure. Both Levinasian subjectivity and Levinasian alterity are otherwise than being-with: the self because it is defined by its care for an absolute stranger rather than by its contribution to a people's destiny, the other because its vulnerability shatters all attempts to see him as part of an all-embracing collectivity.

¹³ In addition to Visker, though, I take the Levinasian self to not be rooted in a community either, and unlike Bernasconi, I do not think that it is only in *Otherwise than Being* that the self becomes uprooted or disembedded as well.

This however does not mean that Levinas only acknowledges one-on-one relations. If he takes the face-to-face to be a better starting point for understanding sociality than the Heideggerian shoulder-to-shoulder, he goes on to complicate the relation between the sole self and the singular other, making clear that it is not “forgetful of the universe” (Levinas 1961/1969: 213). For as Levinas points out: “The third party looks at me in the eyes of the Other” (1961/1969: 213).¹⁴ As soon as I face responsibility for the destitute stranger, I can see the reflection of countless other others that are in equal need of my dedication. So while the stranger is not part of a community, he is surrounded by other human beings likewise defined by their utter vulnerability. And as is the case with the initial other, I cannot be deaf to their calls either.

After offering accounts of self and other according to which they are absolutely singular, then, Levinas does place them within a larger interhuman setting. Even so, this does not amount to lateral being-with; it in a sense only amplifies the face-to-face relation. For if my responsibility to one specific other already confronts me with the problem that my ability to honor that never-ending obligation comes to an abrupt end with my passing, the third shows my responsibility to concern not just one concrete other, but humankind in its entirety and continuity: “The epiphany of the face qua face opens humanity” (Levinas 1961/1969: 213). This situation however starts to look at least somewhat less problematic when one takes the fact of human procreation into account, Levinas maintains. By reflecting on the deeper meaning of fecundity and fraternity,¹⁵ he tries to explain the subject’s relation to the others around and beyond him without falling back on traditional models of either subjectivity or sociality (Bergo 1999: 122–131).¹⁶

According to Levinas, first of all, fecundity transcends its purely biological origins. The self does not procreate for the survival of the species, or in order to duplicate itself; procreation rather serves to prolong its responsibility. This continuity-without-replication is provided by the subject’s offspring, for “the I is, in the child, an other” (Levinas 1961/1969: 267) and the child is conversely “me, but not myself” (1961/1969: 271), Levinas states. Instead of standing in the service of its selfish genes, therefore, fecundity allows the self to renew its ownmost but never-ending obligation to the rest of mankind. Even after its death, the Levinasian subject does not completely disappear into larger socio-historical structures but lives on as “historical without fate” (1961/1969: 278).

In addition or in line with thus preserving responsibility, procreation as Levinas understands it ensures a multiplicity beyond totality. Humans are not only fecund but also engendered beings, he points out, and this makes them simultaneously one

¹⁴ See, e.g., Peperzak (1993: 167–184) and Bernasconi (1999) for more elaborate discussions of the third.

¹⁵ The fact that Levinas discusses fecundity solely in masculine terms also raises the question whether *Totality and Infinity* takes the female self and other to be equally free from history and community (see my earlier note). See Derrida (1994/2005: 278f., 281), explaining that the masculine discourse of fraternity even doubly excludes women.

¹⁶ Bergo also discusses several tensions and problems in the Levinasian account of fecundity and fraternity. I am however more reluctant than Bergo to use “community” to describe the kind of plurality that fecundity and fraternity produce, because Levinas precisely wants to think human sociality beyond commonality.

of a kind and irrevocably bound to their fellow men. For “each son of the father is the unique son, the chosen son” (1961/1969: 279), as Levinas puts it. This is not altered by the fact that a person may have siblings, since “where can I be chosen, if not from [...] among equals?” (Levinas 1961/1969: 279). However, being elected does not make the child into a narcissist who expects others to heed its every beck and call. According to Levinas, election constitutes both “a privilege and a subordination, because it does not place [the child] among the other chosen ones, but rather in face of them, to serve them” (1961/1969: 279). If the child is chosen, in other words, it is chosen to tend to the others around him.

Hence, *Totality and Infinity* ends by offering an account of multipersonal relations that is, like the accounts of subjectivity and alterity given earlier in the book, radically different from Heideggerian *Mitsein*. Fecundity and fraternity absorb neither self nor other(s), and to the extent that it binds them, this is not by similarity or identity but by an excess of responsibility that leaves their separation intact. As Levinas accordingly underscores once more in his conclusions, he has broken away from the “impersonal neutrality” of philosophers like Heidegger, who proclaim “the anteriority of the We” *vis-à-vis* both subjectivity and alterity, or who profess the priority “of the situation with respect to the beings in situation” (Levinas 1961/1969: 298). Fecundity and fraternity, by contrast, do “not join together the fragments of a broken totality” (Levinas 1961/1969: 301) but result in an “untotaled multiplicity” (Levinas 1961/1969: 294); a true, irreducible plurality (Critchley 2015: 102–104).

Let me end this section by pointing out how the same desire to dispose of being-with is at work in Levinas’s second major work, *Otherwise than Being*. This is not altered by the fact that the focus of this book is on subjectivity rather than alterity. To the extent that the later Levinasian self is not the autonomous subject of traditional philosophy either, this is still not because of its membership in a particular socio-historical collectivity, but because it now—in a perhaps even sharper contrast or reversal—always already finds itself haunted by the other from within. *Otherwise than Being* accordingly defines the self by means of terms like exposure, maternity and obsession, but distinguishes this from a Heideggerian perspective as well, though Levinas now also refers to the later Heidegger more frequently.

He for instance alludes to the latter’s notion of language as the house of being, where the subject becomes even more subordinate to the supra-individual, mattering only to the extent that it resounds the call of being.¹⁷ Levinas makes clear that insofar as he also emphasizes the passivity of the self, this “is not the discovery [...] that ‘language speaks’” but is rather a matter of “the very deposing or desituating of the subject” (1974/1981: 47f.). *Otherwise than Being*, in other words, also contests Heidegger’s (increasingly firmly) situating the self in the social or onto-historical. The book’s rethinking of the self, as Levinas once again puts it with reference to the early Heidegger, concerns an “opening up which is not being-in-the-world” (1974/1981: 180) but “homelessness, non-world, non-inhabitation” (1974/1981: 179).

¹⁷ See Cohen, explaining that the *Letter on Humanism* makes man into the “mouthpiece of being” (2006: xx), and contrasting Levinas’s *Humanism of the Other* with what should accordingly be called Heidegger’s “anti-humanism” (2006: xxi).

As a result, and regardless of the differences that exist between *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*, the latter likewise argues for a self uncontaminated by history and community. Here, too, Levinas explains the subject as “unique and chosen” (1974/1981: 50); as a being whose singularity lies in the responsibility that “divests me without stop of all that can be common to me and another man, who would thus be capable of replacing me” (1974/1981: 59; Drabinski 2001: 208f.). Levinas also explicitly applies to the self what he earlier said about the other: one cannot ask “‘who is it?’ ‘from what land does he come?’” (1974/1981: 27) without downgrading the subject’s uniqueness. The self is rather “without a dwelling place, expelled from everywhere and from itself, one saying to the other [...] ‘here I am’” (Levinas 1974/1981: 146).

But this non-belonging still holds for the other as well (Carlson 1998: 59–63). The stranger is “the first one on the scene” (Levinas 1974/1981: 11), as *Otherwise than Being* puts it. He “[absolves] himself from [...] all resemblance” (Levinas 1974/1981: 86) and is “uprooted, without a country” (Levinas 1974/1981: 91). Rather than being characterized by his nationality or ethnicity, the other is defined by his exposure “to the cold and the heat of the seasons” (Levinas 1974/1981: 91), nothing more and nothing less.

Moreover, even though the “quasi-dialectical” (Bergo 1999: 27–32) notion of fecundity disappears from *Otherwise than Being*, it retains the concept of fraternity and also contains a long discussion on the third. And while Levinas now perhaps makes even clearer that the social relation of responsibility is never limited to one particular other—who is “from the first the brother of all the other men” (1974/1981: 158)—he remains adamant that this can never result in a traditional community. As in his earlier work, Levinas argues that fraternity does not unite men through similarity or identity (Carlson 1998: 42f., 64): “All the others that obsess me in the other do not affect me [...] by resemblance or common nature” (Levinas 1974/1981: 159) but by their utter vulnerability. So while justice requires us to make “a comparison between incomparables” (Levinas 1974/1981: 16), we should nonetheless refrain from “[weaving] between the incomparables [...] a unity, a community” (Levinas 1974/1981: 182). That would “[chain] us to one another like galley slaves,” making every subsequent “attempt to disjoin the conjunction” a mere “clashing of the chains” (Levinas 1974/1981: 182).

Just like *Totality and Infinity*, in short, *Otherwise than Being* wants to free self and other from Heideggerian being-with.

Revisiting Being-with

Having argued that Levinasian subjectivity, alterity and sociality can all be explained in terms of his aversion to *Mitsein*, I will now discuss another, seemingly opposing argument he makes against Heidegger. For in addition and in contrast to the claim that *Dasein* is overly immersed in the socio-historical, Levinas suggests that the Heideggerian self is essentially anti-social. He bases this on Heidegger’s claim that everyday *Dasein*, as I also explained in my introduction, is first and foremost inauthentic, precisely because it finds itself absorbed by the others around

it. Levinas however focuses on one particular element that I did not mention: Heidegger argues that a proper relation to one's ownmost death is crucial when it comes to turning *Uneigentlichkeit* around. Zooming in on this aspect of Heidegger's account, Levinas gives a highly individualistic interpretation of Heideggerian authenticity, and thereby of *Dasein* proper. This raises the question whether my anti-*Mitsein* reading of Levinas is ultimately correct—or what this internal contradiction reveals about Levinas's reading of Heidegger. Let me therefore have a closer look at his thoughts on *Dasein*, death and authenticity. Levinas comments on these issues at several points in his oeuvre but explicitly brings them together in “‘Dying For...’,” a paper he delivered in 1987.

In this paper, Levinas explains his difficult relationship with Heidegger—torn as he remains “between youthful admiration” and “the irreversible abomination” (1987/1998: 207) of Heidegger's affiliation with Nazism—as a conflict between an account of man according to which he only cares for himself, and an account according to which man is rather there for the other. That is to say, Levinas reminds his audience that Heidegger identifies being-with as one of *Dasein*'s existentials. If the Heideggerian self is always already concerned with its own being, therefore, it is always already concerned with the being of others as well, as the notion of *Fürsorge* confirms. Even so, Levinas points out, Heidegger is not exactly positive about being-with as it manifests itself on a daily basis. Several paragraphs of *Being and Time* underscore that *Dasein*, “precisely in this relation to others as *Miteinandersein*,” begins “to understand itself in terms of the impersonal anonymity of the ‘they’” (1987/1998: 213). While being an existential, *Mitsein* comes to stand in the way of *Dasein*'s ownmost life as it should be lived authentically; the anonymous *Man* tricks it into thinking that there is no need to carve out a truthful existence for itself. Heidegger concludes from this that the only way out of *Uneigentlichkeit* is to cut all ties with one's fellow men, Levinas claims.

For according to Heidegger, he continues, authenticity is only accomplished when *Dasein* equally resolutely and solitarily faces its own death. Realizing that its existence is finite and that it has to confront this fact entirely by itself, the Heideggerian self comes to see the superficiality of the values that everyday being-with imposes, and is accordingly able to free itself from this dictatorship. This means, Levinas argues, that Heidegger does not even consider the possibility of escaping *Uneigentlichkeit* through a social relation “different [...] than that of the *with* and *for*” (1987/1998: 213). On Levinas's reading, Heidegger immediately turns to (what he considers to be) the most solitary fact of human existence, and claims that authenticity can only be an achievement of *Dasein* all on its own: “An authenticity of the most proper being-able-to-be and a dissolution of all relations with the other!” (1987/1998: 214).

Levinas uses the final paragraphs of “‘Dying for...’” to suggest a different perspective on death, sociality and their interrelation. He quotes a biblical verse according to which death can only make people feel more connected, even across the divide between the living and the dead. Levinas furthermore points to the moments in which one's life suddenly appears less important than that of someone else, and “worry over the death of the other” accordingly “comes before care of the self” (1987/1998: 216). All of this undermines Heidegger's solitary account of

death as well as his individualistic solution to inauthenticity, Levinas maintains. In my caring for both the life and death of the other, he no longer “equals his occupation” or “vested interest” (Levinas 1987/1998: 216), meaning that social relations are more profound than Heidegger acknowledges. Rather than standing in the way of authenticity, moreover, sociality thus understood precisely guarantees my singularity. It is the very “priority of the other over the *I*,” Levinas argues, “by which the human *being-there* is chosen and unique” (1987/1998: 217) because it concerns my ownmost, inalienable responsibility.

In contrast to the main argument in the foregoing sections, then, “‘Dying for...’” suggests that Levinas wants to rescue rather than reject being-with. If Heidegger claims that authenticity is a solitary affair, Levinas maintains that a relation with alterity is required for the self to be its singular self. This particular portrayal of the difference between Heideggerian and Levinasian selfhood should however be said to result from a lax or partial reading of *Being and Time*, for Heidegger does not hold that there is only inauthentic *Mitsein* and that authenticity thus necessitates a severing of the social bond.¹⁸ I already touched upon this in my introduction, but “‘Dying for...’” makes a somewhat more detailed discussion of Heidegger on *Eigenlichkeit* necessary.

In § 26 of *Being and Time*—so before claiming in § 27 that everyday being-with is guided by *das Man*—Heidegger proposes to use the term *Fürsorge* or solicitude for our dealings with other beings of the human kind, as Levinas also mentions. Yet Heidegger goes on to explain that *Fürsorge* comes in several forms, one of which he explicitly describes as authentic. While someone can completely take over the other’s task of facing his finite existence, Heidegger states that “there is also the possibility of a kind of solicitude which does not [...] take away his ‘care’ but rather [gives] it back to him authentically as such for the first time” (1927/1962: 158f.).¹⁹ In addition to or as an extension of this proper attitude towards other persons, Heidegger argues that people can “become *authentically* bound together” when they “devote themselves to the same affair in common” (1927/1962: 159). He does not explain this genuine manifestation of being-with in further detail, but the second division of *Being and Time* makes clear, as I underscored in the introduction, that oblivious *Mitsein* becomes truly authentic in the form of a historically informed community.

Hence, even though Heidegger argues that in the “*non-relational*” anticipation of death, “one is liberated from one’s lostness” (1927/1962: 308) in the they, this is not the end goal of *Eigentlichkeit*. It serves to break the spell of inauthentic being-with, but only to subsequently enable a true relation, not just to finitude, but also to one’s fellow men. For as § 74 explains, our always already being immersed in a social world implies that a proper outlook on the temporality of existence is ultimately a collective undertaking. *Dasein*’s “historizing is a co-historizing and is determinative for it as *destiny*” (1927/1962: 436), Heidegger claims. “This is how we designate the historizing of the community, of a people,” and it is participation in this communal process that “goes to make up the full authentic historizing of

¹⁸ See also Drabinski and Nelson (2014: 1, 3f.). They point out that Levinas is not necessarily considered to be the most thorough reader of Heidegger. Though Levinas does not seem to be the only one who does not connect division I’s account of authenticity with division II’s analysis of (co-)historicality.

¹⁹ See, e.g., McMullin (2013: 141–23) for a more detailed discussion of solicitude.

Dasein” (Heidegger 1927/1962: 436). *Eigentlichkeit*, in other words, is not a matter of choosing a path regardless of one’s socio-historical situation; it is rather about truthfully making this very heritage one’s own.²⁰ And even if this is frustrated by the they’s obsession with trends and hypes—“[i]n awaiting the next new thing, it has already forgotten the old one” (1927/1962: 443)—what Heidegger calls authentic historicity precisely lies in having a more profound understanding of the present, past and future, not just of one’s own life but of one’s entire community.

This means that *Eigentlichkeit* is, *pace* “‘Dying for...’,” not a purely solipsistic affair in which others do not count.²¹ What is more, not unlike Levinas, Heidegger argues against impersonal manifestations of the social bond in which both self and other effectively disappear. *Being and Time* describes *das Man* as concerning “not this one, not that one” but the undifferentiated “neuter” (Heidegger 1927/1962: 164) and contends that our subjection to it leads to an evening out of all differences between individuals. This “dissolves one’s own *Dasein* completely” (1927/1962: 164), Heidegger explains, for “the particular *Dasein* has been dispersed into the ‘they’” (1927/1962:167). The same moreover holds for other persons: in the public sphere of *das Man*, “every Other is like the next” (Heidegger 1927/1962: 164) and is not understood on his own terms but rather “in terms of what ‘they’ have heard about him” (Heidegger 1927/1962: 219).

Levinas’s selective reading of *Being and Time* thus not only misrepresents Heideggerian authenticity, it also obscures what is in fact—and surprising as this may sound—a concern they both share. Even though their motivations are not necessarily the same,²² Levinas and Heidegger can be said to agree on the undesirability of inauthentic coexistence, or intersubjectivity without faces, to put it in Levinasian terms. Regardless of what Levinas suggests, the difference between *Being and Time* and “‘Dying for...’” is accordingly not so much that of a rejection versus a recovery of being-with, as it is a disagreement—in line with my account of the difference between Heidegger and Levinas more generally—over what constitutes the social relation properly understood; over what constitutes, to put it in Heideggerian terms, authentic *Mitsein*. While Heidegger maintains that, though difficult, it is in and through *Dasein*’s situatedness that authenticity can be found, Levinas insists that it is only by looking beyond time and place that self and other can be seen for what they truly are.

The question however is whether such abstractness can capture the understanding that self and other have of their own true selves (assuming that this is not necessarily less insightful than the understanding that the philosopher has of their proper

²⁰ See Guignon (1984: 333–337), explaining that one’s community not only offers the only means for becoming authentic, but that authenticity accordingly is a collective task. Yet while Guignon points to the “crypto-religious concerns with well-being and self-fulfillment” (1984: 339) that result from an individualistic reading of *Eigentlichkeit*, he does not address the problematic aspects of Heidegger’s emphasis on tradition and community.

²¹ Compare the readings offered by, e.g., Cohen, arguing that Heidegger’s account of death, in contrast to Levinas’s, “left ethics and other persons behind as merely ontic or inauthentic” (2007: 34), and Thomson, explaining that the contrast is rather one between a self able “to establish the relatively continuous identity of itself and its community” (2015: 250) and a self more generally “dedicated to serving, eliciting, and respecting the alterity of other people” (2015: 259).

²² Heidegger’s account of inauthenticity has for instance been said to be driven by his disdain for modern liberalist society (Fritsche 2012), whereas Levinas is often considered to be a defender of liberalism (Simmons 1999: 98f.) (but contrast this with Critchley 2015: 33).

identities, as Heidegger explicitly claims but Levinas can perhaps also be said to presuppose). A person may not want to be reduced to her membership in a particular community, as Levinas amply acknowledges, but this does not mean that the only alternative is a complete disavowal of one's situatedness. Rather than being seen as abstract men without distinctive features besides their absolute responsibility, do people not precisely want to be able to embrace their, say, ethnic or religious particularities, even when these are used to oppress or exclude them? Can it not add insult to injury to state that such characteristics should be disregarded?²³ Should it at the very least not be up to people themselves whether they want to break from their socio-historical background, or from which aspects of this background they want to distance themselves? Is it moreover not possible for a person to embrace her particularities without completely letting herself coincide with them, and without defining others solely on the basis of theirs?

Indeed, Levinas himself did not erase all signs of his own situatedness. At several points in his oeuvre—for instance in “Heidegger, Gagarin, and Us”—he explicitly presents Judaism as a model for thinking otherwise than being-with. To be sure, this is because Judaism, on his view, offers an “abstract universalism” that allows us to move beyond “family, tribe and nation” (Levinas 1961/1990: 234). However, given Levinas's argument that this distinguishes Judaism from both paganism and Christianity, which “continues to give piety roots” (1961/1990: 233f.), one can ask whether it represents a true break from particularism, or only urges people from specific persuasions to leave their particularities behind.²⁴

Similarly, his critique of Western philosophy notwithstanding, Levinas aligns himself with a number of insights from this tradition, such as Descartes' idea of the infinite and Plato's notion of the good beyond being. Yet while he argues that these insights precisely enable an overturning of the Western preoccupation with totalitarian community, their particularistic origins seem to undermine this promise, as for instance becomes clear in “Meaning and Sense”. Levinas approvingly explains that for Plato, the only admissible culture is the one “capable of understanding the [...] infantile character of historical”—i.e. non-occidental—“cultures” (1972/1987: 84); he accordingly regrets that contemporary phenomenology feels the need to “show the very excellence of Western culture to be culturally and historically conditioned” (1972/1987: 101).²⁵

²³ Compare Bernasconi (2005: 17, 22).

²⁴ See also Critchley (2004: 174, 175) (though unlike Critchley, I do not think that these problematic aspects of Levinas's work are primarily a matter of “the passage from ethics to politics” (2004: 173); they are already at work in his decontextualized notion of the ethical relation itself).

²⁵ See also Bernasconi on the “Western triumphalism” (2005: 25) that still informs Levinas's thinking. Bernasconi argues that such elements should not discourage one from exploring the resources that Levinas nonetheless offers for overturning “Western dogmatism” (2005: 27): it can be said to be “the Other in his or her specific cultural difference from me that presents a challenge to my own cultural adherences” (2005: 27). Yet that precisely means leaving Levinas's insistence on non-belonging behind. See Drabinski (2011) for a more detailed attempt to counter Levinas's Eurocentrism (hiding behind a mask of abstractness) by bringing him in conversation with postcolonial thinkers. “Decolonization,” Drabinski explains, “means taking [...] historical experience seriously and allowing it a disturbing, interruptive register” (2011: 44); this accordingly means to offer “[a] Levinasian thinking thought otherwise” (2011: 44).

In other words, Levinas's all too hasty reading of *Being and Time* raises the question whether his anti-*Mitsein* account is not overly hasty as well, for it is not just in "Dying for..." that he disregards Heidegger's explicit denial that authentic being-with is impersonal and faceless. Even if Heidegger does not explain in any detail how *Dasein* is able to come into its own, singular self in the process of co-historizing, and even if it is highly doubtful whether the notion of *Volk* can ever do justice to the singularity of all selves and others, this does not imply that the very idea of human situatedness should be categorically dismissed. Stripping human beings of all socio-historical characteristics seems neither desirable nor possible—even Levinas's attempt to use his own situatedness against itself only ends up underscoring his being a European Jew instead of, e.g., a non-Western polytheist, thereby also indicating that his plea for breaking with history and community does not necessarily mean the same for people from all possible backgrounds.²⁶

Hence, while Levinas already at an early stage identified a key notion behind Heidegger's problematic politics and devoted much of his work to actively challenging a division of the human world into different social units, his perspective runs into problems too. Levinas's lesson for reading Heidegger today is accordingly an unintentional one, though he could also be said to not sufficiently take his own warning in "Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism" to heart: there are dangers to disregarding the situated nature of human existence, so rather than radically rejecting *Mitsein*, Heidegger's particular interpretation of belonging should be taken as an invitation to see whether a different explanation is possible. This is moreover not just important for the debate about the continued relevance of Heidegger post-*Notebooks*, it is also of value for the philosophy of coexistence more generally. In a time—not unlike Heidegger's—when distinctions between "us" and "them" only seem to become more pronounced and polemic, arguing against the situated nature of human life can inadvertently serve to further entrench these divides. As Levinas's writings make clear, our belonging to particular communities should be reinterpreted rather than explained away.²⁷

Acknowledgements This research has been made possible by a VENI grant from the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO). Most of this article was written during a research stay at Princeton University; I would like to thank Thomas Trezise for his kind hospitality. Thanks also go out to Gert-Jan van der Heiden and two anonymous reviewers for very helpful feedback on earlier versions of this article.

Open Access This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made.

²⁶ Compare Sikka (2001: 114f.), arguing that Levinas's suspicion of *enracinement* makes him blind to his own roots and the effect they have on his philosophy.

²⁷ This is for instance the strategy followed by Nancy, who maintains that Heidegger never properly thought through his notion of *Mitsein* (see Nancy 2008) and himself offers an account of coexistence (in Nancy 2000, among others) according to which community is not a common being but the very fact of our being-together. (Though, it should be added, Nancy has been argued to rethink the concept of community to the point of emptying it of all meaning, which would mean that he effectively also explains belonging away).

References

- Bergo, B. G. (1999). *Levinas between ethics and politics: For the beauty that adorns the earth*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Bernasconi, R. (1999). The third party. Levinas on the intersection of the ethical and the political. *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 30(1), 76–87.
- Bernasconi, R. (2005). Who is my neighbor? Who is the other? Questioning “the generosity of Western thought”. In C. Katz & L. Trout (Eds.), *Emmanuel Levinas: Critical assessments of leading philosophers. Volume IV: Beyond Levinas* (pp. 5–30). London: Routledge.
- Bernasconi, R. (2006). Strangers and slaves in the land of Egypt: Levinas and the politics of otherness. In A. Horowitz & G. Horowitz (Eds.), *Difficult justice: Commentaries on Levinas and politics* (pp. 246–261). Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Carlson, T. A. (1998). Ethics, religiosity and the question of community in Emmanuel Levinas. *Sophia*, 37(1), 42–71.
- Caygill, H. (2005). *Levinas and the political*. London: Routledge.
- Chanter, T. (Ed.). (2001). *Feminist interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Cohen, R. A. (2006). Introduction. Humanism and anti-humanism—Levinas, Cassirer, and Heidegger. In E. Levinas (Ed.), *Humanism of the Other* (N. Poller, Trans.) (pp. vii–xlili). Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Cohen, R. A. (2007). Levinas: Thinking least about death—contra Heidegger. In E. T. Long (Ed.), *Self and other: Essays in continental philosophy of religion* (pp. 21–39). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Critchley, S. (2004). Five problems in Levinas’s view of politics and the sketch of a solution to them. *Political Theory*, 32(2), 172–185.
- Critchley, S. (2014). Originary inauthenticity: On Heidegger’s *Sein Und Zeit*. In J. E. Drabinski & E. S. Nelson (Eds.), *Between Levinas and Heidegger* (pp. 109–130). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Critchley, S. (2015). *The problem with Levinas*. In A. Dianda (Ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dastur, F. (2014). Levinas and Heidegger: Ethics or ontology? In J. E. Drabinski & E. S. Nelson (Eds.), *Between Levinas and Heidegger* (pp. 133–158). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Derrida, J. (1994/2005). *The politics of friendship* (G. Collins, Trans.). London: Verso.
- Drabinski, J. E. (2001). *Sensibility and singularity: The problem of phenomenology in Levinas*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Drabinski, J. E. (2011). *Levinas and the postcolonial: Race, nation, other*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Drabinski, J. E., & Nelson, E. S. (2014). Introduction. In J. E. Drabinski & E. S. Nelson (Eds.), *Between Levinas and Heidegger* (pp. 1–12). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Duff, A. S. (2015). *Heidegger and politics: The ontology of radical discontent*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Escudero, J. A. (2015). Heidegger’s *Black Notebooks* and the question of anti-Semitism. *Gatherings*, 5, 21–49.
- Fagenblat, M. (2002). Il y a du quotidien: Levinas and Heidegger on the self. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 28(5), 578–604.
- Fritsche, J. (2012). Heidegger’s *Being and Time* and National Socialism. *Philosophy Today*, 56(3), 255–284.
- Guenther, L. (2012). Fecundity and natal alienation: Rethinking kinship with Levinas and Orlando Patterson. *Levinas Studies*, 7(1), 1–19.
- Guignon, C. B. (1984). Heidegger’s “authenticity” revisited. *The Review of Metaphysics*, 38(2), 321–339.
- Heidegger, M. (1927/1962). *Being and Time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Heidegger, M. (1938-1939/2014). *Gesamtausgabe 95. Überlegungen VII–XI (Schwarze Hefte 1938–1939)*. In P. Trawny (Ed.). Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann.
- Heidegger, M. (1939-1941/2014). *Gesamtausgabe 96. Überlegungen XII–XV (Schwarze Hefte 1939–1941)*. In P. Trawny (Ed.). Frankfurt a.M.: Vittorio Klostermann.
- Levinas, E. (1934/1990). Reflections on the philosophy of Hitlerism (S. Hand, Trans.). *Critical Inquiry*, 17(1), 62–71.
- Levinas, E. (1947/1978). *Existence and existents* (A. Lingis, Trans.). Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

- Levinas, E. (1947/1987). *Time and the other* (R. A. Cohen, Trans.). Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
- Levinas, E. (1961/1969). *Totality and infinity. An essay on exteriority* (A. Lingis, Trans.). Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
- Levinas, E. (1961/1990). Heidegger, Gagarin, and us. In *Difficult freedom. Essays on Judaism* (S. Hand, Trans.) (pp. 231–234). Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Levinas, E. (1972/1987). Meaning and sense. In *Collected philosophical papers* (A. Lingis, Trans.) (pp. 75–107). The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers.
- Levinas, E. (1974/1981). *Otherwise than being or beyond essence* (A. Lingis, Trans.). Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.
- Levinas, E. (1983/1998). Philosophy, justice, and love. In *Entre nous: On thinking-of-the-other* (M. B. Smith & B. Harshav, Trans.) (pp. 103–121). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Levinas, E. (1987/1998). ‘Dying for...’. In *Entre nous. On thinking-of-the-other* (M. B. Smith & B. Harshav, Trans.) (pp. 207–218). New York: Columbia University Press.
- Malpas, J. (2016). On the philosophical reading of Heidegger: Situating the *Black Notebooks*. In I. Farin & J. Malpas (Eds.), *Reading Heidegger’s ‘Black Notebooks’ 1931–1941* (pp. 3–22). Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- McMullin, I. (2013). *Time and the shared world: Heidegger on social relations*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.
- Moyn, S. (1998). Judaism against paganism: Emmanuel Levinas’s response to Heidegger and Nazism in the 1930s. *History and Memory*, 10(1), 25–58.
- Nancy, J.-L. (2000). *Being singular plural* (R. D. Richardson & A. E. O’Byrne, Trans.). Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Nancy, J.-L. (2008). The being-with of being-there. *Continental Philosophy Review*, 41, 1–15.
- Nancy, J.-L. (2015). *Banalité de Heidegger*. Paris: Galilée.
- Peperzak, A. T. (1993). *To the other: An introduction to the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas*. West Lafayette: Purdue University Press.
- Peperzak, A. T. (2000). Intersubjectivity and community. In K. Thompson & L. E. Embree (Eds.), *Phenomenology of the political* (pp. 55–64). Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Phillips, J. (2005). *Heidegger’s Volk: Between National Socialism and poetry*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Radloff, B. (2007). *Heidegger and the question of National Socialism: Disclosure and Gestalt*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Sikka, S. (2001). The delightful other: Portraits of the feminine in Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and Levinas. In T. Chanter (Ed.), *Feminist interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas* (pp. 96–118). University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press.
- Simmons, W. (1999). The third: Levinas’ theoretical move from an-archival ethics to the realm of justice and politics. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 25(6), 83–104.
- Taminiaux, J. (1997). The early Levinas’s reply to Heidegger’s fundamental ontology. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 23(6), 29–49.
- Thomson, I. (2015). Rethinking Levinas on Heidegger on death. In H. Pedersen & M. Altman (Eds.), *Horizons of authenticity in phenomenology, existentialism, and moral psychology. Essays in honor of Charles Guignon* (pp. 239–262). Dordrecht: Springer.
- Trawny, P. (2014). *Heidegger und der Mythos der jüdischen Weltverschönerung*. Vittorio Klostermann: Frankfurt a.M.
- Trawny, P. (2015). Heidegger, “World Judaism”, and modernity. *Gatherings*, 5, 1–20.
- Visker, R. (2003). Is ethics fundamental? Questioning Levinas on irresponsibility. *Continental Philosophy Review*, 36(3), 263–302.