

Philosophy in Review



R. Matthew Shockey. "The Bounds of Self: An Essay on Heidegger's Being and Time"

Michael Joseph Burke

Volume 42, Number 2, May 2022

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1089705ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1089705ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

University of Victoria

ISSN

1206-5269 (print)

1920-8936 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Burke, M. (2022). Review of [R. Matthew Shockey. "The Bounds of Self: An Essay on Heidegger's Being and Time"]. *Philosophy in Review*, 42(2), 37–40.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1089705ar>

Copyright © Michael Joseph Burke, 2022



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

R. Matthew Shockey. *The Bounds of Self: An Essay on Heidegger's Being and Time.* Routledge 2021. 224 pp. \$128.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780367642969).

While the recent publication of Martin Heidegger's *Black Notebooks* with its evidence of the author's antisemitism has further put the study of Heidegger's thought on the defensive in Heideggerian scholarship, this latest installment of *l'affaire Heidegger* does not seem to have stopped interest in Heidegger's *Being and Time*. R. Matthew Shockey's *The Bounds of Self* stands at the forefront of a still burgeoning literature mining the seemingly limitless potential of Heidegger's earlier magnum opus. Shockey however is not satisfied with simply offering an exegetical overview of the text but purports to complete Heidegger's project in *Being and Time* by providing a definition of being. To do so, Shockey draws not only on *Being and Time* but also a variety of lectures Heidegger gave preceding its publication, including his creative appropriation of Kant's thought in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. Shockey's title, adapted from another famous interpretation of Kant's philosophy, P.F. Strawson's *The Bounds of Sense*, underscores the impact of Kant's thought upon Heidegger's existential analytic, extending from the latter's appropriation of Kant's epistemological categories to the centrality of the imagination for ontological understanding. While Kant's influence upon Heidegger is an obvious touchstone in Heidegger scholarship, Shockey breaks relatively new ground with his argument for a positive influence of Descartes's thought upon Heidegger's work. Arguing from a Kantian-Cartesian interpretation of Dasein, the entity who has an understanding of being, Shockey explores how the boundaries external and internal to the self shape its understanding of being, purporting to finish what *Being and Time* started and to provide a meaning for being.

The first three chapters of the text return to the well-tread terrain of Heidegger's existential analytic in *Being and Time*, laying out the formal characteristics of Dasein (existence and mineness) and the ontological structure of worldhood, including the being of equipment (the ready-to-hand) and of 'scientific' descriptions of objects (the present-at-hand), as well as selfhood. Cartesian antecedents emerge in a number of places in Heidegger's text, ranging from parallels between Heidegger's existential analytic and Descartes's meditational method, to the way a preceding or *a priori* grasp of essence (in Cartesian terms, the notion of extension) structures how we understand our experience. Moreover, Shockey takes aim at popular interpretations of Heidegger's thought, contesting Hubert Dreyfus's interpretation of the breakdown of equipment as the only way we become aware of the ontological underpinning of the entities around us. Thus, we don't need to hit our finger with a hammer or have our coffee machine break down to send us into speculation about the ontological structure of such things; rather the general way that we (hopefully uninjured and caffeinated!) go about interacting in the world already provides an explicit interpretation of entities' being around us. While such exegetical nitpicking might seem pedantic, Shockey's reading convincingly addresses some of inconsistencies in *Being and Time*. For instance, Shockey works out more clearly an interpretation of discourse that pertains not only to possibilities of direct address, but to experiencing 'direct solicitations from the world for different possible courses of action, indexed to whatever socially shaped and recognized roles and attributes



we have been inducted into' (92). This notion of discursive calling and hearing of public possibilities nicely expands a conception of discourse that often seems threadbare, even prefatory, to Heidegger's later analysis of conscience.

Having sketched out the ontological structures entailed in how Dasein interacts with itself, others, and the world, Shockey fleshes out Heidegger's presentation of Dasein's temporal structure in Chapter Four, which purportedly provides a sense of unity to the ontological structures. While this project can easily go astray in the thickets of exegesis, Shockey stays on task in articulating this temporal interpretation of the structure of the subjectivity. Once more, shades of Kant and Descartes haunt this chapter, with Heidegger praising Kant's anti-substantialist formulation of the self (the 'I think') and, per Shockey's gloss, Heidegger's surprising approval of Descartes's *cogito*, which identifies the right phenomenon (thinking) but errs in tying it to substance. Rather than construing the self as a substance, however, Heidegger underscores temporality as doing the unifying work through the modes of the future, the present, and the past, which serve as multiple ecstatic projections of the manner in which the self engages in the world. Yet although Shockey dutifully outlines Heidegger's account of how the temporal ecstases of the past, present and future unfold in the activity of Dasein, the reader may wonder what is actually accomplished when all is said and done, in demonstrating the unity of care in these temporalizing ecstases.

Chapter Five, on Heidegger's engagement with Kant, seems to provide the payoff to the exegetical work of the prior chapter. Shockey suggests that the whole process of imaginative production results in the temporalizing of temporality that constitutes the first-person singular entity. To understand what this claim means, Shockey refers us to Heidegger's appropriation of Kant's transcendental approach, reading the categorical and intuitive structure of Kant's concepts as springing originally from the imagination. Ultimately, we imagine ourselves imagining being, and in doing so, we are opened up to entities and are able to transcend our own selves, to be a finite entity among other entities (147). Thus, whatever *is* anything for us is determined by the limits of what we ontologically imagine it to be. It is due to the omission of Dasein's temporality and its structuring of our activity as a 'free, thrown-projecting self' (147) that Kant's analysis fell short according to Heidegger.

Chapter Six purports to complete Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology, by extending Heidegger's Kantian interpretation beyond the being of the present-at-hand to the ready-to-hand and to the kind of being selves other than our own possess. In tracing the self's practical engagement with the ready-to-hand, Dasein assigns roles directed to engaging with things on a 'hands-on' basis, the 'teleologically articulated spatial and temporal totality that we project as we take ourselves up as users of things on our strivings-to-do' (154). Shockey not only articulates the manner in which Dasein's *a priori* ontological understanding structures the self, others, and things, but here his interpretation aims to provide a robust sense to intersubjectivity, resistant to Levinasian concerns on the alterity of the other. By taking the other to be self-determining and articulated by the categories of Dasein that are also my own, Shockey thinks he has done justice to Levinas's concern about respecting the alterity and independence of the other. Having thus explained how intersubjective and our circumspective engagement with world around us can be folded back into

the structure of self, it is not surprising that the topics of life, nature, God and mathematics likewise do not count as fundamental modes of being independent of Dasein but are modes of understanding fundamentally derivative from it. Ultimately Shockey's argument concludes that the self's temporality determines the temporality of other selves, of the ready-to-hand and of the present-at-hand and thus the being of these entities. Might it be the case then just as Kant returned to his metaphysical slumber, per Heidegger's gloss, shirking from the radical implications of his interpretation of the imagination, so too perhaps Heidegger in carrying Kant's work further shrank from the subjectivist implications of this account? Shockey prefers to embrace this culminating insight, of existence being bound up with the Dasein's understanding, as a *vindication* of subjectivism.

Some of the most interesting insights of Shockey's project emerge in his conclusion, specifically in his question of how this relatively abstract ontological meditation can shape our everyday life. To put it plainly, it can't. Heidegger's ontology doesn't provide a normative force that tells us to pursue our lives authentically. Doing ontology doesn't help us become better or more authentic selves; rather we should engage in ontological inquiry because we can, for its own sake. With philosophy we are free from all worldly pressures that normally interfere with our contemplation of being. And it is this 'normative inertness of ontology,' (194) Shockey infers, that Heidegger himself failed to consistently recognize, hence his engagement with National Socialism.

One point I would like to raise pertains to Shockey's discussion of intersubjectivity, especially with regard to Levinas's focus on the alterity of the other. Shockey holds that Heidegger's account of intersubjectivity, wherein the being of others is structured by the self's understanding of itself, allots a relative alterity to the other; insofar as our self-knowledge is still open, so too is the possibility of being surprised by others. Yet this claim misses the point for a critic like Levinas, who focuses on the absolute alterity of the other to the self. Shockey's reading is understandable given the claim he finds driving Heidegger's interpretation, 'There's no being of an entity that is itself given to me *from* the entity in my perceptual experience of it' (175). If this anti-empiricist claim lies in part behind Shockey's argument of a positive contribution of Descartes's thought to Heidegger (a claim, it might be noted, that would have benefited from further clarification and a stronger account of substantial ways that Descartes's thought impacts Heidegger's work), it is understandable how Levinas's complaint about Heidegger's position is still not met. Nor is it surprising that Levinas's reading of Descartes, focusing on his innate idea of God, which contains an infinity that the finite self cannot account for, yields an alternate reading of Descartes, unpalatable to a proponent of fundamental ontology. Perhaps it is this common anti-empiricist basis in the work for Descartes, Kant and Heidegger with its attendant risk of eclipsing the alterity of being manifested through Dasein that lies behind Heidegger's abandonment of *Being and Time*'s inquiry and his 'turn' in his later thought to poetic meditations on being. While questions on the link between Heidegger's *Being and Time* to his later thought obviously extend beyond the limits of his text, Shockey's *The Bounds of Self* provides a refreshing and challenging interpretation of Heidegger's classic text, inviting thoughtful considerations of the paths of thought Heidegger walked and those he did not.

Michael Joseph Burke, St. Joseph's University, NY