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June 30, 2009

Intellectual Authenticity: A Comparative Analysis Between Edward Said's Public
Intellectual and Martin Heidegger's Early Meditations on Authenticity

In *Eclipse of the Self*, Michael Zimmerman highlights how “[a]s a young man, [Martin] Heidegger stressed the need for courage and will” (xxiii), for a “true philosopher¹ knows that wisdom comes only when one takes risks and endures suffering” (xx). Similarly, Edward Said, in *Representations of the Intellectual*, maintains that “the purpose of the intellectual’s activity is to advance freedom and knowledge” (17) against social oppression, and this “vocation” “involves both commitment and risk, boldness and vulnerability” (13) and a “perpetual willingness not to let half-truths or received ideas steer one along” (23).

Moreover, in a 1976 essay, Heidegger² that asserts philosophers are “constantly aroused by and immediately sensitive to the completely enigmatic character of what, for sound sense, is without question and self-explanatory” (*Logik* 23-4).

This constant questioning is embodied by Heidegger’s concept of Dasein. In very

¹ It is without question that the philosopher is an intellectual; therefore, as Edward Said asserts in *Representations of the Intellectual*, “there is no such thing as a private intellectual since the moment you set down words and then publish them you have entered the public world” (12). While it is important to note that publication on a mass scale is a modern practice, this position still stands insofar as the dissemination of knowledge itself is opening it up for debate, speculation, and scrutiny within a public forum.

² While Heidegger’s own intellectual past is highly controversial, as, despite his attempts to distance himself after the fact, he was, at one point, a supporter of Nazism. For the purposes of this essay, I will not venture into an analysis of Heidegger himself as a public intellectual; rather, I will be focusing on his conception of Dasein as a medium for analyzing (Said’s) public intellectual.

basic terms, Dasein is that being for whom its being is a question³ and through that questioning, Dasein can take responsibility for its existence and has the ability/potential to be authentic. As such, using Heidegger's rubric for tracing Dasein's path to authenticity, I would argue that Edward Said's figure of the public intellectual fits Heidegger's design for what he considers to be an authentic existence. In the course of this essay, I will attempt to draw parallels between the two figures; however, before tackling this analysis, a slight overview of Heidegger's fundamental project may set the framework from which to make said comparison intelligible.

In *Basic Writings*, Heidegger states that the scope of the treatise "has as its goal a fundamental elaboration of the question of Being" (67). This "fundamental elaboration" involves a "reawakening" or "recovery" of the question "What does 'Being' mean?"(71). Heidegger attempts this through a "destructuring" (63) of the Western ontological tradition by repositioning the aforementioned question onto the horizon of time understood as temporality (60). Without delving too far into what all this might mean, it is necessary to bring to the fore, for it is Heidegger's contention that this "task" (57) can only truly be tackled by first inquiring "from which being is the disclosure of Being to get its start" (47). Being must be disclosed through beings, for Heidegger states that "Being is always the Being of beings" (84). Moreover, Heidegger explains that the way to "work out the question of Being means to make a being--he who questions--perspicuous in his Being" (84); and, "[t]his being which we ourselves in each case are [is] formulated terminologically as Dasein" (47-48). Thus,

³ In addition, so is the question of Being itself.

Dasein “is that kind of existence that is always involved in an understanding of its Being⁴” (Editor, *BW* 48). In this sense, although Being be can referred to as a noun, it may be best understood in the infinitive, “to be,” for as a verb it is, necessarily, an action. Moreover, as a verb, Being is an active process and in a permanent state of becoming. Therefore, as Dasein is always ‘involved’ in an understanding of its being, this never-ending quest[ioning] echoes Said’s account of the intellectual’s activity insofar as, borrowing from Michel Foucault, it is a “relentless erudition” (Said xviii) that “involves a steady realism, an almost athletic rational energy, [...] an everlasting effort [that is] constitutively unfinished and necessarily imperfect” (23). Thus, the intellectual is “an entity like Dasein, whose being Heidegger describes as a continual ‘thrown projection’ (*geworfener Entwurf*), nothing at all like a finished, completed, or even in principle completable thing” (Carmen 287). To reiterate, as time becomes the possible horizon for any understanding of being, this conceptualization is easily likened to Said’s mandate that the intellectual needs to be constantly active and never idle. While the intellectual may envision an end, it is an ideal, not an attainable end. Like the horizon, it exists, but it can never be reached or arrested. As such, there is never an attainable end to an intellectual’s pursuit, lest he cease being an active intellectual. An intellectual’s duty is never done.

Furthermore, Heidegger continues that “[a]s long as Dasein is a being, it has never attained its ‘wholeness.’ But if it does, this gain becomes the absolute

⁴This is why Heidegger states that “ontically” (as a being), Dasein is “ontological” (questions Being) and is thus distinct from other beings. It seems that for Heidegger, this is Dasein’s fundamental nature: “it is ontically distinguished by the fact that in its Being this being is concerned about its very Being” (*BW* 53).

loss of Being-in-the-world.⁵ It is then never again to be experienced as a being” (*BT 220*) for “ending means stopping” (*BT 227*). In other words, whenever an intellectual stops questioning the status quo and becomes complacent and satisfied with his work/efforts, he stops “Being,” and Heidegger likens this to death. In the words of Said, “the major choice faced by the intellectual is whether to be allied with the stability of the victors and rulers—of the more difficult path—to consider that stability as a state of emergency threatening the less fortunate with the danger of complete extinction” (35). Considering that Said believes

the modern intellectual’s role [is to] [...] disput[e]the prevailing norms[...] precisely because the dominant norms are so intimately connected to (because commanded at the top by) the nation, which is always triumphalist, always in the position of authority, always exacting loyalty and subservience rather than intellectual investigation and re-examination. (36)

the intellectual should never be ‘allied with stability’ for “there is no doubt in [Said’s] mind that the intellectual belongs on the same side with the weak and unrepresented” (22).

As such, there should never be “solidarity before criticism” (32). Solidarity would impinge of the “intellectual’s creed of freedom” (17), thwarting and precluding his autonomous mobility through the demands of loyalty and

⁵ In very basic words, Being-in-the-world is Heidegger’s proxy for terms such as subject, object, consciousness, and world. As Theodore R. Schatzki eloquently delineates “[i]n a nutshell: whereas the subject was traditionally viewed as essentially outside and distinct from the world, in Heidegger it is analyzed as being-in-the-world. The point in the present context, however, is that, since individual subjects have been traditionally associated with individual people, Heidegger’s use of the term ‘subject’ reinforces the impression that Dasein refers to individuals” (84).

allegiance. Therefore, as Said highlights, in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, Stephen Dedalus's "entire early career is a seesaw between the blandishments of institutions" (16) and his intellectual "motto," the "Luciferian *non serviam*" (16). This refusal to engage is exemplary of how a true "intellectual will not adjust to domesticity or to humdrum routine" (17)—the intellectual should never consolidate under any institutional banner, abide by any norms, or be seduced by the comforts afforded by routine as "the whole point is to be embarrassing, contrary, even unpleasant" (12). As Said delineates

nothing in my view is more reprehensible than those habits of mind in the intellectual that induce avoidance, that characterize turning away from difficult and principled position which you know to be the right one, but which you decide not to take. You do not want to appear too political; you are afraid of seeming controversial; you need the approval of a boss or an authority figure; you want to keep a reputation for being balanced, objective, moderate; your hope is to be asked back, to consult, to be on a board or prestigious committee, and so to remain within the responsible mainstream; someday you hope to get an honorary degree, a big prize, perhaps even an ambassadorship. For an intellectual these habits are corrupting *par excellence*. (100-101)

If the intellectual subscribes or submits to any form of institutional regulation (and, by extension, censorship), such a gesture would be tantamount to, in Heideggerian rhetoric, death. The intellectual must roam freely in the world, and not be 'corrupted' by *a priori* obligations and stipulations ulterior to intellectual

work itself⁶ as the aforementioned pressures delineated by Said are corrosive to the intellectual's task.

Furthermore, returning to Heidegger, he maintains that as Dasein is an essentially temporal being, it is always a being engaged in the world and is ultimately a product of the world. Similarly, intellectuals, too, are “of their time” (Said 22) as “all of us live in society, and are members of a nationality with its own language, tradition, historical situation” (xv). As one is born into a language/culture/tradition/historical situation without one's active choosing, this “situation” (BT 233) is akin to what Heidegger calls Dasein's “everydayness” (BT 43). Heidegger maintains that Dasein's being is subject to “authenticity or inauthenticity or the modal undifferentiatedness (*Indifferenz*) of the two” (BT 232). As Taylor Carman explains, “modal undifferentiatedness, or indifference, between authenticity and inauthenticity is what Heidegger calls Dasein's ‘average everydayness,’ which is [...] neither good nor bad, but neutral, and which he insists must be the thematic starting point of a hermeneutic phenomenology, or ‘analytic,’ of human existence” (Carman 286):

Dasein must not be interpreted at the outset of the analysis in the differentiatedness (*Differenz*) of a particular way of existing, but rather uncovered in the undifferentiated character it has first and for the most part. This undifferentiatedness of Dasein's everydayness is not nothing, but rather a positive phenomenal character of this entity. All existing, such

⁶ Later on in the course of my argument, I will delineate how Said asserts how this mandatory freedom is a form of intellectual exile; a position which, I argue, is a manifestation of what Heidegger would consider to be Dasein in a mode of authenticity, an authentic-Self (all concepts which I will define in more detail).

as it is, flows from this mode of being, and back into it. We call this everyday undifferentiatedness of Dasein, averageness. (BT 43)

As such, this “average everydayness” is the “benign daily background out of which Dasein must emerge as intelligible to itself at all, in any particular way” (Carmen 286).

However, “average everydayness” can quickly turn into inauthenticity when Dasein “does things simply because that is what one does” (Inwood 27). As Zimmerman explains, “[e]verydayness refers to our usual tendency to conceal things, to regard them superficially, often accepting what ‘everyone’ (*das Man*, ‘they’) says about them” (44). As such, when Dasein “submits to the power of the ‘they’, it does, says, feels, and thinks simply because that is what ‘they’ do, say, feel, or think” (Inwood 51-2), for, “[e]ach of us [...] is the ‘they’ insofar as we glibly pass along ideas and opinions which we have not really made our own” (Zimmerman 48). Simply put, “the Self of everydayness is the ‘they’” (BT 296), and the ‘they’ is an inauthentic self. As Heidegger states,

[w]e take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they [man]* take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge; likewise, we shrink back from the ‘great mass’ as *they* shrink back; we find ‘shocking’ what *they* find shocking. The ‘they,’ which is nothing definite, and which all are, though not as the sum, prescribes the kind of Being of everydayness. (BT 164)

An example of the ‘they’ would be Said’s reference to *Father and Sons* whereby Ivan Turgenev depicts a “portrait of provincial Russia in the 1860s [as] idyllic and

uneventful [whereby] young men of property inherit their habits of life from their parents, they marry and have children, and life more or less moves on" (14); this life is "governed by families, the continuities of love and filial affection, the old natural way of doing things" (15). As such, the 'they' adhere blindly, even "pathetically" (16), to tradition, their 'inherited habits of life', mindlessly aligning themselves with the view of others; this is a perfect example of being inauthentic. For instance, Bazarov, the nihilist whom Said highlights as the "anarchic and yet highly concentrated figure" (14), "a self produced character, challenging routine, assailing mediocrity and cliché, asserting new scientific and unsentimental values that appear to be rational and progressive" (15), challenges Pavel, the father, to show him "a single institution of contemporary life, either in the family or in the social sphere, that doesn't deserve absolute and merciless rejection" (Turgenev 42), for tradition itself is merely a hub of "foreign" and "useless" words (38). Therefore, inauthenticity is a mode of Dasein in which "individuals are tranquilized by the apparent familiarity of the world" (Macey 24). For "[p]roximally Dasein is the 'they,' and for the most part remains so" (BT 167) until it actively and courageously arrests itself against the heritage of inauthentic everydayness. In this respect, an inauthentic self is one whose existence is naively perfunctory.

To shed further light on this complicated matter of inauthenticity, Said's examination of language can prove to be illuminating and useful. Said delineates how "every individual intellectual is born into a language and for the most part spends the rest of his or her life in that language, which is the principal medium of intellectual activity" (Said 27); however,

the particular problem of the intellectual [...] is that a language community in each society is dominated by habits of expression [that] already exists, one of whose main functions is to preserve the status quo, and to make certain that things go smoothly, unchanged, and unchallenged. (27)

Said draws on George Orwell's essay "Politics and the English Language" in which Orwell highlights how "clichés, tired metaphors, lazy writing [...] are instances of the 'decay of language'" (Said 27). As such, "the mind is numbed and remains inactive while language that has the effect of background music in a supermarket washes over consciousness, seducing it into passive acceptance of unexamined ideas and sentiments" (27-8). This "passive acceptance" is "the self of everyday Dasein" (BT 167), what Heidegger calls the "*they-self*" (BT 167), and must be distinguished from the "*authentic Self*—that is, from the Self which has been taken hold of in its own way" (BT 167). As such, an example of the authentic Self is how the intellectual is aware of the national biases and prohibitions latent and laced within its language; and yet, in spite of these obstacles, the intellectual "use[s] a national language not only for obvious reasons of convenience and familiarity but also because he or she hopes to impress on the language a particular sound, a special accent, and finally a perspective that is his or her own" (Said 27). As such, the intellectual must find his or her own voice within the morass "average everydayness" of inauthenticity.

What distinguishes authenticity from inauthenticity is awareness and choice: when Dasein becomes aware of its decisions, it becomes resolute, and this resolve is what Heidegger considers to be authenticity. As Heidegger

delineates, authentic existence is not “something which floats above [...] everydayness; existentially, it is only a modified way in which such everydayness is seized upon” (*BT* 224). Therefore,

[i]f Dasein discovers the world in its own way [*eigens*] and brings it close, if it discloses itself to be its own authentic Being, then this discovery of the ‘world’ and this disclosure of Dasein are always accomplished as a clearing-away of concealments and obscurities, as a breaking up of the disguises with which Dasein bars its own way. (*BT* 167)

Accordingly, Said claims that as the intellectual takes “risk[s] in order to go beyond the easy certainties provided us by our background, language, nationality, which so often shield us from the reality of others” (Said xiv), he is authentic. Therefore, despite the fact that intellectuals are “of their time, herded along by the mass politic of representations embodied by the information or media industry” (21-2), they are

capable of resisting those only by disputing the images, official narratives, justifications of power circulated by an increasingly powerful media—and not only media but whole trends of thought that maintain the status quo, keep things within an acceptable and sanctioned perspective on actuality—by providing what [C. Wright] Mills calls an unmasking or alternative versions in which to the best of one’s ability the intellectual tried to tell the truth. (22)

In the words of C. Wright Mills, the intellectual is

equipped to resist and to fight the stereotyping and consequent death of genuinely living things. Fresh perception now involves the capacity to unmask and to smash the stereotypes of vision and intellect with which modern communication [i.e. modern systems of representation] swamp us. (299)

As such, the intellectual must emerge and unmask the impediments of “vision and intellect” that strive to blind, delude, and sedate us into living an everyday, inauthentic existence.

This unmasking parallels Heidegger’s notion of truth. As Zimmerman concisely phrases, “unconcealment or revelation is the primordial meaning of truth (*aletheia*)” (21). Etymologically, *aletheia* can be traced back to the river Lethe (the river of forgetfulness) in Greek mythology. As such, truth is a “bringing-forth” (BT 53) out of oblivion and an emergence into the space of life; it is a matter of unconcealment--an active revealing. Therefore, as the intellectual “unearth[s] the forgotten” (Said 22), he speaks the truth. Hence, for the intellectual, “[t]he first imperative is to find out what occurred and then why, not as isolated events but as part of an unfolding history” (99). In trying to ‘unfold’ history, the intellectual attempts to bring out of concealment the truth imbued and ensconced in history (not to mention the injustice perpetuated within the present) and does so by questioning “patriotic nationalism, corporate thinking, and a sense of class, radical or gender privilege” (xiii), showing how nothing is “natural or god-given” (33), but rather “constructed, manufactured, even in some cases invented” (33). For the intellectual, this process of uncovering is facilitated by a

“kind of consciousness that is skeptical, engaged, unremittingly devoted to rational investigation and moral judgment” (22) as they are the elect few equipped with the “capacity for thought and judgment” (29) making them “suitable for representing the best thought—culture itself—and making it prevail” (29).

Accordingly, Said stresses that the intellectual is someone who is “endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public” (11), as his “*raison d’être* is to represent all those people and issues that are routinely forgotten or swept under the rug” (11), for “in the end it is the intellectual as a representative figure that matters--someone who visibly represents a standpoint of some kind, and someone who makes articulate representations to his or her public despite all sorts of barriers” (12). Therefore, the intellectual’s resolve is to bring-forth out of concealment by representing and speaking the truth. According to Heidegger, resolve/resolution is the epitome of authenticity⁷ for “[t]he essence of Dasein as an entity is its existence. Resoluteness ‘exists’ only as a resolution [*Entschluss*] which understandingly projects itself” (BT 345) and this “*resolution is precisely the disclosive projection and determination of what is factually possible at the time. [...] the existentiell indefiniteness of resolution never makes itself definite except in a resolution*” (BT 345). The German word for resolute, *entschlossen*, is related to disclose, *erschlossen*; as such, “resoluteness [*Entschlossenheit*] is a distinctive mode of Dasein’s disclosedness

⁷ It is important to note that Heidegger’s later thought on authenticity differs from his earlier one. Earlier Heidegger considered authenticity to be a resolution, whereas in his later years, he considered authenticity to be a releasement.

[Erchlossenheit]" (BT 297). Therefore, the intellectual is authentic insofar as he is resolute in his disclosure of the hegemony dominating his society. Moreover, he discloses *himself* in and through representation. Said delineates this process stating that all "intellectuals represent something to their audiences, and in doing so represent themselves to themselves" (Said xv). Therefore, an authentic intellectual is one who sees himself through the criticisms he puts forth against the prejudices of the society in which he struggles against.

As Heidegger clarifies, Dasein becomes resolute through a responsible "project of self-being" (BT 324); and this resolute condition is to "[withdraw] from the crowd, and to make one's decisions in view of one's life as a whole" (Inwood 83). Thus, resolution is to be distinct, to stand out, and ultimately suffer alienation and isolation: this is the price of living authentically. As Said delineates, being an intellectual is a "lonely condition," but it is "always a better one than a gregarious tolerance for the way things are" (xviii) for an "intellectual must speak out against that sort of gregariousness, and the personal cost be damned" (45). As such, a true intellectual is in a genre of "metaphorical" (52) exile, for they are "at odds with their society" (52) residing in a "state of never being fully adjusted" (53). In other words, "exile is the condition that characterizes the intellectual as someone who stands as a marginal figure outside the comforts of privilege, power, [and] being-at-homeness" (59). Being in this condition of exile, one is "never fully adjusted, always feeling outside the chatty, familiar world" (53)—a condition which is as authentic as it gets. For, as Heidegger describes,

[i]n light of the 'for-the-sake-of-which' of one's self-chosen potentiality-for-Being, resolute Dasein frees itself for its world. Dasein's resoluteness towards itself is what first makes it possible to let others who are with it 'be' in their own most potentiality-for-Being, and to co-disclose this potentiality in the solicitude which leaps forth and liberates. When Dasein is resolute, it can become the 'conscience' of Others. Only by authentically Being-their-Selves in resoluteness can people authentically be with one another—not by ambiguous and jealous stipulations and talkative fraternizing in the 'they' and in what 'they' want to undertake. (*BT* 344-5)

In other words, when Dasein becomes aware of its decisions it becomes resolute; and, in doing so, it is no longer ruled by the "they" and is free. However, at the same time, this resolution offers a mirror for other people to see and judge themselves. In so doing, the opportunity arises to have an authentic contact between Daseins rather than an inauthentic aggregation into the "they." As such, freedom is also freedom from the inauthentic vision which closes the drapery of the intellect. This liberated perception affords one the vision to "see things not simply as they are, but as they have come to be that way" (Said 60), and, this vision presents choice: as "an intellectual you are the one who can choose between actively representing the truth to the best of your ability and passively allowing a patron or an authority to direct you" (121).

As such, true intellectuals are not afforded the luxury to be inauthentic as theirs is a condition which necessitates perpetual awareness, decision, and resolve. In the words of Said, the "*exilic* intellectual does not respond to the logic

of the conventional but to the audacity of daring, and to representing change, to moving on, not standing still” (64). As such, like Dasein, an intellectual is in a constant state of self invention, reinvention, and representation, never being static or resting. In stasis, the intellectual ceases to not only be authentic, but to be, for “what you do as an intellectual has to be made up because you cannot follow a prescribed path” (62).

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