Lecture series “Thinking community today: Human co-existence after Heidegger”

Is community still a relevant concept for understanding human existence in the 21st century? Or have the processes known as ‘globalization’ disproved the claim that human life is always already situated in the context of particular communities? On the one hand, the world has become an increasingly interconnected place, making it increasingly difficult to divide humanity into discrete and distinct social units. This suggests that the concept of community, and related notions such as ‘people’, ‘nation’ and ‘ethnicity’, are irrevocably becoming obsolete – a development that need not be lamented when one considers the role that these notions played in the atrocities of the previous century. It would however be far from correct to say that the present-day world is a peaceful global village without inter- and intracommunal aggression or tension. It can even be argued that globalization has only reinforced divisions such as those between the rich and the poor, locals and migrants, or the West and the rest. For better or worse, then, the concept of community has not lost all appeal or legitimacy. This means that the relevance of human situatedness is not necessarily questionable, but that the question of community itself has become even more pressing. For if the notion of belonging has not become outdated, it can – and should – no longer be explained in any traditional way. So if human existence is always already coexistence, how is this fact to be understood today?

These questions are vital for any philosophy of the social and political, but they are especially urgent for thinkers who are, in one way or another, working in the wake of Martin Heidegger. Having put the idea of a socio-historical subject firmly on the philosophical agenda, Heidegger’s influence on the thinking of intersubjectivity and community remains unmistakable. At the same time, however, it has become painfully clear that he cannot be given the final word on human situatedness. With the recent publication of the Black Notebooks, and the even more recent release of Heidegger’s letters to his brother, his claim that Dasein is always already Mitsein now definitively brings up associations with notions like Blut, Boden and Volk. Hence, for much of contemporary philosophy, the question formulated above can be specified as, or runs exactly parallel to, the question how to think community with and against Heidegger. For if he remains an important source for the philosophy of coexistence, his account has also proven to have highly problematic implications; how, therefore, to understand belonging in this post-Heideggerian day and age?
This lecture series aims to address the general question of community by means of this more specific one. We accordingly want to explore accounts of human situatedness from the perspective of philosophies and philosophers on which Heidegger has left an indelible mark (even, or perhaps precisely, when this takes the form of a scar). These philosophies include, but are not limited to, phenomenology, existentialism, hermeneutics and deconstruction. In terms of relevant thinkers, we invite discussions of philosophers as diverse as Arendt, Levinas, Fanon, Derrida, Nancy and Agamben – in addition, of course, to Heidegger himself, though we do not require our conversations to be held in strictly Heideggerian terms. The question, after all, precisely is to what extent his thought can be saved from itself. Can a less problematic concept of community be developed as part of Heidegger’s heritage, or are those rethinking notions like belonging effectively breaking with his project? Regardless of their exact relation to Heidegger, what can the philosophers working in his wake teach us about inclusiveness, plurality, our relation to the other and the distinction between us versus them? For these issues are as pertinent now as they were in Heidegger’s days.

Organizers:

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- Chantal Bax

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Program:

Feb 14  Simon Glendinning (LSE): *A community that is not one*  
E 1.15

Mar 7  Ian James (Cambridge): *On open community*  
E 2.62

Mar 28  Christian Sternad (Leuven): *The 20th century as the struggle for community*  
E 2.62

Apr 4  Joanna Hodge (Manchester): *Nancy on finite thinking and finite history*  
E 3.29

Apr 11  Sanem Yazıcıoğlu (Tilburg): *Arendtian beginning under the threat of violence*  
E 2.62

May 2  Tina Chanter (Kingston): *Who is the peasant woman? Gender and old shoes*  
E 3.29

May 9  John Drabinski (Amherst): *Dialectics, alterity, race*  
E 2.51

May 16  Thomas Trezise (Princeton): *On persons and community in Levinas*  
E 3.29

All lectures will start at 16:00h. Registration is not required but much appreciated through c.bax@ftr.ru.nl. Abstracts available upon request.