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Re-theorizing the "We" in Community. Review of David Studdert, *Conceptualising Community: Beyond the State and Individual.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. Pp. 221. Cloth $79.95; and Hans Bernhard-Schmid, *Wir-Intentionalität: Kritik des ontologischen Individualismus und Rekonstruktion der Gemeinschaft.* Freiburg: K. Alber, 2005. Cloth €48.00.

I.

The concept of community in German (*Gemeinschaft*) has a troubled history. In a 1993 article contrasting the cultural semantics of the respective terms in Germany with those in the USA, Hans Joas writes of the "anrüchige Erbe" of *Gemeinschaft* and its implicit opposition to the ideal of democracy.[1] In an analysis of *Gemeinschaft* subtitled "*Zerfallsgeschichte einer Utopie*," Manfred Fassler explicitly draws attention to this problem: "Die Kategorie der Gemeinschaft," he writes, "mag zumal für die deutsche Geschichte so diskreditiert erscheinen, daß sie ins gefährliche Eck zu treiben droht."[2] Far from the positive connotations popularly associated with the term in English,[3] *Gemeinschaft* in German is often associated with the National Socialist dictatorship and its "artsgleiche Volksgemeinschaft" that contributed to the fascists' ideological justification for the Holocaust. Although Steffen Bründel recently published a historical analysis of debates about a German *Volksgemeinschaft* during the First World War showing the term to be broader than the fascist concept of national unity we now remember,[4] *Gemeinschaft* still too often bears a continuing aura of the taboo in German.

Determining the basis for the unity presupposed within community presents a major challenge when re-theorizing the concept of *Gemeinschaft*. Over a century ago, Ferdinand Tönnies' *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (1887) delineated a romantic notion of organic community in stark contrast to modern society, thus inadvertently setting the stage for the later racialization of *Gemeinschaft*. In a 1955 article, René König criticized Tönnies' approach as unscientific, a "cultural-historical theory" that had lapsed into ontological philosophy. König suggested founding a new study of community "jenseits der Entwicklung von Gemeinschaft zu Gesellschaft," [5] and in a subsequent work, *Grundformen der Gesellschaft: Die Gemeinde* (1958; in English, *The Community*, 1968), König postulated that communal integration may be based as much on symbolic projection as on any extrinsic or objective factors. Subsequent approaches have included Jürgen Habermas' extended work on discourse ethics, which develops the concept of community based on communicative action,[6] and Anthony Cohen's symbolic theory, in which community is seen as a shared symbolic field of meaning defined primarily by its borders.[7]

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[1] Hans Joas. "Gemeinschaft und Demokratie in den USA: Die vergessene Vorgeschichte der Kommunitarismus-Diskussion." In *Gemeinschaft und Gerechtigkeit*. Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1993. 49-62 (here: 50).

[2] Manfred Fassler. *Gemeinschaft oder Herrschaft: Zerfallsgeschichte einer Utopie herrschaftsfreier Gesellschaft*. Giessen: Focus, 1979, 22.

[3] Robert Putnam, for example, refers to "community" as having "warm and cuddly" associations (*Bowling Alone: The Decline and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000, 21).

[4] Steffen Bründel. *Volksgemeinschaft oder Volksstaat: Die "Ideen von 1914" und die Neuordnung Deutschlands im Ersten Weltkrieg*. Berlin: Akademie, 2003.

[5] René König. "Zur Problematik und Anwendung der Begriffe Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft: Die Begriffe Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft bei Ferdinand Tönnies." *Kölner Vierteljahrshefte für Soziologie*, *Neue Folge* 7:1 (1955): 348-420 (here: 408).

[6] E.g. Jürgen Habermas. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990. Recently, Udo Tietz expanded upon Habermas' discursive approach in a recent analysis of the construction of communities around shared concepts of "the good" in political theory (*Die Grenzen des 'Wir': Eine Theorie der Gemeinschaft*. Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2002).

[7] Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. New York: Tavistock, 1985.

The two works reviewed here stand in dialogue, implicitly or explicitly, with this intellectual tradition and with recent debates about communitarian renewals of liberal democracy. In *Conceptualising Community*, David Studdert draws upon Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* to suggest a relationally based theory of human existence inextricably situated within community. In *Wir-Intentionalität*, Hans Bernhard Schmid proposes an ontology of community based on a model of collective intentionality drawing from Heideggerian philosophy. Given that both venture to deliberate on the philosophical ontology of community which König had dismissed as a field of sociological inquiry over fifty years ago, they not only complement each other, but they help expand the field of inquiry regarding community in general.

II.

In *Conceptualising Community*, Studdert criticizes common conceptions of community, which he claims are beholden to the discursive regime of modernism that relegates community to a position subservient to the primacy of the individual/state axis. In the first part of the book, he reviews the "social science version of community," which he claims is not only based upon, but also serves to uphold, the Cartesian model of the lone, rational individual. He argues that modern sociology rests upon conceptual foundations established by Plato, Descartes, and Hobbes, foundations that privilege an idealized, abstracted, individualized, and ultimately highly conflictual model of the social. Sociology thus becomes overly concerned with questions of social cohesion, and the works of Tönnies, Comte and Durkheim become fixated on "lost community." More recent approaches to sociality such as communitarianism, or theories of social capital and social networks from scholars such as Bourdieu, Etzioni, Giddens, and Taylor, he suggests, simply repeat this modernist configuration that ultimately conflates community with the state. These theories, he argues, although purportedly countering classical liberal individualism, all rely upon its assumptions about the self that "ignore the ontological and moral sense in which social bonds are constructive of identity" (58-9), and they all avoid addressing the question of what a community actually is. In this analysis, even Foucault's critiques of the Cartesian subject and post-colonialist critiques of dominant cultural discourses are still wedded to the lone individual as subject and thus to the overarching regime of governance/state.

The second part of the book examines problems arising from the liberal conception of the state as consisting of separate, competing individuals. This theoretical approach, in Studdert's view, creates a conception of community that is reductive and derivative, merely the outcome of a union of pre-existing individuals. "Within this mode of thought," he writes, "community is a hollow shell, a 'theoretical and performative stage' for the enactment of rational unitary individualism rather than a space of relational plurality, constitutive of all forms of social being-ness, *including individualism*" (90). In this view, social theory naturalizes the existence of the state as the supra-individual entity *sine qua non*,[8] and community becomes the 'Other', modernity's "expelled shadow." The last chapter of part two attributes this impoverished view of community to a pervasive mode of abstract "mechanistic thinking" that presumes division, separation, and conflict in society, a mode that Studdert sees in the work of writers such as Weber, Lyotard, and Althusser.

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[8] Arendt, in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, noted that membership in the "political community" of the modern nation-state in effect thoroughly supercedes any other mode of belonging: "whoever was thrown out of one of these tightly organized closed communities found himself thrown out of the family of nations altogether" (*The Origins of Totalitarianism.* New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1951: 291).

Part three of the book suggests a new framework for conceptualizing community through the modes of human sociality described in Hannah Arendt's 1958 work, *The Human Condition*. Rather than offering a simple reversal of values still relying upon the basic ontological individualism characteristic of modernity, Studdert reads Arendt's book as an anti-metaphysical project that offers a radically social, subjectively de-centered theory of human existence outside of the binary of subject and state. Arendt's model of the social is highly inter-relational and inherently action-based—including, fundamentally, communicative action(s). "[T]he *vita activa*," Studdert writes, "illuminates the conditions under which the social human being-ness is theoretically enunciated" (143), an enunciation that is radically plural in its perspectives, and thus, he claims, "impervious" to many structuring binary essentialisms of modern psychological and political theory. Human beings are always already situated in a complex web of relations that forms the backdrop against which subjects disclose themselves through their actions. Communal existence, then, is not the outcome of, but the prerequisite for, selfhood and subjectivity. This, Studdert claims, spells the end of the "mechanistic model" of pre-social individuality.

The multi-dimensional space of active sociality, then, becomes the basis for community in Studdert's conceptualization—indeed, at the start of Chapter 8, he suggests that it *is* community. Later, Studdert writes that community emerges out of the recognition of shared commonalities in the space of disclosive action; although he does not elaborate on this process, he does state that multiple commonalities imply multiple (overlapping) communities, forms which are by nature dynamic and highly particular, not rigid and abstract. This model also implies a highly perspectival approach to truth, wherein community—an agreed-upon sharing of perspectives— helps constrain interpretations and construct a sense of the truth (recalling Stanley Fish's "interpretive communities"). This social ontology leads to radical epistemological conclusions: communal inter-relationship, not individual subjective perception of an objective world, becomes constitutive of our sense of reality.

Studdert's project is praiseworthy. His analysis of the philosophical foundations of modernity joins a growing communitarian debate about the conceptual dominance of liberal individualism as well as Foucauldian critiques of the rational subject. At the same time, Studdert's critique of the foundational assumptions of many current social theories—including communitarianism—helps highlight the extent to which such theories are still wedded, even in their opposition, to the concept of the pre-social individual. Given that Studdert bases his project on an assertive reading of Arendt, however, one could wish for a more sustained and in-depth engagement with her text. For example, several passages seem almost naively facile in claiming that Arendt's model of sociality is unaffected by modernist "polarities" such as conscious/unconscious and structure/agency (143). Furthermore, while he criticizes other scholars for not defining community carefully in their deliberations, he appears to do the same; at one point he claims that all forms of sociality can create community, without specifying how this might be, and only towards the very end of the book does he write of community as cooperative commonality. Indeed, too often the social and the communal seem to be casually conflated in his argument. Nevertheless, despite its flaws, the work contributes a valuable perspective to the conception of community based on one of the great German thinkers of twentieth century.

III.

Hans Bernhard Schmid's *Wir-Intentionalität* offers an extensive critique of the dominance of individualism in current thought, along with a proposed ontology of community based on a rereading of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*. The first part of the book, provocatively entitled "Die 'Cartesianische Gehirnwäsche' überwinden" after a phrase coined by Annette Baier, decries what Schmid terms our *ego*-fixation arising from Descartes' approach to subjectivity (37). This mode of analysis, he claims, unnecessarily and incorrectly reduces our conception of intentionality to a lone, rational subject. Like Studdert, Schmidt sees this reductionist assumption active even in contemporary theories that claim to oppose individualism; in their effort to avoid the specter of a *Kollektivgeist*, the theories all represent collective intentionality as the sum of individual intentions. Schmid, however, argues for a conception of community that is pre-reflexive, irreducible, and genuinely intersubjective. His work elaborates on these theses in careful detail.

The first chapter considers the manifold conceptual challenges that arise with simply saying "we." In his attempt to determine what differentiates individual action from communal or collective action, Schmid repeatedly draws upon the simple thought experiment of two hikers, Anna and Bertha, who meet on a mountainside and are faced with the choice—implicitly or explicitly—to either continue wandering separately, or to join together in their activities. Schmid first questions the need to consider intentionality at all when considering community. He argues that the joint activities of the two imagined hikers cannot be determined purely through their observable behaviors, including through their use of the first person plural pronoun, and he suggests that intentionality must play a role in community, regardless of whether intentionality is understood causatively or normatively, or even whether the communal action is harmonious or aggressive. Unlike discourse-oriented approaches, he does not restrict his view of intentionality to rationally determined, practical goals; he also admits that an intentional theory must address cognitive and affective modes of communality.

By turns, Schmid considers Georg Simmel's proposition that the *consciousness* of forming a unity with others is central to understanding collectivity, Max Weber's theory of social activity as being oriented towards the other, Jean-Paul Sartre's suggestion that "we-groups" are constituted through the awareness of third-party observation, and Margaret Gilbert's recent Plural Subject Theory. Schmid thus postulates a "*partizipative Dimension des 'Wir'*," in which members of a community reciprocally attribute to themselves and others group membership. Along with the *participative* side, though, he also considers the *exclusive* side of saying "we": the two sides constitute *inherent* dimensions of group participation that may be more or less voluntary, more or less determined by the self or pre-determined by others. This leads to a discussion of Marx's theory of class formation, Moritz Lazarus' conception of the *Volksgeist*, Samuel Huntington's theory of the "Clash of Civilizations," and other examples of what Schmid terms the tension between idealistic and realistic notions of group formation.

From the consideration of the conditions of saying "we," Schmid moves to a discussion of the formation of community. Imagining a community, he argues, does not create one; self-categorization, or even a "we-consciousness," is not sufficient to produce a shared identity, nor, he claims, is it even necessary. He takes issue here with Benedict Anderson's often-cited thesis in *Imagined Communities* (1991), with Simmel's theory, and with Habermas' discursive approach. The image of a community and the experience of community are two completely different things, Schmid points out, and communities do not form because of a "reflexive-thematic" (*reflexiv-thematisches*) group consciousness among members, but on the contrary such

consciousness arises from the prior existence of the group. Just as an individual's being in the world precedes self-conscious awareness, communal action—including communal thinking and feeling—he claims, is the precursor for a group's self-consciousness. Schmid postulates a "pre-reflexive-unthematic we-consciousness" (*vorreflexiv-unthematisches Wir-Bewußtsein*) that itself enables members to orient their thoughts and actions reflexively and thematically towards community. Schmid then demonstrates how this intentional, yet pre-reflexive, consciousness overcomes the apparent opposition between exclusive and participatory concepts of the "we" that focus on the external borders of a community or the internally shared activities of the group, respectively. Schmid describes this theoretical stance as a "repetition in the plural" of Dieter Henrich's arguments against theories of the self based solely on a Cartesian model of self-reflection.

Schmid proclaims deep skepticism towards reflectively-oriented theories of group identity and argues, "[d]as ursprüngliche 'Wir' ist kein 'Gegenstand' eines Bewußtseins" (103). Schmid discusses what he terms a growing Copernican revolution against the Cartesian *ego*-fixation of modern philosophy. The legacy of Descartes, he argues, leaves us a reductionist conception of communal intentionality describable only on the basis of the interaction of individuals' intentions. Here, Max Weber's model of communal activity becomes the focus of the critique. Schmid, on the other hand, argues that communal intentionality is "eine genuin *intersubjektiv-relationale* Angelegenheit" (180), irreducible to the sum of the individual participants. This leads to an examination of theories of collective intentionality from John Searle, Alfred Schütz, Wilfrid Sellars, and Michael Bratman. Schmid claims that the belief that intentionality can only be situated in the minds of lone individuals still hampers theories of collective action, and he finds all contemporary theories haunted by what he terms the specter of the collective subject or the group mind. In his view, communal intentions have a normative effect on individuals, but they are, primarily, interpersonal and relational: "Gemeinsames Intendieren ist in diesem Sinn kein *subjektives,* sondern ein durch und durch *relationales* Phänomen" (199-200). No supra-individual collective entity is necessary to posit an intersubjective experience.

In the second half of the book, Schmid draws upon Heidegger's notion of *Miteinandersein* and the unavoidably social nature of existence to support the claims that communal "we-consciousness" is pre-reflexive-thematic, irreducible, and intersubjective-relational. Schmid argues that our pervasive ontological individualism is a deceptive, yet unavoidable aspect of our communal being. Citing Heidegger's motif of *Uneigentlichkeit*, Schmid writes that "Das *gemeinsame Dasein*, das wir sind, tendiert dazu, sich selbst als Sache vereinzelter Individuen zu sehen – und läuft dadurch in seinem Selbstverständnis an seinem eigenen Sein vorbei" (244). Schmid generalizes Heidegger's reading of "Man" (in the German sense) as a "broken we," a pronoun reflecting both "Vermassung" and "Zerbröckelung," and in doing so Schmid suggests a re-interpretation of the communal "we." Schmid admits that Heidegger's existential philosophy in *Sein und Zeit* is not by design primarily a theory of the social, and he uses Sartre's analysis of the "subject we" to reveal limitations in Heidegger's position. Nevertheless, Schmid argues that Heidegger's analysis offers a critical site for discussing the ontological structure of sociality.

The fifth chapter in the book critiques the post-enlightenment, social science model of the rational individual as "Homo Oeconomicus." Like Studdert, Schmid views the theoretical tensions between individual "emancipation" and social "integration" as products of our modern social ontologies. Indeed, he claims that "[d]ie Schwachstelle in der Konstruktion des

'Individuums' ist die Vernunft" (314), and he situates the weak point precisely in a conception of rationality modeled on liberal economic theories favoring competition over cooperation, theories that arbitrarily define an orientation towards material goals ("Zweckrationalität") as rational and an orientation defined by values ("Wertrationalität") as irrational. Schmid develops an extended argument for a rationality-in-relation that returns to the intersubjective model of his previous chapters. "Das Dasein, das sich und andere nach Maßgabe des ökonomischen Verhaltensmodells versteht," he writes, "verdeckt in seinem Selbst- und Fremdbezug seine Möglichkeiten vor sich selbst: nämlich jene Möglichkeiten, die es nicht als individuelles Dasein, sondern nur als vorreflexiv-irreduzibles Miteinandersein hat. Das macht seine Uneigentlichkeit aus" (409).

Finally, Schmid concludes his analysis with a chapter on the affective dimension of sociality, which he admits may play more of a role in the formation of groups than does rational thought. In examining this dimension of community formation, his analysis joins recent works such as Barbara Rosenwein's *Emotional Communities*.[9] Drawing on Jon Elster's work, Schmid terms envy (*Neid*) the cement of society and cites the emotion as particularly exemplary of the same self-deception he saw in the recognition of a "we-consciousness": the belief that individuals, rather than groups in relation, are the site and source of such group affect. He returns here to a discussion of the "broken we" of Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein*.

Schmid's *Wir-Intentionalität* is a far-reaching and demanding work worthy of prolonged consideration. The analysis situates community in the intersection of an impressive array of thinkers, and Schmid's engagement with Heidegger complements Studdert's sketch of a communal ontology based on Arendt's philosophy of the social. Both Schmid and Studdert argue forcefully against widely prevalent atomistic social theories, and both take aim at the Cartesian model of rationality so characteristic of modernity. Schmid's work nevertheless falls prey to the same definitional difficulty found in Studdert's work: how does one distinguish between a general theory of "the social" and a more specific theory of community? At what point does communal action become community? Indeed, like Studdert, Schmid avoids any direct definition of 'community'; at one point, he simply writes, "Der 'Wir-Aspekt' des Bewußtseins, welches Gemeinschaft ist…" (243). Nevertheless, Schmid's analysis offers a wealth of well-considered arguments for reconsidering *Gemeinschaft*. Both *Conceptualising Community* and *Wir-Intentionalität* provide help expand contemporary theories of community.

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[9] Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the early Middle Ages.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell U.P., 2006.