Chapter 6

Rethinking *Being and Time* as a Resource for Feminist Philosophy

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To say that the feminist reception of Heidegger's thought has been lukewarm, would be an understatement. Even the introduction to the volume of essays *Feminist Interpretations of Martin Heidegger* opens with the lines: '[o]ne might wonder how Heidegger could be useful to feminist theory, given that he was not primarily a political thinker. Nor was he *explicitly* concerned with social ontology, contemporary issues of sexual identity, moral epistemology, or social ethics' (Hunntington 2001, 1). Among his more sympathetic commentators one still has to go to great lengths to explain why a feminist appropriation of Heidegger is not only useful but also feasible. In many ways, these reactions are understandable. There appear to be multiple barriers. Firstly, Heidegger says very little about questions of gender and sexuality.[1] Although as Jacques Derrida observes, this silence is *itself* worthy of investigation (1983, 67). Secondly, as Sandra Lee Bartky asserted in the 1970s, Heidegger's thought is 'far too vacuous and abstract to serve the needs of any radical world-renewing project' (1970, 369). However, one cannot straightforwardly argue that his concerns are irrelevant to feminist philosophy, given that Heidegger's work touches on freedom, the complexity of the social world, technology, nature, and art – all themes over which much feminist ink has been spilt. A third and more significant factor may be his texts themselves. Dense, complex and employing a distinctive vocabulary, these works can, at first

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[1] *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* ([1928] 1984) is a notable exception.

blush, appear impenetrable and even incomprehensible to the untrained or unwilling reader.[2] Taken together, Heidegger's lack of attention to issues of gender and sexuality, his initially obscure and ambiguous writing style, the regular denouncements of his work from within and outside of feminist philosophy, and his much-discussed affiliation with the Nazi party,[3] have until recently rendered him and his work a largely 'no go' area for feminist scholars.

Where feminist engagement does exist, it tends to critique his philosophy, levelling some of the charges made above (Chanter 2001; Caputo 2001; Nagel 2001); or if a more extended, positive 'appropriation' of his ideas is undertaken, it usually concerns his later work, focussing on the themes of language, nature and art (Graybeal 1990; Bigwood 1993). Nevertheless, there is a small body of literature that looks not to critique Heidegger from a feminist viewpoint, but to explore what a Heideggerean perspective can contribute to feminist theory. Within this domain, one finds works which analyse Heidegger's influence on key feminist scholars, most notably Hannah Arendt and Simone de Beauvoir (Bernasconi 2002; Gothlin 2003; Bauer 2006; Knowles 2019; Garcia 2021); and work that openly makes the case for Heidegger's early philosophy as a resource for feminists, through analyses of the potential of concepts such as Dasein, *das Man,* (in)authenticity and Being-with, to enhance feminist projects (Holland 2001; Leland 2001; Bauer 2006; Guenther 2008; Freeman 2011; Knowles 2022). It is within this latter camp that this chapter aims to make a contribution, defending the idea that *Being and Time* is a fruitful and underused resource for feminist philosophy, and that the structural analysis of Dasein Heidegger offers in *Being and Time* is ripe for feminist appropriation. The condition of such an appropriation, however, is to take seriously the criticisms feminists have levelled at his work and show how they can be addressed.

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[2] See for example Rudolf Carnap's infamous dismissal of Heidegger's work (1932).
[3] As Mahon O'Brien (2010) argues, Heidegger's involvement with the Nazi party and its relation to his own philosophy is a complex and multi stranded issue. Accordingly, it cannot be dealt with quickly or easily. Whilst I am mindful of the issue when exploring the feminist possibilities of Heidegger's thought, I do not explicitly address it in this chapter. For an in-depth discussion of the relation between Heidegger's philosophy and his politics see O'Brien (2020).

Accordingly, this chapter is structured around three interrelated feminist objections to Heidegger's thought. Firstly, that the analytic of Dasein is the analysis of an exemplary masculine subject; secondly, that Heidegger neutralises gender at an ontological level; and thirdly that authentic modes of existence involve separating oneself from the social world. I treat each of these objections in turn. I begin in Section One by arguing that the analytic of Dasein should not be seen as the elaboration of an implicitly masculine exemplar, but rather that it is the articulation of a structural essence and, approached in these terms, we can see how feminist philosophers can and *have* put this structural essence to work. In Section Two, I argue that far from erasing the issue of gender at an ontological level, Heidegger's understanding of Dasein's neutrality speaks to an anti-essentialist critique of binary gender that has much in common with contemporary feminist work on the multiplicity and fluidity of gender. In Section Three I offer an interpretation of authenticity as a form of genuine self-understanding. I argue that grasped as such, authenticity can be understood to have much in common with Bartky's notion of developing a 'feminist consciousness' (1990), and can be read as a means by which to critique and transform role-based relations and 'inauthentic' understandings prescribed by *das Man*. By demonstrating how these three common objections can be addressed, I aim to show that far from being inimical to feminist theorising, *Being and Time* is a fruitful resource.

1. Feminists Critique Heidegger: Dasein as Implicitly Male

Being and Time is structured around an analysis of Dasein, Heidegger's term for the human being and the human way of Being. The text 'lay[s] bare the 'fundamental structures' of Dasein's existence so as to clarify the structural features that constitute our distinctive human mode of existence (Heidegger [1927] 1962, hereafter BT, 65). Among these fundamental structures are Being-in-the-World, articulated in terms of 'disclosedness' and the tripartite relation between mood, understanding and discourse; Being-with-Others, an understanding of human agents not as isolated beings, but as fundamentally bound up with others at an existential level; and

'mineness', the idea that Dasein is always 'mine to be in one way or another', namely, in the modes of authenticity or inauthenticity (BT, 68). Heidegger's analytic thus seeks to lay bare the distinctive and fundamental features of human existence *as such*, sketching a picture of human existence that is designed to apply universally.

This kind of universal project is one of which feminist philosophers have often been suspicious. Drawing on the work of Luce Irigaray, Tina Chanter puts the point thus: 'philosophy took itself to be neither male nor female. It assumed the neutrality of its discourse precisely because there was never any reason to suspect that its discourse could be other than it was' (Chanter 1995, 140). The primary feminist critique levelled at the analytic of Dasein in *Being and Time* stems from this worry. As Chanter puts it, 'Heidegger's ontology has pretentions to a neutrality and universality that I do not believe it can sustain' (Chanter 2001, 74). She continues,

> Heidegger['s] methodology rules out in advance any serious consideration of significant
> differences between individuals (whether those differences are specified in terms of
> gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, or some other culturally loaded difference). This
> characteristic of his methodology leads him to posit, almost by default, a culturally
> specific version of Dasein that he takes to be exemplary, but whose exemplarity is never
> made available for critical interrogation. (Chanter 2001, 74)

According to Chanter, Heidegger's attempt to sketch a universal human subject obscures not only sexual difference, but human difference as such. Given that feminist philosophies are united in their aim to end gender hierarchy, making gender difference as well of considerations of race, class and sexuality unthinkable within his ontology, does indeed seem like a significant barrier to any appropriation of Heidegger's philosophy for feminist ends. In Chanter's eyes, Heidegger does not furnish us with the outlines of a universal human subject, but a culturally specific, white, middle class, *masculine* subject. We find a similar objection levelled at the project of classical phenomenology and its methodologies by Sandra Bartky:

I found the project of classical phenomenology, namely, the analysis of the *a priori* and necessary structures of any possible consciousness, quite useless for my purposes. It was not any possible consciousness I was after, certainly not the "structures" in consciousness of a subject so "pure" as to be elevated above the "mere" determinants of gender and history. (Bartky 1990, 1-2).

Bartky's comments echo some of Chanter's concerns regarding the universal analysis of human existence offered by classical phenomenologists, and the way such a project may obscure the investigation of a specifically feminine subject. But Bartky's critique of this classical project also contains a first response to Chanter's objection.

1.1 Universal Exemplars vs Universal Structures

Where Chanter sees Heidegger as offering an 'exemplar' of the ideal human subject, Bartky understands classical phenomenologists, like Heidegger, to be sketching the 'necessary structures' of any possible subject. To offer an exemplar is to undertake a detailed analysis of one particular subject and hold it up as the subject *par excellence*, showing how it embodies the essence of what it is to be a subject. By contrast, to sketch the necessary structures of any possible subject, is to attempt to think across various subjects, to dig down beyond the particularities, and identify the underlying structures that shape and determine the human way of Being as such. If one offers an exemplar, those of us who do not fit the model are seen to be deficient in some way, or otherwise we must suppress those elements of ourselves that do not cohere with the exemplar in order to be understood as legitimate subjects (Caldwell 2002, 20-21). However, if one seeks the necessary structures of any human subject, finding subjects who do not embody the structures that have been identified as universal, should not involve seeing such *subjects* as deficient, rather a deficiency is revealed in what has been positioned as universal.[4] As I see it, Heidegger's ontology

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[4] Or at least a much stronger argument will be needed for why these subjects count as deficient, rather than threatening the project itself.

seeks to offer not an exemplary human subject, against which all other subjects should be measured. Rather, what he provides is a structural essence of human existence that can be instantiated in various different ways.[5]

This project is attested to by the centrality of the ontic / ontological distinction in *Being and Time*. Heidegger understands himself to be undertaking an ontological analysis of Dasein, or, as he also terms it, an '*existential analytic of Dasein*' (BT, 34), 'existential' being the term for an ontological analysis when it pertains to Dasein's existence. The existential analysis of Dasein seeks to get clear about the deep, universal structures of Dasein's existence. These are features that are common to all Dasein as a way of Being, regardless of the specific ontical or '*existentiell*' content of the existence of any particular Dasein. Ontical facts may affect the particular way Dasein encounters the world, but they nevertheless rely upon and reflect the fundamental ontological structures of Dasein's existence, which make these ways of Being-in, and encountering the world, possible. Dasein is not primarily an entity. Although we can talk ontically about Dasein in the way this mode of existence is instantiated in different human beings, 'the ontological analytic of this entity always requires that existentiality be considered beforehand' (BT, 33). Which is to say, Heidegger is aiming to offer something more fundamental than an exemplar of Dasein. He wants to uncover Dasein as a way of Being *as such*. Indeed, he is critical of investigations that focus specifically on exemplars, because they often conceal what is more fundamental.[6] If we read the project of classical phenomenology – and Heidegger's project in particular – as something that seeks to articulate a *structural essence* of human existence, one that can be instantiated in various different ways (albeit ways he does not discuss), rather than offering an *exemplary* model of the human agent, some of Chanters concerns fall away.

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[5] I am indebted to Anthony Vincent Fernandez (2022) for explicitly articulating this distinction between two approaches to phenomenology: the distinction between focusing on exemplars versus what he calls a 'schematic' or what I call a structural approach.

[6] See for example Heidegger's discussion of epistemology, which focuses on knowing as an exemplary mode of Being-in the world (BT, 86-90). Focussing on 'knowing' as our primary relation to the world conceals the more fundamental way we are *in* and related to the world, which makes such an epistemic relation to the world possible.

Both Chanter and Bartky object that Heidegger ignores the concrete realities of our particular existence, but if we understand Heidegger's project as seeking to offer a structural analysis of Dasein's Being, we can see why such an objection is misplaced. Although Heidegger offers an analysis of the human agent as Dasein, he does so in order to reach his ultimate aim: an understanding of the meaning of Being (and not just the Being of us as human agents). The analytic of Dasein's 'limits are thus determined. It cannot attempt to provide a complete ontology of Dasein' (BT, 38) because 'the analytic of Dasein remains wholly oriented towards the guiding task of working out the question of Being' (BT, 38). The elision of concrete differences is thus not an oversight, but a deliberate strategy.

However, one could still protest that in order to understand human existence, we need to attend to differences such as race, gender, class and so on, that are so central to our lives. Does Heidegger's ontology rule out any consideration of difference? I think not. Although Heidegger is very clear that he does not want to provide an 'anthropology' (BT, 37, 38, 71 following), which would involve attending to and elaborating concrete features at the level of 'ontic' analysis – that is at the level of 'beings' – he does not see his project as incompatible with such an analysis. As he puts it,

> The existential analytic of Dasein comes before any psychology or anthropology, and certainly before any biology. *While these too are ways in which Dasein can be investigated*, we can define the theme of our analytic with greater precision if we distinguish it from these. (BT, 71 my emphasis).

We can understand the ontology of *Being and Time* as providing a *framework* with which any ontic study of Dasein can take place.[7] Which is to say, Heidegger's project of fundamental ontology illuminates the structural features of human existence that must be in place such that we can be-in the world in the way that we are. This is a project that is undertaken without providing the

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[7] An explicit example of this use of Heidegger's ontology can be found in the work of Køster and Fernandez (2021), which draws on Heidegger to outline a programme for phenomenologically guided qualitative research.

analysis of any particular subject. Dasein is not an exemplar, Dasein is only an articulation of the fundamental structures of human existence: temporality, intentionality, Being-in-the-world and so on. It is in this sense that Heidegger's project can be understood as offering what I refer to above as a 'structural essence' of Dasein.

1.2 Dasein's Structural Essence and Feminist Analyses

A structural essence can be filled out in many different ways. It does not tell us what Dasein is *like*, or what Dasein *is*, as something fixed and static. This is where some of the complexity lies in interpreting what kind of picture of human existence Heidegger is offering. In *Being and Time,* Heidegger seems to be both resisting essentialist metaphysics at the same time as offering something akin to an essence of Dasein – the fundamental features or structures that make Dasein distinctive as a way of Being. The analysis Heidegger offers in *Being and Time* is not simply an alternative, for example, to Aristotle's definition of man as a rational animal (BT, 47). Such a definitional project remains confined within a substance ontology, bound by inappropriate conceptions of Dasein as a thing in which certain properties inhere (BT, 32, 73). Dasein is not fundamentally a thing or a subject with certain properties that make it what it is. Rather, 'Dasein *is* its possibility' (BT, 68). Dasein has no fixed essence, 'the essence of Dasein lies in its existence' (BT, 67). As Daniel Dahlstrom argues, Heidegger is sceptical of any traditional notion of essence as '*essentia*' (2013, 65). In a traditional sense, then, Heidegger offers an anti-essentialist picture of the human agent. However, there are nevertheless certain 'structural' features that must be in place such that Dasein can *be* its possibility.

Now one might still object that these structures themselves are marked by male bias and are culturally and situationally specific, but this seems like a much harder task. Indeed, many of the structures Heidegger identifies seem to have much in common with the socio-relational picture of the self offered by feminist philosophers and theorists of relational autonomy. The existentially co-constitutive relation between Dasein and world (BT, 445; Heidegger [1925] 1985,

202), the relational nature of Dasein's existence articulated in Being-with-Others (BT, 162), and the fundamentally social nature of Dasein's existence expressed in the idea that *das Man* is an 'essential *existentiale'* (BT, 168) can be read as not only compatible with feminist understandings of the self, but as useful and complementary resources for furthering such a socio-relational picture (Freeman 2011).

If we understand Heidegger's philosophical project as offering only a structural essence, we can see more clearly how feminist philosophers can and *have* put his insights to work. Although Bartky argues at the outset of *Femininity and Domination* that she found the project of classical phenomenology 'quite useless' for her purposes, later in the text she demonstrates precisely how classical phenomenological work – such as Heidegger's – can be employed for feminist ends. In the chapter 'Shame and Gender', Bartky draws directly on Heidegger's understanding of mood as an *existentiale* of Dasein. For Heidegger, moods are not fleeting emotions or subjective psychological states. They are what attune us to the world and enable us to be in relation to it (BT, 176). Moods are necessary for our Being-in-the-world, they are a pervasive aspect of our existence, 'we are never free of moods' (BT, 175), and they play a key role in disclosing our situation and the specific way we are 'in' the world (BT, 174-5). In this respect, moods and Dasein's fundamental attunement to the world, can be understood as a central aspect of Dasein's structural essence.

In 'Shame and Gender', Bartky takes these understandings of the structural and foundational nature of moods for human existence and demonstrates how these insights can be used to illuminate the concrete situation of her female students who, she argues, are attuned to themselves and their situation through a mood of shame.[8] This gendered shame, Bartky argues, is 'a profound mode of disclosure both of self and situation' (1990, 85), affecting how the students

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[8] I focus here on Bartky's text as just one example of the uses feminist philosophers have made of the structural essence of Dasein. For other examples see Beauvoir on '*mit sein*' ([1949]2011), as well as my own work which draws on Heidegger's ontology to illuminate how women can be complicit in their own unfreedom (Knowles 2019; 2021a; 2022), and how 'disclosedness' can be employed to illuminate what it is to give testimony on gendered violence (Knowles 2021b).

understand themselves, their educational situation and their relation to their peers. She describes how shame affects their embodiment and their comportment in the classroom (1990, 88-90), and demonstrates how the Heideggerean concept of mood does better than the understanding of moods we find in moral psychology or works of political philosophy for illuminating what it is to be a woman in the world (1990, 85). As she puts it, 'the shame of some of these women was not a discrete occurrence, but a perpetual attunement, the pervasive affective taste of a life' (1990, 96).

Far from obscuring the specificities of our concrete existences, Bartky's text demonstrates how, approaching *Being and Time* as offering a structural essence of human existence – even if such an understanding is only implicit in her analysis – enables the analytic of Dasein to be put to work to illuminate the concrete situations of women and other minoritized groups (1990, 92). Rather than 'rul[ing] out in advance any serious consideration of significant differences between individuals' as Chanter claims, we can observe these differences in the varying ways the fundamental structures of Dasein's existence are instantiated by different individuals and groups. If, for example, we recognise the fundamental role of moods in human existence, we can then proceed to investigate which moods more commonly characterise certain groups (Bartky 1990, 84); how this affects the ways of Being-in-the-world of such groups, directing self-understandings and relations to others (Kosofsky Sedgwick 2003, 37); and how and why the mood of shame often attaches to minoritized groups (Ahmed 2004, 106). Although Heidegger does not offer this particularist analysis himself, his work is not incompatible with such projects. His analytic includes the tools and terminology to makes such distinctions in the way he encourages us to think about different modes of existence (BT, 68). That is, the different ways in which the fundamental ontological structures of our existence can be instantiated in various ways at the ontic, concrete level of analysis.

2. Approaching Gender Through a Heideggerean Lens: Dasein's Neutrality

So far, I have focussed my arguments primarily on establishing that there is nothing that immediately rules out Heidegger's ontology for appropriation by feminist scholars. I have also highlighted that some of his insights into the fundamental structures that enable us to exist as the beings that we are, can and *have* been employed to understand women's situation. But one might still wonder whether there is anything distinctive in Heidegger's ontology that means it is not only compatible with feminist projects, but actively useful for them. This is the question to which I now turn.

A key concern of feminist philosophy is how to do justice to the idea that gender is central to our sense of ourselves, to social life and our ways of Being-in-the-world, without slipping into gender essentialism: the idea that maintaining this claim commits us to identifying a certain property, trait or characteristic that all women share and that grounds our membership in a particular gendered group.[9] Efforts to identify such a property have historically been critiqued by feminist scholars both on the basis that such arguments have traditionally been used to exclude women from certain fields by identifying a supposedly fundamental trait that renders women unsuitable for certain tasks, domains and ways of thinking (Lloyd 1993); as well as being challenged on the basis of intersectional concerns, and the argument that there is no one, unifying property, trait or characteristic that all women share, given the various ways women are positioned in relation to other identity categories such as race, sexuality, disability and class (hooks 1984; Stone 2004).

We have already seen that Heidegger's ontology in *Being and Time* will also be critical of this kind of essentialist project. As Kevin Aho puts it, 'because Heidegger's ontology undermines traditional substance ontology, it is critical towards the essentialist category "sex"' (Aho 2009, 55). To endorse a Heideggerean ontology is to reject biological gender essentialism because 'for

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[9] For a recent attempt to resolve this issue see Witt (2011).

Heidegger, human beings should not be interpreted fundamentally in terms of the fixed objective "presence" of body parts' (Aho 2009, 55). Heidegger makes it clear that the 'neutrality' of the term 'Dasein' is not coincidental, but is 'essential, because the interpretation of this being must be carried out prior to every factual concretion' (Heidegger [1928] 1984, 136). Every claim Heidegger makes about Dasein is meant to be a claim that pertains to all people, regardless of factical matters such as gender, race, class, sexuality, nationality etc. Heidegger further clarifies Dasein's neutrality in relation to gender and sexual difference by arguing that 'the term 'man' was not used for that being which is the theme of the analysis. Instead, the neutral term Dasein was chosen… [t]his neutrality also indicates that Dasein is neither of the two sexes' (Heidegger [1928] 1984, 136). In many ways, this conscious neutrality is laudable and sits in stark contrast to the work of other classical scholars such as Rousseau, Kant and Hegel who explicitly comment on the differences between the sexes and offer a picture of the female subject as not fully human, in the way she exists primarily as the complement to man (Lloyd 1993).

However, appeals to neutrality (re)introduce the worries we have seen articulated by Chanter and Bartky. We may be concerned that the assertion of neutrality at an ontological level goes too far in ruling out considerations of gender and sex *per se*, thus trivialising the effects they have on the way human agents are in, and opened onto, the world. Rosalyn Diprose, for example, argues that to retreat into neutrality is to do a disservice to women, as it obscures their difference and attempts to subsume them under a male norm (Diprose 1994, 71). She argues that positing neutrality in discussions of gender ignores the oppression suffered by women in a society founded upon gender hierarchy (1994, 65). Moreover, she suggests that such a move does women a further injustice by suggesting they must deny the harm done to them and embrace a system of neutrality (1994, 71). Although neutralising sex and gender at an ontological level might guard against problematic forms of gender essentialism, one might worry that such a move trivialises these issues and fails to appreciate the importance of gender for our existence. We have already seen in our brief discussion of Bartky's work, one example of how the

ontological structures of Dasein can be examined in their concrete, ontic instantiations in order to illuminate the everyday situation of women. But does the ontological neutrality of Dasein ultimately jeopardise this project?

2.1 Gender Neutrality, but not as we know it

Although Diprose's comments may bear weight with regard to accounts which attempt to replace considerations of difference with a 'faulty neutrality' (Scott 1988, 39), I argue that Heidegger's understanding of neutrality in fact aids the feminist project by providing a basis on which to critique binary notions of gender, whilst doing justice to the idea that gender is a central aspect of our existence.

In his essay '*Geschlecht*', Derrida argues that Heidegger neutralises gender as duality, but not the possibility of gender as an ontological constituent of Dasein. Heidegger himself explicitly states that neutrality 'is neither of the two sexes. But [that] here sexlessness is not the indifference of an empty void' (Heidegger [1928] 1984, 136). Derrida takes this to mean that neutrality is not to be interpreted in terms of sexlessness at all. Owing to Heidegger's characterisation of neutrality as a 'primordial positivity and potency' (Heidegger [1928] 1984, 137), neutrality can instead be understood as a 'pre-differential, rather than a pre-dual, sexuality' (Derrida 1983, 72). Following Heidegger's lead, Derrida argues that the gender neutrality of Dasein should be understood in terms of dispersion,[10] dissemination and multiplication rather than as a 'unitary, homogenous, or undifferentiated' whole which is then divided into the two sexed instantiations of Dasein one finds in the world (Derrida 1983, 72). This understanding of gender has much in common with post-structuralist accounts found in the work of thinkers like Judith Butler who emphasise the 'fluid possibilities of such [gender] categories once they are no

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[10] Derrida claims that dispersion is not only the clarification of an inauthentic way of Being, but is 'marked *twice*, as a general structure of Dasein and as a mode of inauthenticity' (1983, 71). *Zerstreuung* as a general structure of Dasein's Being is said to be an 'originary dispersion', which grounds Dasein's ability to concern itself with a multiplicity of objects (Derrida 1983, 65-66).

longer linked causally or expressively to the presumed fixity of sex' (Butler 1999, 128). Similarly, Derrida takes the 'positivity' Heidegger associates with neutrality to mean that it is 'sexual division itself which leads to negativity' (1983, 72). He concludes that Heidegger's ontology neutralises 'less sexuality itself than the "generic" mark of sexual difference, belonging to one of *two* sexes' (1983, 82). Interpreted in this way, we can see that Heidegger's neutrality doesn't erase considerations of gender as a fundamental aspect of our existence,[11] rather what it neutralises is thinking of gender or sexual difference in binary terms.

Far from being an obstacle to a feminist appropriation of Heidegger's work, the neutrality of Dasein's Being can function as an enabling factor for feminist critique. As bell hooks argues, 'either/ or dualistic thinking…is the central ideological component of all systems of domination in Western society' (1984, 29). If Dasein is fundamentally neutral at an ontological level, in the way described above, then we can both recognise the importance of gender to our existence, while being critical of binary and essentialist ideologies and the social forms they generate. Any ontic social organisation, such as patriarchy, that relies on fixed, binary, oppositional understandings of sex and gender can be critiqued on the basis that such understandings and social arrangements fail to reflect Dasein's ontological neutrality. Which is to say, Dasein's ontological neutrality understood in terms of possibility, dispersion and multiplicity, represents an alternative source of intelligibility regarding how we are gendered to the binary understandings proliferated at the ontic level in the social world of *das Man*.

Of course, Heidegger does not make these arguments himself, but his ontology lends itself to these conclusions in the way he speaks of our inauthentic existence in *das Man* 'obscur[ing] and 'cover[ing] up' more genuine understandings of ourselves and the world (BT, 165). Applying these insights in relation to gender, means that we can highlight the way the public understandings of gender found in *das Man* often 'level down' and 'cover up' (BT, 165)

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[11] Given that Dasein's ontological neutrality is spelled out specifically in relation to its articulation with regard to issues of sex and gender (Heidegger [1928] 1984, 136).

more primordial understandings of our gender neutrality, which are not characterised by an 'empty void', but by multiplicity and possibility. *Das Man* is 'insensitive to every difference of level and of genuineness' (BT, 165), and so replaces more nuanced, complex understandings of our gendered Being with simplistic binary understandings of gender, which 'get passed off as something familiar and accessible to everyone' (BT, 165). Developing the ontic implications of Heidegger's ontological analysis in this way, means calling into question binary understandings of gender and claims that women are *essentially* more predisposed to certain tasks, ways of thinking or Being-in-the-world. Rather than obscuring the plight of women, then, the ontological neutrality of Dasein provides an impetus to critique and transform women's concrete situation so that it more accurately reflects what we are at an ontological level, and so that we can all live more authentically as Dasein.

3. Authenticity and Self-Understanding: A Project of Social Critique

Heidegger's conception of authenticity is often critiqued on similar grounds to those noted above: that it is the articulation of a male norm, an agent set up in a 'masculinist, agonistic game where a solitary (heroic) player makes his decisive move in silence in order to exist authentically' (Nagel 2001, 296). Such analyses have led feminist commentators to argue that authenticity is too individualistic, reflecting masculine norms of independence and autonomy at the expense of taking seriously the relations we have with other people (Chanter 2001; Nagel 2001). As I have argued elsewhere, this asocial understanding of authenticity cannot be accurate given that Being-with and *das Man* are both fundamental *existentiales* (Knowles 2017). To read authenticity through the lens of an individualistic existentialism and an idea of radical freedom is, as Charles Guignon notes, a mistake (1993, 268). However, the motivations for this kind of analysis are understandable given the way Heidegger describes Dasein's Being in the social world in terms of a situation where a 'dictatorship of *das Man* is unfolded' (BT, 164) and Dasein stands 'in

subjection to Others' (BT, 164). From these statements it is clear to see why one might think authenticity involves escaping such a social situation and striking out on one's own.

However, although authenticity may involve 'clearing away [the] concealments and obscurities' that plague us in inauthentic modes of existence, a better way of making sense of both the fundamentally social nature of our existence (BT, 168) and the possibility of authentic modes of Being, I argue, is to interpret authenticity as a mode of Being in which we understand ourselves more clearly as Dasein.[12] This interpretation fits better with the logic of Heidegger's ontology and enables us to see more clearly the feminist potential in this concept. On this reading, becoming authentic does not mean acceding to an individualistic male norm, or separating oneself from others and the social world. Nor does it mean ignoring or obscuring difference. Rather, it entails better understanding ourselves, the social world and the barriers that exist for living out an ontological understanding of ourselves as free possibility (BT, 232), by taking up and working out our Being as an 'issue' for us (BT, 32), rather than turning away from this.

3.1 Authentic and Inauthentic Modes of Being

Although it is not the case that inauthentic Dasein is somehow not yet Dasein, or that one only becomes Dasein when one is authentic, it is the case that authentic Dasein manifests its Being as Dasein in a more explicit way than inauthentic Dasein. This is because authentic Dasein grasps itself more explicitly as Dasein.[13] This does not mean that authenticity is simply a matter of 'knowing' my Being has a certain structure. Rather, it is a matter of manifesting an understanding of my Being in my way of Being. Authenticity is the extent to which I have become 'transparent' to myself. 'Transparency', Heidegger argues, is 'the sight which is related primarily and on the

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[12] This interpretation finds support in passages such as 'the meaning of Dasein's Being is not something that is other than and 'outside of' itself, but is the self-understanding Dasein itself' (BT, 372). Sacha Golob implies a similar understanding of authenticity when he argues that 'authentic agents... "liberate" their own being' (2014, 250).
[13] Heidegger argues that inauthentic Dasein misunderstands its own nature, 'existing primarily in forgetfulness of its own self' ([1927] 1982, 170).

whole to existence' (BT, 186). That is, it is a way of understanding ourselves that gets to the heart of what we fundamentally are. Or, in the words of Beatrice Han-Pile, 'transparency is Dasein's pre-reflective grasp of its own ontological make-up' (2013, 303). In authentic modes of Being Dasein is more transparent to itself and manifests this in its way of Being, whereas in inauthentic modes of Being Dasein's understanding of itself is opaque (BT, 187).

Understood in this way, to be authentic means to understand oneself in terms of the structural essence outlined above: Being-in-the-world, temporality, intentionality, being in a mood, Being-with-Others and so on. But grasping ourselves as Dasein in these terms also means grasping that we cannot speak of our essence in any more substantial terms than these because, as we have seen, 'the essence of Dasein lies in its existence' (BT, 67). There is no pre-ordained way Dasein should be, no specific possibility upon which Dasein should embark simply in virtue of being Dasein. Rather, Dasein is essentially a 'not-yet', it is characterised by possibility and could always be other than it currently is (BT, 185-6). Taken in a feminist context, we can see how this notion of authenticity builds on what was said at the end of Section Two. Authenticity, as an alternative and more genuine understanding of ourselves, can act as a basis for critiquing the limited and limiting self-understandings prescribed to women by the *das Man* of everyday patriarchal social contexts.[14]

As I have argued elsewhere, the everyday world of *das Man* Heidegger describes in *Being and Time* is not inherently inauthentic, although Heidegger elaborates it in its inauthentic form (Knowles 2017). It is not that sociality *as such* is constitutive of inauthentic ways of Being, but rather that certain forms of social life can lead to inauthenticity because of the way they 'disburden' Dasein of the responsibility of understanding itself and its world (BT, 165). In such

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[14] Authenticity can function in this way because it is a possibility we always carry with us. More authentic understandings of ourselves are 'uncovered' rather than created (BT, 167). In contrast to some dominant interpretations, I do not see authentic and inauthentic modes of existence as mutually exclusive. Rather, I follow Michael Lewis in understanding Dasein as existing on a spectrum, 'stretched between' the poles of inauthenticity and authenticity (2005, 15), and thus always characterised by both, albeit in varying degrees. For more on this point see Knowles (2017).

modes, Dasein primarily grasp itself and its world in terms of 'public' understandings by which 'everything gets obscured, and what has thus been covered up gets passed off as something familiar and accessible to everyone' (BT, 165). Such inauthentic modes of Being-in and understanding the world are characterised by an attunement in which Dasein becomes 'stubborn [*Versteifung*] about the existence one has achieved' (BT, 308 translation modified). This stubbornness, as William Blattner argues, leads to a misinterpretation, namely, 'taking the possibilities that the public insists upon as being somehow unchallengeable' (2013, 326). Accordingly, in inauthentic modes of Being, Dasein's more primordial and authentic understanding of itself in terms of possibility and a 'not-yet' is covered up.

Whereas to understand oneself authentically is to understand oneself in term of 'possibilities as possibilities' (BT, 185), to grasp oneself inauthentically is to grasp oneself in terms of the fixity of the public, levelled down, socially available self-understandings and social roles made available by *das Man* (BT, 165). As Hans Bernhard Schmid argues, to understand oneself primarily in terms of social roles involves 'a basic self-misapprehension, or self-misunderstanding', as 'being oneself [i.e. being authentic] and playing a social role are in a fundamental tension with each other' (Schmid 2017, 264). Whereas social roles provide us with fixed conventions, rules and norms, which can direct one's behaviour and tell us who we are and how we should live; to grasp oneself authentically as Dasein is to recognise that there are 'no norms binding on Dasein qua Dasein' (Golob 2014, 239), and thus that there is nothing that can ultimately determine who we should be and how we should live our lives.

This analysis does not entail that becoming authentic means jettisoning all role-based self-understandings, but it does involve recognising their contingency and that they cannot be totalising with regard to our existence.[15] Such an insight enables us to recognise that there is always a distance between who we are and the social roles we perform. As Jonathan Lear puts it,

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[15] Stephen Mulhall makes a similar point: '[a]uthenticity is a matter of the way in which one relates to one's roles, not a rejection of any and all roles' (2005, 73).

'we do not fit without remainder into socially available practical identities' (2011, 50), a fact which can help make sense of the discomfort we can feel with regard to gender- and social- role based understandings that are supposed to say something about who we fundamentally are, but that seem to be at odds with our sense of ourselves. For example, in her book *Gender Outlaw,* Kate Bornstein writes: 'I didn't feel like I was the gender I'd been assigned. I felt there was something wrong with me, something sick and twisted inside me, something very very bad about me' (1994, 12). One way of explaining this feeling in Heideggerian terms is to note the tension between authentic self-understandings, which manifest in terms of possibility and a lack of fixity, and the static categorisations made available for self-understanding in our social contexts. One could argue that what Bornstein is articulating here in Heideggerian terms is a confrontation with the anxiety one feels when one encounters the 'break down' and insufficiency of publicly available, social understandings for capturing who we are (BT, 232). Moreover, the Heideggerian explanation situates the deficiency not in Bornstein herself, but in the socially available self-understandings for capturing who and how she is. This distinction between authentic and inauthentic self-understanding can thus not only serve a descriptive and explanatory function, but also a therapeutic one.

3.2 The Feminist Credentials of Authentic Self-Understandings

The idea that who and what we fundamentally are is possibility, is an insight Heidegger shares with feminist philosophers. In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir argues for the importance of centring possibility in understandings of woman:

> Woman is not a fixed reality but a becoming; she has to be compared with man in her becoming; that is, her possibilities have to be defined: what skews the issues so much is that she is being reduced to what she was, to what she is today, (Beauvoir [1949] 2011, 45-46)

For Heidegger, as for Beauvoir, the human agent is not a being, but a *becoming* (BT, 287), defined by possibility and a 'not-yet'. To understand oneself fundamentally in terms of possibility means being future directed, recognising that things do not have to be as they currently are, which is a foundational tenet of any feminist philosophy that seeks women's liberation and an end to gender hierarchy.[16]

But the significance of possibility in relation to our self-understanding is not simply the recognition that things could be different, it also articulates a particular way of Being-in and relating to the world, that I argue is productive for feminist projects. In Heidegger's ontology, understanding is fundamentally bound up with existence. Understanding refers not only to something in my mind, but also to some practical way of Being-in-the-world: Understanding is, Heidegger argues, 'a competence… over Being as existing' (BT, 183). This means that the way I understand myself affects the way I exist (BT, 283), and the way I exist affects the way I understand myself (BT, 385). Given this characterisation of understanding, becoming authentic and understanding oneself authentically cannot be something that happens in isolation from the world. Whereas Heidegger is often read as indicating that in authentic modes of existence we *extricate* ourselves from the social world, I argue that a change in my understanding is better understood as a change in the way I am in, and relate to, the world, and specifically the social world. Indeed, Heidegger argues that '*Authentic Being-one's-Self* does not rest upon an exceptional condition of the subject, a condition that has been detached from *das Man; it is rather an existentiell modification of das Man – of das Man as an essential existentiale'* (BT, 168). Rather than an individualistic project of social escape, I argue that authenticity is more productively understood in line with the critical, but engaged relation to the world Bartky describes in terms of developing a 'feminist consciousness' (1990, 11-22).

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[16] For Bartky, understanding that one's situation is not natural, inevitable or inescapable, and instead grasping the possibility that it can be other than it is, is central to having a feminist consciousness (1990, 14).

Like the move to more authentic modes of Being, developing a feminist consciousness involves not just a change in ways of *thinking*, but a change in ways of Being-in-the-world: 'the feminist changes her *behaviour*. She makes new friends; she responds differently to people and events… [sometimes she alters] her whole style of life' (1990, 11), and it is a change precipitated by a new understanding of the social world. Specifically, 'social reality is revealed as *deceptive'* (Bartky 1990, 17). Similarly, as we have seen, authentic modes of existence involve 'clearing away concealments and obscurities [and] breaking up… disguises' (BT, 167), but this does not involve transcending the social world, it involves relating to it in a new way. Just as Bartky's feminist is 'no more aware of different things than other people; they are aware of the same things differently' (Bartky 1990, 14), in authentic modes of Being Dasein continues to appreciate *das Man's existentiale* role in making possible shared intelligibility, but without regarding *das Man* as the ultimate source of intelligibility (Knowles 2017). We thus develop a new relation to the social world in which we rid ourselves of the stubborn, unquestioning and distorting relation to public understandings that served to conceal rather than promote the understandings of ourselves in terms of possibility, and we ready ourselves for taking responsibility for who we are and how we live our lives.[17]

3.3 Authenticity and Social Transformation

Both authenticity and the development of a feminist consciousness involve coming to see new possibilities for inhabiting and relating to one's social context. For Bartky this is an explicitly social process, involving feelings of 'solidarity' with others and the recognition of 'possibilities for liberating collective action' (1990, 21). As I shall argue, authenticity can also be understood in

[17] For more on this point see Knowles (2021a). Steven Crowell also emphasises that the possibility opened up by the breakdown of everyday modes of existence is the possibility of 'being-responsible', and offers a similarly socially connected picture of authentic modes of Being, where 'to be responsible is to be answerable or accountable *to others'* (2013, 216).

this way: as a mode of Being in which we not only endeavour to makes changes for *ourselves,* but also help to bring about changes that enable us *all* to live more authentically as Dasein.

To discover myself as Dasein in authentic modes of Being is not only to make a discovery about my own existence, but about human existence *as such.* Authentic modes of existence not only direct Dasein towards its ownmost potentiality-for-Being, but 'makes Dasein, as Being-with, have some understanding of the potentiality-for-Being of Others' (BT, 309). To discover oneself as Dasein, is thus also to discover the other as Dasein and relate to them in a new way. This is indicated in Heidegger's discussion of solicitude and its different modes. In inauthentic modes, our care like our inauthentic self-understanding, is directed only to what the other does – the roles they perform or the projects they are engaged in (BT, 158). By contrast, in authentic modes, we are concerned with 'the existence of the Other' (BT, 159), i.e. the other as Dasein. Such a relation is described as 'liberat[ing]' because it does not dominate the other by defining them in terms of a fixed project or role (BT, 159). Rather, it is a mode in which we relate to the other authentically, as someone with an existence – like ours – that is unfixed, undecided and characterised by possibility. Whereas in inauthentic modes of Being-with, Dasein 'leaps in and dominates' the other; in authentic modes, Dasein 'leaps forth and liberates', 'free[ing] the Other in his freedom for himself' (BT, 159).

As we have seen, for Heidegger, understanding cannot be separated from ways of Being-in-the-world, and thus if Dasein understands the other *as Dasein* and thus as essentially free and undetermined, Dasein will not be able to engage in relations with others that do not reflect such an understanding of the other's existential freedom.[18] In authentic modes of Being, when Dasein has understood both itself and the other as Dasein, Dasein will be motivated (even if only implicitly) to seek out ways of Being-in-the-world and Being-with others that reflect the ontological possibility and freedom of Dasein, and work collectively to challenge those social

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[18] Dasein can still slip back into inauthentic modes of understanding and Being-with others, but when Dasein understands the other authentically as Dasein it will relate to (Be-with) the other authentically as Dasein.

forms that contradict, undermine or cover up more authentic understandings of our fundamental existence.[19]

However, this is not to say that coming to recognise the social distortions and unjust concealments of contemporary social life automatically means being able to transform them. '[T]he possible does not exceed the real' (Beauvoir [1949] 2011, 270).[20] Whereas some situations may be too restrictive to allow women to manifest their authentic self-understanding in their way of Being, other situations may be fundamentally incompatible with realising oneself in authentic modes. Nevertheless, on my interpretation, we can see how the possibility of authenticity can be seen to arise as a result of our social and material conditions, rather than in abstraction from them. As Nancy Holland argues, 'precisely the fact that women's [social] scripts are banal and ultimately unrewarding can sometimes create a revealing distance between an individual woman's consciousness and the larger social world in which she is immersed' (Holland 2001, 37). This implies that in some cases it may be easier for women and minoritized groups to come to understand themselves more authentically than it is for men or those who occupy more privileged social positions. If women are more likely to feel dissatisfied with, and restricted by, their social roles, they may be more likely to be assailed by the anxious mood that can be engendered as the result of such dissatisfaction and that can, in turn – if self and social conditions allow[21] – engender more authentic ways of understanding and Being oneself (BT, 230-234). Authenticity can thus be seen as inherently social because it is a possibility that arises out of our social and material conditions, and because it is one that involves engaging with and transforming these conditions so that we can all live more authentically as Dasein. Interpreted in this way, rather than the journey to authenticity being a 'masculinist game', it can be understood as something more accurately capturing what it is to develop a feminist consciousness. By

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[19] Leland offers a similar picture of authenticity (2001, 123-4).
[20] Heidegger makes a similar point in his discussion of 'pseudo-understanding' and the idea that for genuine understanding there must be a certain 'match up' between the (self)understandings we project and the possibilities we have in the world (Heidegger [1925] 1985, 260).
[21] For more on this point see Knowles (2019; 2021a; 2022).

highlighting these parallels, we can see how authenticity can be linked to 'struggles over social meanings' more broadly 'and as taking shape as part of a political practice' (Leland 2001, 124). Becoming authentic thus becomes a process of social critique, a way of Being-in and relating to the world that can precipitate social change.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have endeavoured to refute three objections which are commonly identified as barriers to feminist appropriations of Heidegger's ontology in *Being and Time*. I have argued that rather than presenting an implicitly masculine exemplar of human existence that obscures difference and positions women's existence as 'deviant', Heidegger should be understood as offering a structural essence of human existence that can usefully be employed to illuminate women's ways of Being-in-the-world. I have suggested that the ontological neutrality of Dasein is not a way of making gender irrelevant at a fundamental level, but of challenging binary notions of sex and gender and offering a basis for developing a more fluid and multiplicitous understanding of these concepts. Finally, I have argued that authenticity is not an individualistic project that involves separating oneself from the social world, but rather that it can be understood as the basis for a liberatory understanding of the self in terms of possibility, which can in turn be used to critique the contingency of existing, oppressive social orders without ignoring the social and material challenges this involves.

In offering this analysis I hope to have furthered the case that *Being and Time* can be understood as a productive resource for feminists, and to have indicated some of the directions in which in-roads may be made. In particular, we have seen the important role mood or affect[22] plays within Heidegger's philosophy and how, by making connections with the work of thinkers like Bartky and Bornstein, we can draw out some of the political implications of this analysis. A

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[22] I use these terms interchangeably.

focus on Heideggerean notions of affect through a social and political lens presents itself as a particularly fruitful avenue for future research, given the emerging body of literature on 'affective injustice'. Affective injustice names the 'injustice faced by someone specifically in their capacity as an affective being' (Archer and Mills 2019, 76), but the field is still relatively young and many key questions currently remain open: how should we evaluate people's affective lives? What is it for someone's affective life to go well or badly? And thus, how should we more precisely define affective injustice? (Gallegos 2021, 186). Given Heidegger's concern with mood as a key aspect of disclosedness, determining how we are opened on to or closed off from the world (BT, 177), his philosophy is well placed to address many of these questions. Moreover, owing to the existential connection Heidegger identifies between affect and understanding (BT, 182),[23] a Heideggerean lens has the potential to fruitfully illuminate the relation between affective injustice and the more studied 'epistemic injustice' – how an agent can be harmed specifically in their role as a knower (Fricker 2007) – in a way that can enhance our understanding of both concepts. For example, a Heideggerean perspective could draw our attention to the role of affect in 'hermeneutical injustice', a central form of epistemic injustice in which an agent is deprived of the (epistemic) resources to make sense of their situation and communicate this to others (Fricker 2007, 158). As Heidegger argues, mood can close off our situation 'more stubbornly than any 'not-perceiving'' (BT, 175). His work thus draws our attention to the role that moods and our affective states can play in depriving us of certain understandings. By developing this line of thought, we may gain a deeper insight into the way affective injustice can function as a form of hermeneutical injustice, and how the social production of certain moods and affects can prevent agents from effectively understanding and being able to testify about their situation.[24] In pursuing the political potential of Heidegger's philosophy in ways such as these, we can thus not only see how notions like authenticity and the anxiety can help illuminate a situation of social

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[23] Every understanding has its mood, and every mood has its understanding.
[24] For more on this point see Knowles (2021b).

critique, but also how Heidegger's philosophy in *Being and Time* can be mobilised to enhance our understanding of some of the central issues of oppression and injustice with which contemporary feminist, social and political philosophers are presently concerned.

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