

## Chapter 2

# Can We Drop the Subject? Heidegger, Selfhood, and the History of a Modern Word

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### Selfhood and Subjectivity

A major element of *Being and Time* is Heidegger's critique of modern philosophy's division of self and world into subject and object, where objectivity denotes "facts" independent of the self and the rational subject denotes the mind's reflective distance from ordinary involvements and practices, a distance that frames the methods and ordering principles allowing the constitution of objective facts. In other words, modern objectivity and subjectivity are both shaped by a disengagement from the ways in which the human self first and foremost finds itself in the lived world. Heidegger's phenomenology aims to establish the priority of this "first" world, which therefore cannot be understood objectively or subjectively in the modern sense: "subject and object do not coincide with Dasein and world" (Heidegger SZ, 60).<sup>1</sup>

Dasein's "selfhood" is not originally an interior consciousness over against an objective world, but a unitary structure of being-in-the-world. The self is not a "what" but a way of being (Heidegger SZ, 117). Dasein in its everyday existence is for the most part immersed in non-reflective practices, involvements, and relationships; Dasein is "thrown" into its world, rather than being a self-originating conscious entity. Dasein is "in" its world in the manner of inhabitation, of being at home amidst (*bei*) its environment, which Heidegger designates as

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<sup>1</sup>I am using standard pagination of the German text indicated marginally in translations and in GA 2.

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“dwelling” (SZ, 54). Dasein’s being is the *meaning* of its world, its *matter* to Dasein’s factual activities and concerns.<sup>2</sup> What matters to Dasein in its world are the range and import of its possibilities, its tasks and projects that shape present concerns with futural purpose. So Dasein’s “self” is not a discrete entity but a temporal movement toward a future informed by an inherited (thrown) past; nor is Dasein simply a “mind,” but rather an engaged agent in a practical environment; nor is Dasein simply an individual self, since being-with other Daseins is an essential feature of the lived environment.<sup>3</sup>

The organizing concept for Dasein’s selfhood as being-in-the-world is care (*Sorge*), which in its own way captures both senses of the ontological difference mentioned earlier. In German, *Sorge* carries a twofold meaning of caring-about and anxious worry. Care, for Heidegger, is a *single* phenomenon with this twofold structure (SZ, 199), which gathers both Dasein’s concerned being-in-the-world and the primal mood of anxiety that discloses the radical finitude of being-toward-death, the exposure of Dasein to meaninglessness at the heart of existence. Accordingly, Dasein’s being is a temporal project of meaning that is also saturated with the lapse of meaning. This is why Dasein’s selfhood cannot be rendered as a being, a thing, an object, or any condition of presence because its existence is a temporal movement bounded by, and infused with, absence. If Dasein’s finite being-in-the-world is characterized as an *ungrounded, engaged temporality*, we can spotlight Heidegger’s critique of modern philosophy, which can be tagged with two basic concealments of finitude: (1) its ontology of constant presence and an epistemological principle of certitude, which conceal an abyssal temporality and the contingencies of life; and (2) its bifurcation of self and world into a detached subject and external objects, which conceals existential engagedness.

At this point I want to focus on the second form of concealment by exploring the question of selfhood and subjectivity, and I do so with the help of an important book by François Raffoul, *Heidegger and the Subject*. In this study, Raffoul argues that selfhood is essential to Heidegger’s thought, both early and late. Even in the supposed “turn” (*Kehre*) from Dasein to being, the *meaning* of being for human selves remains central. This is cogent because selfhood, for Heidegger, never

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<sup>2</sup>That the world matters to Dasein is all that is meant by the notions of “mineness” and “for the sake of itself,” which therefore do not connote anything egoistic, but simply a challenge to the priority of impersonal (third person) models of being (Heidegger SZ, 41–43).

<sup>3</sup>The subject-object split in modern thought is well indicated in the problem of skepticism, particularly in terms of radical doubt about the existence of the external world. In section 43 of *Being and Time*, Heidegger takes up the problem of skepticism, particularly in terms of the presumed division of self and world into subject and object, an internal conscious mind and things external to the mind. He critiques skepticism, not on its own terms, not by showing how the existence of the external world *can* be proven, but by dismissing radical skepticism *as* a problem that needs to be solved. Since Dasein is not originally an internal consciousness over against an external world, but rather *is* being-in-the-world, then involvement with its world-environment is constitutive of Dasein’s being. The very notion that subjective consciousness must pursue a demonstration that its environment exists shows that reflection has disengaged from a prior mode of being that makes it possible to pose such a question in the first place (see Heidegger SZ, 202, 205).

referred to some discrete entity or self-thing, but rather to an intrinsic relatedness to the meaning of being (and so not simply a self-relation). Raffoul rightly understands that a proper account of Heidegger's early phenomenology and the ubiquity of selfhood in the question of being must follow Heidegger's deconstruction of the modern subject-object binary. Yet Raffoul also shows how the early Heidegger displayed an ambivalence regarding the status of subjectivity, as opposed to his later departure from subject-language. In this way Raffoul opens up the possibility of rethinking subjectivity, a task that has occupied a number of contemporary thinkers, often in matters pertaining to ethics and politics, especially when the supposed loss of the subject is thought to obviate human agency and undermine arguments against oppression (Raffoul 1998, Chap. 5).<sup>4</sup> We can add, of course, "existentialist" writers such as Kierkegaard and Sartre who have advanced non-foundationalist models of subjectivity that proclaim the openness of human selfhood.

The ambiguity of the subjectivity question is shown in Raffoul's careful portrayal of Heidegger's "destruction" of the subject as a deconstructing/appropriating of the concealed *being* of the modern subject (Raffoul 1998, 139). It is this *being-of-the-subject* that interrupts the tradition and prepares a "nonsubjective" understanding of subjectivity or selfhood, something entirely different from the tradition (Raffoul 1998, 211, 147–48). Raffoul's nuanced and provocative treatment of Heidegger's engagement with Kant (see especially BP, 125–42/GA 24, 177–99) suggests that the early Heidegger was not utterly abandoning subjectivity but trying "to open up *another* sense of subjectivity" (Raffoul 1998, 122). As Raffoul reminds us, Heidegger on occasion (in *Being and Time*, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, and *History of the Concept of Time*) indicated that the ontology of Dasein was meant to explicate the tacit meaning of the subject, and that the "subjective" turn in modern thought was an inescapable starting-point for philosophy (Raffoul 1998, 5–6, 155, 180). In *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, Dasein is specifically described as a subject, or more precisely, "the *subjectivity* of the subject" (Heidegger MFL, 165/GA 26, 211).

In addressing this question, I want to mention something important in the early Heidegger that is not often recognized or appreciated. Heidegger did not think that fundamental ontology was a strict departure from, or replacement for, the Western philosophical tradition. The meaning of being as he saw it was simply concealed within, and even implicit in, that tradition (see Heidegger SZ, 22–23). The early Heidegger, therefore, wanted his philosophical concepts to be launched from a radical reappropriation of the history of philosophy. Heidegger was not averse to seeing in standard philosophical concepts the kind of phenomenological meaning he was working to uncover. Here we should mention the crucial importance of "formal indication" in Heidegger's early work. Philosophical concepts, for Heidegger, are not necessary, fixed structures that "ground" thinking. They are formal concepts that can only be drawn from a phenomenology of factual existence, and that can then only function as indications, or "pointers" toward their activation in

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<sup>4</sup>For discussions of the so-called "return of the subject," see Stern 2000; Palti 2004; and Deeds Ermarth 2001. See also *Why We Are Not Nietzscheans* (Ferry and Renault 1997).

factical life. Philosophical concepts, then, are not substantive designations but self-exceeding indications of concrete, finite being-in-the-world. The problem in philosophy has been that formal concepts have become reified and detemporalized into ascertainable objects of thought in and of themselves, thus eclipsing their indicative function (see Heidegger FCM, 292-94/GA 29/30, 422–27). Even though traditional philosophical constructions are an obstacle to the phenomenology of Dasein and so must not be presumed or employed uncritically, Heidegger in *Being and Time* does talk of the possibility of ascertaining the “unreified being of the subject, the soul, the consciousness, the spirit, the person,” all of which “refer to definite phenomenal domains that can be given form” (SZ, 46)—as formal indications.<sup>5</sup> Here we find clues to the ambiguity of Heidegger’s relation to tradition, particularly with respect to subjectivity.

One of the meanings of the *Kehre*, however, can be understood as a departure from the early complicit engagement with traditional philosophical concepts, particularly the subject. In the *Nietzsche* lectures, Heidegger concedes that the danger of phenomenology getting ensnared by subjectivity was due to the limits of the early hermeneutical situation (N IV, 140-42/GA 6.2, 172–74). This situation was also alluded to in “Letter on Humanism,” where Heidegger says that in order for his early work to gain traction in the existing philosophical milieu, it needed to be expressed “within the horizon of that philosophy and its current use of terms” (LH, 259/GA 9, 357). With the *Kehre* it was not so much the project of *Being and Time* that was in question, but its *language* (Heidegger LH, 231/GA 9, 327). Heidegger also complained that *readers* remained stuck in the customary meaning of concepts deployed in *Being and Time*, rather than rethinking them in the light of fundamental ontology (LH, 259/GA 9, 357). Here is my take on this: Readers got stuck in the formal nature of concepts at the expense of their indicative function. This problem was especially acute with subjectivity, a notion that Heidegger now directly claims *Being and Time* was trying to *abandon* (LH, 231/GA 9, 327). So the early ambiguity about the subject becomes resolved in the later Heidegger when he specifically targets subjectivity as inadequate to the thinking of being.

Considering Heidegger’s early engagement with the philosophical tradition, my own view is that a kind of complicity with standard philosophical concepts is not always problematic. Many philosophical terms can function effectively if clarified by existential phenomenology and if given a formal indicative character. Yet I also believe that Heidegger’s later turn away from the subject was justified, to the point where I think his early work never should have been complicit with subjectivity at all. Recalling the previous list of traditional concepts designating selfhood that Heidegger suggested could display a positive phenomenological meaning, I think

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<sup>5</sup>In *Being and Time*, when discussing selfhood in terms of the “I,” Heidegger clearly distinguishes between (1) a *merely* formal, reflective awareness of the “I” and (2) phenomenological attention to the function of the *word* “I,” which is to be “understood only in the sense of a non-binding *formal indication*”—especially as this leads in the direction of Dasein’s selfhood understood as a *who* rather than a *what* (SZ, 115–16).

that soul, consciousness, spirit, and person can have potential in this regard, particularly in view of a host of pre-theoretical uses of these terms, as distinct from their technical uses in philosophy. Yet I want to argue that the same cannot be said for the subject. I will make this case by considering the history of the word “subject” in philosophy, which should also provide a fruitful avenue for understanding how foundational models of selfhood critiqued by Heidegger took shape in Western thought.

## The History of the Subject

The subject as the “I think” (*cogito*) in modern philosophy is a transubstantiation of the Medieval *subjectum*, which (as Heidegger was always at pains to point out) was the Latin descendent of the Greek *hupokeimenon*, which was understood as the substantive bearer or base of properties and attributions.<sup>6</sup> In *What is a Thing?* (a 1935–1936 lecture course), Heidegger discusses the origins of the modern subject-object distinction in terms of Descartes’ task of positing a self-grounding fundament for the mathematical character of modern science, wherein the radical divorce of mathematical physics from all Ancient, Medieval, and customary beliefs demanded a grounding in a disengaged thinking sphere. In this way the *a priori* methodology and abstract mechanical principles of the New Science could be secured and liberated from all external dependencies and contingencies (see Heidegger WIT, 98–106/GA 41, 98–106). Heidegger mentions Galileo as an example of such a methodological *a priori* (WIT, 90ff/GA 41, 90ff). In the *Discourses*, Galileo recounted how the discovery of universal principles of motion required that he conceive of a body on a horizontal plane free of any obstacles, a conception that no experience will give him (“I conceive in my mind . . .”).<sup>7</sup> Heidegger claims that with such developments, the erstwhile meanings of *subjectum* and *objectum* became transformed in a remarkable way. The *cogito* became identified as a special, privileged *subjectum*, construed as the underlying *hupokeimenon* or substantial basis of mathematical thinking. Originally a “subject” indicated any referential base, more in line with Aristotelian *ousia*, which was Latinized as “substance,” or that which stands under or behind or within particular features of an entity.<sup>8</sup> Before Descartes,

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<sup>6</sup>It should be noted that in the same *SZ* passage where Heidegger mentions the possibility of an unreified concept of the subject, he also points out that any reified concept is drawn from *subjectum* and *hupokeimenon*.

<sup>7</sup>For an account of how dematerialized thought experiments and imagination figured in the science of mechanics, see Bertoloni Meli 2010.

<sup>8</sup>In Aristotle there is an important distinction between *hupokeimenon* and *ousia*, with the former usually pertaining to predication and the latter to being. Yet this distinction was not a separation along the lines of the modern subject-object split. Being, for Aristotle, is a “fused” concept where the existential and predication functions of the “is” are two sides of the same coin. See Van Brennekom 1986.

*subjectum* showed no exclusive identification with the thinking mind. But now the *cogito* as *subjectum* became something unique in line with the modern mathematical project: a *self*-grounding *subjectum* that freely grounds the thinking of nature as a set of “objects,” namely the “disenchanted” entities of modern science denuded of all relations to human interests on behalf of a mechanistic/causal world view.<sup>9</sup>

In the light of modern science, “nature” was transformed into a set of material objects properly ascertained only through empirical observation and quantitative measurement. The reach of this model has been such that in some circles philosophy itself is conceived as a kind of “naturalism,” which is shorthand for scientific naturalism, wherein philosophical topics are best explained by, or at least must be consistent with, findings in natural science. Analytic philosophers often complain that continental philosophy is bereft of precision and commitment to scientific reason. Continental philosophers often complain that analytic philosophy takes for granted terms or criteria that are not timeless but rather historically emergent and that thus at least are worthy of questioning. Nature is a good example.<sup>10</sup> One might think that our sense of physical nature is nicely collected in the Greek word *phusis*, usually translated as nature; but this word had a much more complex meaning for the Greeks (as emphasized repeatedly by Heidegger). *Phusis* is derived from the verb *phuō*, meaning to grow, to bring forth, to give birth.<sup>11</sup> With Aristotle we get a philosophical articulation of *phusis* as nature, but here too we have to be careful. Aristotle does not equate *phusis* with physical matter; *phusis* is manifest more in form than in matter (*Physics*, 193b5ff). And a prime instance of *phusis*, for Aristotle, is *psuchē*, life, including the human soul (*On the Soul*, 412a20ff). *Phusis* is not contrasted with the “supernatural.” It is simply identified with movement and change (Aristotle *Physics*, 200b12) and is specified as self-manifesting movement, as contrasted with *technē*, artifice, or movement caused by an external agent in human production (*Physics*, 192b10ff). Aristotle even gives *phusis* a comprehensive ontological significance, going so far as to connect it with being itself (*Metaphysics*, 1003a26-32). To repeat, Aristotelian *phusis* is not strictly material because it includes a teleological principle of form, where all natural beings are essentially purposeful in the process of actualizing potentialities that are intrinsic to their being.

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<sup>9</sup>With respect to the mathematical, Heidegger insists that number is not its source, but a consequence of the original meaning of the Greek *mathēsis*, or presuppositions required for learning (Heidegger WIT, 70ff/GA 41, 69ff). Descartes bears this out in Rule IV of *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* (PWD I, 15–20). There *mathesis universalis* is not universal mathematics but a general universal method of grounding thought by deduction from the intellect’s natural capacity for measuring order (as set out in the *Meditations*). Descartes knew of the Greek sense of *mathēsis* as a process of learning (connected with Platonic recollection). And he took mathematics per se to be simply the purest instance of *mathesis universalis*. See Van Pitte 1991.

<sup>10</sup>For Heidegger, what is “natural” is always historical (WIT, 39/GA 41, 38).

<sup>11</sup>In Homer, *phuō* usually refers to plant life, with a specific meaning of bringing forth shoots, and earth is commonly called *phusizoos*, that which gives forth life (*Odyssey*, 11.301).

In general, the modern concept of nature developed out of two guiding criteria in modern science that, despite their apparent divergence into empirical and conceptual standards, were reciprocally related in scientific work: experimental verification and mathematical formalization. Both Descartes and Kant, among others, insisted that a science of nature was grounded in mathematics.<sup>12</sup> Modern science was a self-conscious repudiation of Aristotelian “physics,” in part because central Aristotelian concepts of purpose and potentiality eluded precise formalization and verification. As Newton put it, “the moderns, rejecting substantial forms and occult qualities, have endeavored to subject the phenomena of nature to the laws of mathematics” (Newton 1960, xvii).<sup>13</sup> And Descartes described his *Meditations* as the foundation of his physics, which deals a mortal blow to Aristotelian physics (Descartes 1981, 94). Consequently, in modern science, “nature” is no longer understood in an Aristotelian manner as the field of self-manifesting phenomena that guide inquiry according to their evident formations, but as re-formed phenomena according to *a priori* constructs and principles that are *not* evident in immediate experience. In *Meditations* V, Descartes claims that corporeal things in nature exist, but their true existence cannot be ascertained as a match with our sensory grasp (as in Aristotle), because sense experience can be confused. Things in nature exist only in the manner of clear and distinct ideas, which are ultimately grounded in pure mathematics, which is the ground of mechanical physics, and which, for Descartes, is ultimately guaranteed by knowledge of God (*Meditations* V, PWD II, 48–49).<sup>14</sup> It can be argued that God, for Descartes, is not only a warrant for physics but also the source of the non-teleological conception of mechanics. For Descartes, God’s perfection is radical freedom, especially with respect to creation as a result of sheer divine will, as not bound by any prior conceptions, including goodness and purpose (Dutton 1996). Divine “indifference” with respect to the quality of nature underwrites the

<sup>12</sup>Descartes PWD I, 19–20; Kant 1985, 6. Descartes’ thought was not restricted to deductive principles to the exclusion of experience. For Descartes, although the laws of nature are deduced necessarily from God’s immutability, their truth is *confirmed* by experiment. See Nadler 1990.

<sup>13</sup>For Galileo, philosophy is written in the “great book” that is the universe. But this book cannot be understood unless one learns its language and letters—mathematics—“without which it is humanly impossible to understand a single word of it.” Without mathematics, one wanders around in a “dark labyrinth” (Galileo 1957, 237–38).

<sup>14</sup>It may be that the *Meditations* is not primarily about the separability of mind and body, but simply the radical distinctness of thought and extension. See Rozemond 1995. Thought and extension are principal attributes of mental and physical substance, and substance is the base of its “modes,” indeed is the “subject” of its modes (Descartes PWD I, 198). Individual bodies are modes of the principal attribute of extension. A substance has only one principal attribute, defining its essence and bearing its modes. So *res extensa* should not be called “body” but the core defining element of individual bodies. In other words, body can be *nothing other than* extension. This scheme allows the treatment of *all* bodies as subject to the singular analysis of mathematical relations, thus supplanting the Aristotelian view of qualitative differences among bodies, and justifying the reductive mechanism of the new physics of nature.

legitimacy of the “purposeless” axioms of mechanical physics.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, since nature has no intrinsic ends of its own, the door is open to the modern technological spirit of reducing nature to human ends. Descartes himself claimed that the chief benefit of the new mechanical model of nature is the power of control it grants to those who understand the secrets of nature’s workings. Human beings can then become “the lords and masters of nature” (*Discourse VI*, PWD I, 142–43).

We should note that one of the meanings of “natural” is that which is “native” to experience, what we are born into, which is indicated in the sphere of common sense that Descartes had to withdraw from and even fight off in his method of radical doubt. Modern science exhibits a similar kind of contested disposition toward natural experience and understanding (which are sometimes called, disparagingly, “folk knowledge”). Indeed, the posture of experimental science toward nature is far from a cooperative relationship (which marked Aristotle’s account of scientific knowledge). Francis Bacon is disarmingly honest on this matter. The experimental method investigates “nature under constraint and vexed; that is to say, when by art and the hand of man she is forced out of her natural state, and squeezed and molded” (Bacon 1905, 27). The point is that modern scientific naturalism emerged as a *struggle* with erstwhile conceptions of nature and lived experience. Kant as well claimed that scientific reason “has insight only into what it itself produces according to its own plan,” and that, armed with necessary laws, it must “compel nature to answer reason’s own questions” (CPR, Bxiii). We can conclude that the construal of nature as a scientific and technological “object” is itself far from an objective discovery. For such a scheme to emerge, the rational “subject” has to withdraw from natural experience to reconstitute the *being* of nature by way of mathematics.<sup>16</sup>

The mathematized being of nature allows for the contemporary sense of “objectivity,” in the manner of *independence* from interests, values, and purposes. Yet the *selectivity* evident in this transformation of nature is another angle on the history of subjectivity and objectivity. Such selectivity can be seen in the shift that occurred in the meaning of *objectum*. In *What is a Thing?* Heidegger notes that *objectum* originally referred to something present in the mind rather than something existing

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<sup>15</sup>Along these lines, the turn to the *cogito* in Descartes is not simply a matter of inward reflection but a radical withdrawal from both outside experiences *and* internal thoughts that are the effects of past experiences and influences. Such is the mark of *indifference* (Descartes PWD II, 41) to all possible occurrences in the world and in the mind, which is what underwrites the method of radical doubt. See Dodd 2004.

<sup>16</sup>The transformative character of this modern scheme is shown in its reversal of Aristotle’s analysis of mathematics. In *Metaphysics* 13, Aristotle claims that mathematical form is indeed disclosive of being, but only in the manner of secondary *ousia*, not the primary *ousia* of particular phenomena in nature. Mathematical form is *derived* from primary *ousia* through the operation of *aphaeresis*, or “abstraction,” which means to pull away or take away from (Aristotle *Metaphysics*, 1061a30ff)—a term that Aristotle uses exclusively for mathematics, and that exemplifies his critique of Platonic Forms, which are falsely assumed to be conditions of primary *ousia*. Analogously, modern physics would count as a comparable distortion of nature by giving primacy to mathematical form. See Heidegger’s analysis of Aristotle in this regard in *PS* section 15, an analysis that serves as an early precedent for his later critique of modern science.



in reality (an imagination would be an example). *Objectum* was the Scholastic translation of the Greek *antikeimenon*, meaning “set over against,” which Aristotle used not to designate an “object” but opposition. In philosophy *objectum* basically referred to an intentional object or representation, something thrown before or presented to the mind, as distinct from the independent reality of a thing. When Berkeley claimed that “to be is to be perceived,” he was equating *esse* and *objectum*. As he said with respect to natural phenomena, “their real and objective natures are therefore the same” (Berkeley 1744, para. 292).<sup>17</sup>

What is unusual in all of this, Heidegger remarks, is that the modern senses of subjectivity and objectivity represent a reversal of the original meanings of *subjectum* and *objectum*. *Subjectum* in the old sense indicated something we would call “objective,” and *objectum* something we would call “subjective.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* bears out Heidegger’s point in recognizing “an exchange of sense” between subjectivity and objectivity in the course of time (see under “objective”). Objectivity originally meant something only in the mind while subjectivity meant real existence outside the mind. A 1647 passage cited in the *OED* (under “objective”) calls personal confession the objective foundation of Christian faith, while Christ is called the subjective foundation.<sup>18</sup> The implication of Heidegger’s analysis of this meaning reversal is, I think, as follows: When the *cogito* became the self-grounding *subjectum*, its substantive reconstruction of nature as a mathematical system out of its own thinking sphere privileged the mind’s self-positing capacity (more in line with the original meaning of *objectum*); and from this privileging of the new *subjectum*’s positing power there eventually arose the modern sense of “objectivity,” namely real things existing independent of the mind as discerned by scientific reason. In other words, after Descartes the *cogito* as the primal “subject” now can deploy its own mental “objects” (ideas, laws, etc.) to refashion nature by way of a new sense of being that is stripped of non-measurable qualities such as values and purposes—what we now call “objective being” (see Heidegger WIT 103, 106/GA 41, 103–04, 106–07; also N IV/GA 6.2, Chap. 15, and LEL, 116ff/GA 38, 140ff). Regarding the existence of material things, Descartes says: “I now know that they are capable of existing in so far as they are the subject-matter (*objectum*) of pure mathematics, since I perceive them purely and distinctly” (PWD II, 50).

We must be clear that Heidegger’s account is in no way a dismissal of the modern project but an attempt to clarify its deepest conditions of thought.

This reversal of the meanings of the words *subjectum* and *objectum* is no mere affair of usage; it is a radical change of *Dasein*, i.e., the illumination (*Lichtung*) of the being of what is on the basis of the predominance of the *mathematical*. (Heidegger WIT, 106/GA 41, 106)

<sup>17</sup>For a general analysis, see Ayers 1998.

<sup>18</sup>William Hamilton, who edited the collected works of Thomas Reid (first edition in 1846), provided extensive notes to Reid’s texts, and one note gives a detailed account of the reversal of meaning between *subjectum* and *objectum*. In Scholastic philosophy, he says, “a material thing, say a horse, *qua* existing was said to have *subjective* being out[side] of the mind; *qua* conceived or known, it was said to have *objective* being in the mind” (Reid 2005, 806–09).

It could even be said that the terminological shifts were necessary for the radical reshaping of nature in modern science. Heidegger's critique would target the subsequent exclusive role played by such thinking in the general question of the meaning of being. In other words, the positive disclosive power of modern science prompted an inappropriate extension to all manner of philosophical topics.

## When Was the Subject Born?

With respect to the historical developments in question, Heidegger's analysis of Descartes and modern thought is in a technical sense a premature compression of a transitional process that took a long time to unfold. To my knowledge, Descartes did not use the term *subjectum* in reference to the *cogito*. There is, however, an interesting moment in Hobbes' objection to the *Meditations* (objection 2 in the third set of objections: Descartes PWD II, 122–24). He suggests that Descartes is applying the substantive sense of the subject (i.e., *subjectum*) to the thinking mind—hence a thinking thing (*res cogitans*) becomes “the subject of the mind, reason, or understanding.” But for Hobbes a substantive subject is corporeal (following one of the common meanings of “subject”), so he asks how a mind can be a subject. In effect Hobbes is accusing Descartes of arbitrarily connecting a subject with a nonmaterial entity. Descartes replies that indeed a subject is a substance, but not on that account necessarily material (citing non-corporeal senses of “subject”). This is a hint of things to come, but not yet a technical employment of modern subjectivity. The same is true for objectivity, given Descartes' distinction between formal reality (more in line with the original substantive sense of *subjectum*) and objective reality (more like the modern sense of subjectivity). In *Meditations* III, formal reality refers to a thing's actual existence as distinct from the objective reality of the mind's representation.<sup>19</sup>

Aside from Descartes, I am not aware that Spinoza uses “subject” in the modern sense, and like Descartes, he distinguishes between formal and objective essence. Locke does describe external “objects” as the source of the mind's ideas, as does Hume, but as far as I know, neither Locke, Berkeley, nor Hume uses the term “subject” in reference to the mind, but rather to the old sense of *hupokeimenon*. For Hume, “subject” even refers to “external objects” (Hume 2000, I.4.3). In Kant, of course, the modern configuration of subject and object is clinched and indeed perfected with respect to Heidegger's diagnosis. Inheriting the Cartesian *cogito*, Kant proclaims: “The *I think* must be *capable* of accompanying all my

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<sup>19</sup>Formal reality can apply to the mind, however, in the sense of an idea's actual presence in the mind, as distinct from the objective reality of an idea, namely what the mind grasps when it sees distinctions, particularly in definitions and clear and distinct ideas—where “clear” means being *present* and accessible to an attentive mind, and “distinct” means being clear plus being sharply marked off from other ideas so as to contain only what is clear (Descartes PWD I, 206–07).

representations” (CPR, B131), and it is the ground of any knowledge of “objects” (B203). For Kant, to be an object is to be constituted by the *a priori* structures of the “thinking subject,” and therefore objects do not exist “in themselves” (the *noumenon* is not an “object”) (CPR, A191/B236). An “object of experience” must be governed by necessary rules, otherwise we are left with *merely* subjective apprehension, merely a play of representations and thus not an “object” for knowledge (Kant CPR, A194-95/B239-40). For Kant the modern sense of objectivity is secured because of the inter-subjective validity and necessity of the mind’s categories. According to Kant, subjective knowledge is transcendently more certain than objective knowledge (since *a priori* categories guarantee scientific knowledge); but empirically, subjective knowledge (in individual minds) is less certain than objective knowledge. Thus Kant denotes a distinction that posed an enduring problem in modern philosophy: the difference between transcendental subjectivity as the ground of knowledge and individual subjectivity as a possible site of cognitive deficiency (non-objective belief based solely in an individual mind).<sup>20</sup>

Here I note two questions regarding the complex history of modern subjectivity and objectivity, questions I am not able to answer with any confidence. First, when was the “subject” first used as a technical reference to the *cogito*, to the “I think”? Was it someone before Kant?<sup>21</sup> Second, how did the individual, psychological sense of “subjective” tend to eclipse the more foundational, cognitive sense of the subject

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<sup>20</sup>Although the phrase “thinking subject” occurs frequently in *CPR*, Kant also deploys earlier connotations of the subject as the substantive base of properties or the reference of predication (i.e., *subjectum* understood ontologically or logically). So Kant actually works with three senses of the subject: cognitive, ontological, and logical. It should be noted that Kant critiques theories that move from the “I think” to a substantive self (see CPR, A348-51). The error of rational psychology is taking the cognitive unity of consciousness as “an intuition of the [thinking] subject as an object” and illicitly applying the category of substance to this supposed object (Kant CPR, B421). For Kant here the thinking subject is a precondition for thinking objects, not itself an object of thinking. Indeed, the transcendental cognitive subject is a “logical subject,” not a “real subject” (Kant CPR, A350)—note all three senses of the subject used here. Despite such manifold uses, Kant’s emphasis on the thinking subject seems to have cemented this denotation for philosophy afterward.

<sup>21</sup>William Hamilton, cited earlier, surmised that the reversal of meanings between *subjectum* and *objectum* began around the mid-Seventeenth Century, in German writers such as Calovius, Leibniz, Wolff, and Knutsen. In Christian Wolff, subject is connected with substance, since the latter is called the subject of constant and variable intrinsic determinations (*Gesammelte Werke*, III, 15, #683). Leibniz, in *Theodicy* I.59, says something that could be relevant: “soul and body compose one and the same *suppôt*, or what is called a person.” *Suppôt* comes from the Latin *suppositum*, closely linked to *substantia* and *subjectum*. Leibniz provides a clear case of the human subject by joining *subjectum* and *persona* in an ethical/juridical sense: “The *subjectum* of a moral quality is a *persona* or a thing (*res*). A person is a rational substance, and is natural or civil” (*Nova Methodus* II.15). See Zarka 1999 (the Leibniz passage is cited on p. 263). Locke defines personhood in a manner comparable to the Cartesian *cogito*: A person is an identity, given by “consciousness, which is inseparable from thinking, and as it seemed to me essential to it: It being impossible for anyone to perceive, without perceiving, that he does perceive” (1975, II.XXVII.9).

that we find in Kant and Hegel?<sup>22</sup> Indeed with Kierkegaard (a significant influence on Heidegger's thinking in *Being and Time*) we come to the valorization of non-objective, personal subjectivity in its proper existential sphere (the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious)—which accordingly rejects Kant's attempt to ground the value realm in intersubjective universals. So we see a long and winding road from *subjectum* as substance, to the subject as ground of knowledge, to subjectivity as individual, personal selfhood; and all of this intertwined with a concurrent movement from *objectum* as mind-dependent, to objects as constituted by the subject, to objectivity as reality independent of minds and selves. Now we have the familiar distinction between subjective belief (as mind-dependent) and objective truth (as mind-independent).

The terms subject and object, subjective and objective are today used in a host of different ways that cannot be reduced to any common genus—largely because of the variegated history of these terms. With the “subject” we note the following meanings: (1) the subject as the ground of cognition, the rational mind, which can be taken as universal and identical across individual minds (e.g., in Descartes and Kant); (2) the subject as the individual self or person; (3) the subjective as non-objective, as the immediate content of individual consciousness, and then as (4) the *merely* subjective, as corrigible content contrasted with objective truth; (5) the grammatical subject of a sentence; (6) a disciplinary subject of study; (7) the subject of investigation; (8) political subjects, e.g., a monarch's subjects; and (9) passive subjection in a general sense, as in being subject(ed) to ridicule. With the “object” we have: (1) an object as counter-posed to a knowing subject; (2) an object as a material thing in the world; (3) an object of thought, which can therefore be immaterial; (4) the object of investigation (thus identical to # 7 above); (5) an objective as a goal, as in a planning objective; and (6) objective truth, as true independent of subjective beliefs, desires, or interests.

## Should We Drop the Subject?

The confusing historical and semantic thicket just described is one reason why I think we should drop the subject. There are so many different meanings attaching to the subject and subjectivity that a termination of usage in the matters at hand can clean up the conceptual landscape. One could argue for the use of subjectivity as a defensible label for the phenomenology of selfhood at issue in this investigation, especially since subjectivity and selfhood have come to be joined so much in

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<sup>22</sup>When Hegel declares in the *Phenomenology* that being is subject as well as substance (1977, 17), he was inheriting (and conjoining) a distinction that originally was more a synonymy. Heidegger's counter-position is that the being of Dasein is “neither substance nor subject” (SZ, 303).

common usage, often in rich ways. I concede that subjectivity in the “existentialist” sense (especially in Kierkegaard) might suffice for the kind of existential selfhood that I am arguing is intrinsic to the being question, but I have two reasons for resisting this, at least from a philosophical standpoint: (1) Subjectivity came to mean personal selfhood *only* out of the modern transubstantiation of subject and object, and the subsequent differentiation between scientific objectivity and “merely” subjective psychological states. Thus subjectivity *never* harbored an authentic phenomenological base outside of this “impersonal” philosophical framework. (2) Personal subjectivity has itself come to represent a kind of individual *subjectum*—as a *ground*—which continues to plague philosophy, especially in epistemology and moral and political philosophy.

The perennial problem of subjectivism—where truth is reduced to individual beliefs, with no warrant beyond the subject’s self-assertion—is a vestige of the grounding character of the subject in the history of modern philosophy. For Heidegger, truth is the “unconcealment” of being, something disclosed *to* Dasein (see SZ, §44), and it cannot be reduced to subjectivity, either individually or collectively. Here we find one element of Heidegger’s critique of “humanism.” Human existence is not the author of being and truth because it is essentially open to, and thrown by, being (Heidegger LH, 244-45/GA 9, 171–73). Heidegger specifically mentions the modern concern over subjectivism: Since subjectivity has come to represent only the isolated, individual self—and thus has nothing to do with “objects”—then anything pertaining to the subject must be “mere semblance” if subjectivism is to be overcome (LEL, 116/GA 38, 140). But his own phenomenology avoids this problem entirely by not assuming the human being to be an “isolated I” (Heidegger LEL, 124/GA 38, 149).

In ethical and political spheres, any baseline subjectivism or individualism will always haunt the “claim” of social projects. Moreover, if individualism is assumed and manifested in ways of life, there can result the reactive formation of oppressive or consuming systems that overwhelm individual selves. Heidegger undercuts ethical subjectivism when he claims that norms are a “dispensation” to humans as a “belonging” to being, a “dwelling” in being, such that norms are “something we can hold on to,” rather than something “merely fabricated by human reason” (LH, 262/GA 9, 361).

I have outlined a number of reasons why the subject is problematic in philosophy, mainly because of its grounding-character, whether in the rational or personal subject—in that the rational subject is divorced from the instabilities of lived experience and temporality, and the individual, personal subject is divorced from its enviroing world and other selves. The thrown finitude of Dasein’s being-in-the-world provides a viable alternative to subjectivity, particularly in light of Heidegger’s notion of authenticity, to which I now turn.

## Authenticity and Selfhood

In *Being and Time*, Dasein's world-disclosive environment is at first characterized as fallen and inauthentic, terms which are easily misconstrued if Heidegger's text is not read carefully.<sup>23</sup> Fallenness and inauthenticity do not indicate any deficient condition of Dasein that must be transformed or superseded, but simply the original, everyday immersion in world concerns, which Heidegger calls a primordial and essential condition of Dasein's being (SZ, 129, 179). Some of the analysis in *Being and Time* carries the influence of Kierkegaard's critique of bourgeois conformity, and it gives the impression that authenticity would mean the liberation of the unique individual from common social patterns, which Heidegger terms *das Man*, "the Anyone." But we are told that authenticity is not a departure from *das Man* but its modification, and that *das Man* is a "primordial phenomenon" belonging to Dasein's "positive constitution" (Heidegger SZ, 129). We can make sense of this if we interpret *das Man* in a less pejorative manner as socialization, as the necessarily common ways in which human beings are initially enculturated into social practices, cognitive patterns, and cultural norms. *Das Man* is called the "common world," Dasein's *first world out of which* it can make its own way (Heidegger HCT, 246/GA 20, 339). Authenticity, then, would refer to the *tension* between socialization and individuation, and not a break with the social world as such.

Authenticity is not a denial of inauthentic fallenness, but its modification (Heidegger SZ, 130). What kind of modification? Inauthentic Dasein is not "itself" (Heidegger SZ, 176). But what is Dasein's authentic "self"? Here Heidegger is working with the familiar philosophical notion of a dimension that is more "true" to the self's being than other dimensions. Yet Dasein's authentic self is not an "entity" or any kind of positive content, but rather the awareness that Dasein's being is permeated by a negative dimension that is sheer "possibility" and finally its utter "impossibility" in death (Heidegger SZ, 250–51). In other words, inauthenticity involves a concealment of Dasein's radical finitude by way of a fallen absorption in the realm of beings and a confinement to common, familiar modes of understanding. Authenticity indicates an appropriation of what *exceeds* beings and the self's familiarity, security, and control. Dasein's thrownness "means *never* to have power over one's ownmost being from the ground up" (Heidegger SZ, 284). Authenticity therefore points to an *ungrounded* selfhood that is "neither substance nor subject"; it also points to the radical finitude of being, which for Dasein involves an awareness of the pervasive possibility of loss and privation, and an engagement with the intrinsic incompleteness of existence (Heidegger SZ, 303).

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<sup>23</sup>I have always benefited from Charles Guignon's careful and nuanced work on authenticity. See Guignon 1983, 1984, 2000. Guignon emphasizes two elements of authenticity not much explored in my text: (1) how history is part of Dasein's thrown selfhood; and (2) how authenticity is not simply an "existential" matter but also essential for the *philosophical* work demanded by existential phenomenology.

The finitude of being is clearly indicated in the twofold unity of care. The meaning of being is intrinsically related to an absence of meaning. The “repulsion” of anxiety is the “thrust” of Dasein’s everyday immersion in beings. Dasein’s fallenness now gets clarified as *fleeing* from the primal force of anxiety (Heidegger SZ, 189). Yet fallenness is not a deficiency that anxiety is meant to diagnose, but rather a positive, disclosive condition of meaning that now can be *understood* as a movement structured by absence. In other words, we care about the world *because* we are radically finite. All instances of caring-about, caring-for, and being-careful are what they are by virtue being linked with a looming negativity. The care structure, therefore, is a “double movement” of meaning in the midst of “unmeaning.” In this way, being-toward-death is constitutive of the “meaning of life.” It is well understood that a brush with death can sharply open up the value of life in ways quite different from ordinary compartments. As Heidegger puts it in *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*: “just as every loss first really allows us to recognize and understand the value of something we possessed before, so too it is precisely death that illuminates the essence of life” (FCM, 266/GA 29/30, 387). The “nothing” in anxiety and death, then, generates the “throw” that opens up a world of meaning; it is not an empty nothingness but a *power* that “constantly thrusts us back into being,” that lets beings be *as* beings (FCM, 299/GA 29/30, 433). What is ingenious about Heidegger’s analysis is that an absence of meaning is not the opposite of meaning but a possibility that is intrinsic to the very unfolding of meaning.

In the context of this analysis, authenticity can be understood in two registers: (1) In anxiety Dasein understands its authentic “self” not as some particular being but as the finite throw of care and being-toward-death. If inauthenticity can be characterized as a fleeing towards beings as a *refuge* from anxiety, authentic care amounts to understanding Dasein’s comportment towards beings *as* finite, as possibility rather than full actuality. As Heidegger puts it, authentic care is being-toward-death, in which Dasein “exists finitely” (SZ, 330). (2) In a more specific sense, authenticity can allow individual Daseins to discover their own particular and richer modes of care because the inauthentic commonalities and leveling power of *das Man* have been disrupted by anxiety, which opens room for new possibilities of discovery. In general terms, authenticity is a “modification” of inauthenticity in that the disruption of meaning permits a more sharpened, careful attention to meanings that can be carelessly weakened by familiarity and comfort. So being-toward-death can bring fresh meaning *to* life out of the stale conditions of everydayness.

Dasein’s finitude also entails the limits of human agency, in that it is *thrown* into its world, “always already” shaped by its social environment and an historical inheritance not of its own making. Dasein’s thrownness is thus counter-posed to intimations of sovereignty and mastery in the modern conception of a self-grounding, autonomous subject. Yet Dasein’s thrownness cannot be reified into any kind of social or historical determinism, because its world too is finite in being unstable and changeable. Dasein’s “historicality” (Heidegger SZ, §74) refers not simply to its past but also to its open future (which is why history is a set of *changes* in the first place). Dasein’s world is always susceptible to disruptions and alterations, and this is where the “individuated” elements of authenticity come into play.

I have suggested that authenticity represents a *tension* between individuation and socialization; it is also a tension between Dasein and its heritage (Heidegger SZ, 383). I have argued in another work that authentic individuation can be understood as the fourfold possibility of *owning*, *unmasking*, *innovating*, and *interrogating* one's culture and heritage (Hatab 2000, 174). I culled various remarks in *Being and Time* to organize this set of possibilities: (1) One can freely appropriate as one's "own" (*eigen*)<sup>24</sup> a tradition that has been handed down, but no longer simply *as* handed down (Heidegger SZ, 383). (2) One can unmask the disguises, superficialities, and other concealments that block a richer and deeper understanding of cultural phenomena (Heidegger SZ, 129, 391). (3) One can discover or initiate new possibilities that are normally impeded by inauthentic immersion in the commonplace (Heidegger SZ, 194–95). (4) One can challenge normalization and its tendency to suppress "new inquiry" and "disputation" (Heidegger SZ, 169).

The individuating elements of authenticity do not bring a severance from the cultural world because Dasein always remains "situated." But authenticity is also a situated *openness* in not being reducible to any closed form of actuality—an openness that is the precondition for any change or innovation in Dasein's world. Authenticity is a complicated circulation of factors that cannot be adequately described by any one factor or set of factors. Authentic selfhood is a situated openness that is neither autonomous nor determined, neither isolated nor communal, neither separated from, nor fused with, its environment, neither exempt from, nor bound by, tradition, neither conformist nor eccentric, and in general neither a fixed substance nor sheer becoming. In sum, because of Heidegger's account of finitude and the complex structure of Dasein's being-in-the-world, the substantive contours and implications of subjectivity make it a deficient concept for rendering human existence and selfhood.

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<sup>24</sup>Note the German word translated as authenticity: *Eigentlichkeit*.



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