

Drouillard, Jill “Problem: What is Woman? The Hermeneutics of Sex/Gender Facticity”

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\*This paper is an early draft written in 2020. For an expanded version that includes a reworking of the concept of “care-lessness”, a longer discussion of biology, and further clarification of the tension between a phenomenological world and a concrete world as it pertains to transcendence, see Chapter 2 in Jill Drouillard, *Feminist Heidegger: Sex, Gender, and the Politics of Birth* (SUNY Press, March 2025). For clarification, Dasein never has an original position of “care-lessness” but rather a denial of an authentic enactment of care.

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## Chapter 9

### Problem: What is Woman? The Hermeneutics of Sex/Gender Facticity

#### I. Problem: What is Woman?

What does Martin Heidegger say about sex or gender? According to most accounts, including Derrida’s influential essay “Geschlecht: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference,” Heidegger makes a marginal reference to sex in a 1928 Marburg lecture later translated as *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic (GA 26)*. However, an earlier allusion to sexual difference appears in a 1923 Freiburg lecture, translated as *Ontology—the Hermeneutics of Facticity (GA 63)* where he explains why he uses the term “Dasein” instead of “man” in his existential analytic. “Man” carries *his* own historical baggage, representing a living being endowed with reason, as well as a pre-given understanding of what it means to be a person. This latter definition has its roots in a Judeo-Christian tradition where “man” is created in the image of God as the first born of many “brethren.” In a perplexing move, Heidegger then cites biblical passages to highlight the sexed emergence of man in Genesis as he poses the question, “Problem: What is woman?” (GA 63,

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22/18). This chapter untangles what it means for Heidegger to ask such a question, particularly as he leaves it unanswered and seemingly negligible in his pursuit of a hermeneutics of facticity.

Heidegger states, "Hermeneutics is itself not a philosophy. It wishes only to place an object which has hitherto fallen into forgetfulness before today's philosophers for their 'well-disposed consideration'" (GA 63, 20/16). I place the object of sex/gender<sup>1</sup> facticity before today's philosophers, situating the "Problem: What is woman?" within the context of Heidegger's larger ontological project, namely to rediscover the question of being. Captured in the eponymous title *Ontology—the Hermeneutics of Facticity* is the insight that the study of being (ontology) can only be carried out as an interpretive non-objectifying process (hermeneutics) of our existence at a particular time in history (facticity). What does it mean to exist as a certain sex or gender during a particular time? How are sex and gender related to the question of being and the ontological difference? How are we defining sex and gender and to which term does Heidegger refer? Throughout this chapter, I will examine a few instances where Heidegger reckons with the sex/gender question. By posing the inquiry, "Problem: What is Woman?" within the parameters of Heidegger's larger ontological project, I suggest that sex and gender must be fluid categories insofar as such properties describe the "whatness" of our existence rather than the "how" of our world-forming. That is, Dasein is neutral with respect to these categories as such attributes only show up after a time reckoning with an original position of care-lessness. I also suggest that Heidegger privileges sex/gender facticity in undergirding such neutrality as he contests Christian origin stories of the flesh (GA 63) and evolutionary theories associated with the *Lebensphilosophie* of his time (GA 26). Finally, I conclude by demonstrating how Heidegger's distinction between *Körper* and *Leib* further upholds sex and gender fluidity.

II. *Ontology—the Hermeneutics of Facticity* and ontological sex inequality

If we are to remain true to Heidegger's project of historical ontology, neither sex nor gender can be grasped as essentialist concepts that defy the influence of history. That is, what it means to exist as/to be a sex or gender must change over time. In the rare instances where Heidegger evokes concepts of sex or gender, such terms appear to be linked to a question of generation/*genos*/genesis. In *GA 63*, when Heidegger explains his choice of the term *Dasein* over man, he refers to the book of Genesis and quotes the following two passages:

Paul, 1 Cor. 11:7, "For a *man* ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God" [*emphasis mine*]

CF. 2 Cor. 3:18 and Rom. 8:29, "For those who he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his *Son*, in order that he might be the first-born among many *brethren*" [*emphasis mine*] (*GA 63*, 22/18).

Without further examination regarding the significance of these quotes, he very abruptly remarks, "Problem: What is *woman*?" [*emphasis mine*]. This question, "Problem: Was ist die Frau?" is never answered but merely interjected. Yet, three thoughts necessarily flow from its inquiry. First, the concept of man, with its Judeo-Christian roots, necessarily excludes woman from having a direct relation to being (if being is God), since only man was made in his likeness. Second, man, in not having to cover his head, is already established within a hierarchy of sexual difference and such differences are predicated prior to an interpretative investigation of facticity.<sup>2</sup> Third, the problem of woman introduces a problem of the flesh that makes of man (spirit)/woman (flesh) a dialectical relation, and Heidegger accuses dialectics of committing the same error as static juxtapositions. Of dialectic he asserts, "It steps into an already constructed context, though there really is no context here (...) Every category is an existential and *is* this as such, not merely in

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relation to other categories and on the basis of this relation" (GA 63, 43/35). His disdain for dialectics and its inability to properly adhere to historical ontology is further evidenced in the Appendix XI *On Paul* that is directly related to the section that raises the question, "Problem: What is woman?". In further demonstrating a dialectical relation on which Judeo-Christian origin stories of sexual difference rely, the Appendix elucidates,

Flesh-*spirit* (...) to be in them, a *how* as a "what," objective heavenly, the *what* as the how of a history coming to an end. Explanation of facticity: of the unredeemed, and being redeemed: (...) [sons of God] (Rom. 8:14). Death-life, sin-righteousness, slavery-sonship (...).

'History of salvation' unclear (GA 63, 111/86)!

Heidegger thus asserts that dialectic turns the "how" of facticity (as an historical process) into an objective "what" (a stasis) in relation to other categories. Also, apparent in this text is what side of the dialectic woman would fall on: flesh, unredeemed, death, slavery.

Though Heidegger does not explicitly explain why he poses the problem of woman, the reader intuits that the issue of *Frau* as woman is tied to a question of generation, as interpreted by St. Augustine who Heidegger declares a few pages earlier as the philosopher who provides "the first hermeneutics in grand style" (GA 63, 11/9). In reckoning with the ontological inequality between the sexes, St. Augustine declares that man was created for the contemplative life (of the spirit) whereas woman finds her origins in corporeality (of the flesh) and procreative purpose (On the Trinity, Book XII, 10). That is, she was created for Adam to have a descendent; she was created for her sex. Woman's particular relation to sexual fecundity is why she must cover her head and man "ought not." From her inception, woman is born with a specific form of guilt, accorded because of her bodily intention. Such pre-determined guilt runs contrary to

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Heidegger's notion of Dasein's primordial "being guilty," that is being born on the basis of a nullity, on groundlessness (GA 2, 329/284). As Dasein, we are "thrown" into the world without a plan, without a blueprint, and so, woman could not be created for her flesh any more than man could be designed for the contemplative (read rational) life. Aware of "man's" historical baggage as already being pre-determined as not only a rational animal but as a person whose hierarchy is predetermined through an ontological sex inequality, Heidegger prefers to use the term Dasein in his existential analytic.

In part, such a reading agrees with Kevin Aho who argues in "Gender and Time: Revisiting the Question of Dasein's Neutrality" that Dasein cannot be a "man" or "woman" with fixed properties, as Dasein is not a static entity but rather a dynamic way of being. Additionally, he contends that such a dynamism of sexed or gendered practices can only be intelligible on the basis of temporality, for time is that reference point by which any being(s) can be understood at all. My temporal structure is so that I understand myself as a past "throwness," taking up a history that has been passed down to me, a present series of nows, and a future projection in which I anticipate the possibilities of what I can be. Yet, describing myself *in time*, tells me *what* I am but not *how* I came to be so. The *how* of my existence only makes sense in terms of care [*Sorge*], the fact that something can matter to me at all. Care is a receptiveness that allows sex or gender to have any significance, that allows such predicates to be of concern to me.

I will return to a discussion of care in the next section, but I want to highlight a point that Aho raises with respect to those thinkers (Dreyfus, Guignon, Haugeland, Brandom) who view the they/ the Anyone [*Das Man*], rather than temporality, as the source of Dasein's intelligibility. For such thinkers, our disclosive nexus of social relations (*Das Man*) is responsible for an understanding of being, so insofar as such institutions are patriarchal and founded on social

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hierarchies, Dasein must necessarily be gendered. I agree with this to some extent. To borrow a term from Haugeland, insofar as we are "cases of *Dasein*," the *whatness* of my case, my mineness [*Jemeinigkeit*] that is also part of a larger shared community, is already gendered, for as Tricia Glazebrook notes, "This world is *very much informed* by gender" (Haugeland 2013, 10; Glazebrook 2001, 233). Yet, this does not explain the *how* of my world-forming, the neutral disclosive structures of *how* this is possible.

Returning to Aho's question for such thinkers, he states,

The question we come to is this: Is Heidegger's project shortsighted because it fails to grasp the fact that the disclosive clearing we rely on to interpret things *as such* is ordered in terms of social hierarchies? This criticism is particularly sharp if we maintain- as many Heidegger commentators do- that the origin or source of intelligibility is *Das Man* (2007, 144).

Is Heidegger that shortsighted with respect to social hierarchies? As previously demonstrated, Heidegger's question, "Problem: What is woman?" was, in part, raised to highlight an unequal sex difference that was predetermined prior to an investigative interpretation of facticity. "Man" and his dialectical relation to "woman" is loaded with pre-established significance, hence Heidegger's preference for the term *Dasein* which signifies a neutral "being there" prior to intelligibility. However, such reference to sex inequality is not meant to laud Heidegger as a feminist, for I think he was shortsighted insofar as the "ontic entanglements" he found worthy of pursuing in his quest for being neglect issues of significance to the "second sex."<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Heidegger's critique of origin stories founded on sexual difference does not mean that Heidegger was an advocate for equality. Gosetti demonstrates how the "feminine" is "explicitly rejected and

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implicitly opposed to destinal-historical founding" in Heidegger's reading of "Germanien," as he accuses Hölderlin's projected image of Germania as being "too feminine," offering a more "masculine" substitute (2001, 199-200). In *Geschlecht III: Sex, Race, Nation, Humanity*, Derrida suggests that Heidegger's reading of Trakl uses the masculine/feminine relation of brother/sister to return to a "one generation" of colonial expansion (Therezo 2018, 27). In mapping out the sex/gender fluidity of Dasein, I am not dismissing other instances where Heidegger reckons with the facticity of such attributes. Rather, if we read Heidegger's earlier works, in view of his attempt at bracketing any predetermined predicates of that being for whom being is an issue, we see that our state prior to any interpretive investigation of facticity is one of sex and gender neutrality.

In this section, I've demonstrated that Heidegger's first reference to sex/gender facticity that occurs in *GA 63* dismisses Judeo-Christian origin stories of sexual difference in that such differences are assumed prior to a proper ontological investigation. Such differences may describe the "whatness" of an already biased world, but they do not explain the "how" of such world-forming. It is this "how," and the neutral temporal structures that disclose it that interests Heidegger. The "how" of these structures is further examined in *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic (GA 26)*, the key text that scholars usually analyze in trying to understand Heidegger's position on sex and gender neutrality.

### III. *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* and the primacy of sexual difference

#### a. transcendence, world-forming, and care-lessness

Heidegger will go on to further examine the neutrality of this not-yet-determined Dasein in *GA 26* where he understands Dasein as the condition of its possibilities. The problem of being is necessarily a problem of freedom insofar as Dasein exists as an openness to other ways of

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existing (GA 26, 22-27/18-21). Here, Dasein is analyzed as prior to its factual concretion, prior to its predetermined predicates. Heidegger asserts that any understanding of being, where being is not yet determined, involves a primordial transcendence (GA 26, 169-170/135-136). The issue becomes, how can Dasein, as "being there" at a certain time and always already in a world, a world arguably characterized by sex and gender, transcend said world? Heidegger asserts,

Dasein is thrown, factual, thoroughly amidst nature through its bodiliness, and transcendence lies in the fact that these beings, among which Dasein is and to which Dasein belongs, are surpassed by Dasein. In other words, as transcending, Dasein is beyond nature, although, as factual, it remains environed by nature. As transcending, i.e., as free, Dasein is something alien to nature (...) That towards which the subject transcends is what we call world (GA 26, 211-212/166).

In defining transcendence as such, Heidegger does not wish to make a subject/object distinction in the way of Descartes. That is, we cannot transcend the world as disinterested observers, using reason to declare objective facts about our environment. Dasein can transcend nature while remaining factually environed by it, because nature, as it appears to us, is not pre-given in advance (nor is Dasein); nature can mean different things, therefore making up a different type of world. That is, how nature appears to us, depends on a mix of phenomenological perception and environment, with such perception depending on the "there" of our being, the situated knowledges and attunement [*Stimmung*] from which we approach our surroundings. Dasein does not transcend over and above a world, but *towards* it.

Transcendence is tied to Heidegger's definition of understanding as projection. Dasein understands itself as a projection onto its possibilities of existence (GA 2, 228-229/184-185).

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Projection necessarily implies an understanding of our already being in a world insofar as we must be able to imagine the world that we are in as existing other than it is. Dasein is always in a world, but that world may change insofar as self, others, and nature are not static entities.

As Heidegger states in "On the Essence of Ground," as transcending, Dasein is "world forming" (GA 9, 123). The transcendence that is required for any understanding of being is different from intentionality, as the latter implies a conscious being-towards an object. As transcending, as being in the process of world-forming, there can be no consciousness of objects/nature, because such objects only appear to Dasein through a mode of circumspective concern, through care. As Heidegger makes clear in *Being and Time*, things appear to us in the world because of our care for them, that is, they matter to us. In its neutral, not-yet determined state, "the simplicity and 'care-lessness' of an absolute sustenance from nature arise in Dasein" (GA 26, 173-174/138). My ability to be factually dispersed, into one world among others, into one sex/gender among others, depends on this initial state of "care-lessness" where things in the world do not yet show up, do not yet matter, where they are in the process of being formed. It is this "how" of sex/gender facticity that interests Heidegger and not the "what." This initial state of care-lessness doesn't occur at the beginning of one's life, rather it is the original step in the on-going process of world-forming. Or, as Heidegger will later explain in *Being and Time*, it is the moment of vision or *Augenblick* prior to one's decisions being owned.

In keeping with Heidegger's project of historical ontology, sex and gender must be fluid categories, as they are possibilities that may be being differently owned. Yes, we are thrown into the world as sexed/gendered bodies, but to say that I was assigned female at birth and to remark that I was forced to wear a bow on my head to indicate my girlhood is to describe the "what" of my existence and not the "how" in terms of this being possible and how it could be otherwise. As

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such, the not-yet-determinedness of Dasein, what Heidegger will go on to describe as a neutrality, may make sense, but what is curious about Heidegger's discussion of transcendence and its insistence upon a not-yet-determined ground is the primacy that sexual difference is accorded in undergirding such neutrality.

He asserts.

Selfhood is the presupposition for the possibility of being an 'I', the latter only ever being disclosed in the 'you'. Never, however, is selfhood relative to a 'you' but rather- because it first makes all this possible- is neutral with respect to being an 'I' and being a 'you' and *above all with respect to such things as sexuality [emphasis mine]* (GA 9, 122).

Selfhood, at other times described as *jemeinigkeit* (in each case mine), is my way of being that is not totally separate from others and from the world, but is nevertheless my possibility, my projection onto an array of diverse projects that matter to me (GA 2, 149-155/114-119). Such selfhood is described as neutral, insofar as such not-yet-determinedness implies potential, but why does Heidegger find it necessary to mention such neutrality with respect to sexuality? As Derrida inquires, why the "*à plus forte raison*," why the "above all," as if we risked mixing the question of sexual difference with the question of being? (1983, 73). In accentuating this "above all," is Heidegger simply reiterating that at which he hinted in *Ontology—the Hermeneutics of Facticity*, that we must abandon Christian origin stories of the flesh that are founded on unequal sexual difference if we are to raise the question of being anew? To understand why Heidegger highlights the sexual neutrality of Dasein, we must unpack certain principles he sets forth in *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* (GA 26).

b. the principles of GA 26, the privileging of sexual difference, and Darwin

In his first principle, he reiterates that neutral Dasein and not man is under analysis. Then, he reinforces the sexual neutrality of Dasein as he states,

This neutrality also indicates that Dasein is neither of the two sexes. But here sexlessness is not the indifference of an empty void, the weak negativity of an indifferent ontic nothing. In its neutrality Dasein is not the indifferent nobody and everybody, but the primordial positivity and potency of the essence (GA 26, 170-173/136-137).

This reference to primordial positivity and potency of the essence is in line with Dasein's constitution as a condition of its possibilities, as both terms speak of the potential of Dasein to be, of its freedom; such freedom consists of its prerogative to establish a ground, the freedom to define "what is." But, in describing the "how" in which one establishes a ground, why must Heidegger declare Dasein's *sexual* neutrality above all other attributes? In surmising the need for such clarification, Derrida posits,

Perhaps he was then responding to more or less explicit, naïve or sophisticated, questions on the part of his hearers, readers, students, or colleagues, still held, aware or not, within anthropological space. What about the sexual life of your *Dasein*? They might have still asked (1983, 71).

Glazebrook responds to this supposition that Heidegger may have been replying to the query of a student, asserting,

[In *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*], he argues presumably in response to a question that could have come from Helene Weiss, that Dasein is a gender-neutral term. It is in the part of Heidegger's lecture

constructed from the notes of Weiss that his comments on the neutrality of the term *Dasein*, in particular, on its gender-neutrality, appear (2001, 231).

While Glazebrook suggests that his specification of neutrality may be in response to Weiss, she also puts forth a further clarification that, contrary to Derrida's supposition that "*keines von beiden Geschlechtern ist*" indicates that *Dasein* is neither of the two *sexes*, it actually asserts that *Dasein* is neither of the two *genders*. Derrida does notice the multifariousness that the term *Geschlecht* will later take on, stating that in thirty years' time, it could stand for sex, genre, family stock, race, lineage, generation (1983, 69). Does *Geschlecht* mean sex or gender for Heidegger?

While Weiss could have inquired about gender, Heidegger appears to discuss *Geschlecht* in terms of generation, as a fecundity founded on sexual difference. From a contemporary viewpoint, to designate something as "neither of the two genders" seems to ignore the fact that to posit the existence of (only) two genders does nothing more than to reify an already supposed binary sexed system. As Judith Butler inquires, if gender has nothing to do with sexual difference, why suppose there are only two genders? From here, Butler puts forth a social constructionist view that sex is always already gender (1990, 10-11). In *Phenomenal Gender: What Transgender Experience Discloses*, Ephraim Das Janssen, who draws from Heidegger's phenomenology in order to characterize the experience of gender, holds a similar view, asserting,

My fulfillment of the role 'man' in my culture is thus dependent on my assumption of this culture's particular, historical conception of 'masculinity' at this time. And what of biological sex? In this regard,

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biology is to a great extent a function of *Mitsein* as well, since scientific endeavors are shaped by cultural needs and presuppositions (2017, 73).

If sex is always already gender, then it doesn't matter much if *Geschlecht* is meant to connote one term over the other. The term "gender" as we know it, wasn't used in the language, or *Rede*, of Heidegger's time, and even if Heidegger did make a distinction between sex and gender, he would probably make a direct correlation between the two, viewing the latter as "social sex," those expressions and societal expectations particular to a given sex i.e. feminine/female v. masculine/male.

Why does Heidegger specify "neither of the two sexes"? Could it be to reiterate his argument against a Judeo-Christian ground founded on sexual inequality? Could Heidegger specify sexual neutrality as a way to dismiss Freudian accounts of psychosexual development? Or, is it possible that Heidegger posits Dasein as neither of the two sexes to separate himself from the practitioners of *Lebensphilosophie*, a philosophy of life?

In the fourth principle of *GA 26*, Heidegger makes clear that the analysis of Dasein is prior to all prophesying and heralding world-views, and he directly sets his analysis apart from any *Lebensphilosophie* (*GA 26*, 172-173/137). Such philosophies of life were highly influenced by the evolutionary ideas of Darwin for whom the proliferation and future of the species rely on sexual selection. For Darwin, sexual difference is the ground on which all other attributes of difference are possible. Heidegger appears in conversation with Darwin in his ninth principle when he discusses Dasein's neutrality in terms of its being-with, for Dasein is always a being-with others; yet, such neutral being-with "is not explained solely on the basis of the supposedly more primordial species-being of sexually differentiated bodily creatures" (*GA 26*, 174/139). Does Heidegger notice a proximity to Darwin, in his language of possibilities, from which he

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must distance himself? As Heath Massey demonstrates in *The Origin of Time: Heidegger and Bergson*, despite Heidegger's brief discussion of and subsequent dismissal of Bergson, a French philosopher in the philosophy of life tradition, Heidegger is much more indebted to the author of *Creative Evolution*'s philosophy of temporality than he lets on (2015). I am not going to dwell on the issue of temporality specifically, rather I mention Heidegger's unacknowledged engagement with Bergson to suggest that he was more influenced by evolutionary theories than he let on.

In *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, Darwin examines sexual selection and sexual difference and how on the basis of two sexes additional differential attributes become possible (2004). One year after *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* (1928) in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude* (1929), Heidegger clearly disagrees with Darwin in thinking that the differences of human beings are comparable to those of other organisms. He asserts,

The worker bees know the flowers that they seek, their color and scent, but they don't know the stamens of these flowers *as* stamens...they don't know something like the goal of the stamen and petal. Over against this the world of man is rich, greater in its sphere, wider-reaching in its penetration (GA 29/30, 285).

The animal is restricted in its openness to being. The bee, for example, is receptive to the things in its environment [*Umwelt*] and has its own way of navigating such environs, but that environment will never *matter* enough to constitute a world. The bee does not have the capacity for care that is required to understand being. As Zimmerman states,

Just as *Dasein* opens up a temporal-historical clearing which makes it possible for entities to manifest themselves in such a way that *Dasein* can interact with them, so too the organism opens up a sphere which reveals things in ways that enable it to interact with them in specific ways. Despite this structural analogy, Heidegger maintained that the animal's perceptual 'capacity' (*Fähigkeit*) for perceiving is different from the human's 'potentiality for being' (*Seinkönnen*) (1995, 506).

The human's "potentiality for being" is markedly different because of their self-awareness of things *as* things. But also, the human has a capacity for language and a particular relation to death. The human organism is aware of their death, not as a perishing, but as an ontological disclosure of finitude, a finitude that informs its language and process of world-forming. Noting that the essence of finitude is "unveiled in *transcendence as freedom for ground*," Heidegger elaborates,

Clarifying the *essence of finitude* in *Dasein* from out of the constitution of its being must precede all 'self-evident' assumptions concerning the finite 'nature' of the human being, all description of properties that first ensue from finitude, and *above all* any hasty 'explanation' of the ontic provenance of such properties [*emphasis mine*] (GA 9, 135).

Heidegger thus warns that we must approach the essence of finitude differently than the mortality of the human being, and *above all* without reference to any ontic properties of death. Could it be that this "above all" reference is linked to the previously discussed "above all" with reference to sexuality? That is, is Heidegger alluding to the close association of sex and death in evolutionary theory and the link between sexual selection and species survival? Is the "neither of

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the two sexes" clarification meant as a further contestation of Darwin and of other philosophy of life theorists of that time?

In clarifying the essence of finitude, Heidegger leaves an interesting footnote that specifies, "The leap [*Sprung*] into the origin [*Ursprung*]! (Da-sein) origin- freedom- temporality; finitude of Dasein not identical with the finitude of the human being, to be grasped otherwise: character of origin!" (GA 9: 135). The origin [*Ursprung*] that Heidegger refers to is different than the origin [*Entstehung*] that Darwin refers to, as *Ursprung* is later defined in *The Origin of the Work of Art* as "to originate something by a leap, to bring something into being from out of its essential source in a founding leap" (1993, 202). This implies a projection, a transcendence, of which the animal is not capable. And yet, while Heidegger's *The Origin of the Work of Art* examines the origin of the artworld, rather than that of our species, we can hardly ignore the sexed dimensions of earth/world and how the evolutionary interplay of these terms are responsible for the artwork, a work who, like the child, is "the bringing forth of a being such as never was before and will never come to be again" (1993, 187).

David Krell suggests that the introduction of "earth" and its relation to origin [*Ursprung*] to Heidegger's already established "world," comes from the poetic influence of one of the most ancient Homeric Hymns, "To Earth, Mother of All" in which Gaia has the "power to give mortal men life. Or take it" (1993, 142). However, it appears unlikely that Heidegger believes in any goddess origin, as he concludes *The Origin of the Work of Art* with a warning from Hölderlin, "that which dwells near the origin abandons the site," thus cautioning against searches for a solid ground (1993, 203). In the same way that Dasein is "neither of the two sexes," the origin of the artwork is "neither earth nor world," as it is not a question of neither/nor but rather of both/and. Yet, even though this both/and rejects a unitary origin, escaping any philosophy of "the One," it

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nevertheless hints at an origin grounded on a binary difference, leading us to ask, as Derrida did, "What if sexual difference were already marked in the opening up of the question of the sense of being and of the ontological difference?"

Insofar as sex is conceived in terms of a binary, such distinction appears to be thinking of sex as a reproductive difference, or sex as a binary reflects the history of the times in which non-binary and genderqueer were not yet part of the vernacular, and subsequently not yet thinkable. I do not mean to reify such a binary by speaking of "neither of the two sexes," rather I am working with the language of Heidegger's philosophy to interpret the significance that sex or gender may have had for him.

In the sixth principle of *GA 26*, Heidegger asserts,

Dasein harbors the intrinsic possibility for being factically dispersed into bodiliness and thus into sexuality. The metaphysical neutrality of the human being, inmost isolated as Dasein, is not an empty abstraction from the ontic, a neither-nor; it is rather the authentic concreteness of the origin, the not-yet of factual dispersion [*Zerstreuung*] (*GA 26*, 172-173/137.)

The not-yet of this dispersion is Dasein's potential, its conditions of possibility, though this "not yet" implies a "both/and" that is prior to "neither of the two sexes." For example, the artwork is both earth/world at its origin, yet whilst "set up" as an artwork, earth recedes, and we are left with an "historical truth" that is a world that is experienced at a particular time. Dasein as the not-yet of two sexes implies that it is both at its origin, yet one upon dispersion (one sex); sexual difference is the process of "how" Dasein becomes factically dispersed into the "what" of its sex. This process is further described in the sixth principle as Heidegger explains that dispersion is an

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affair of “multiplication (not ‘multiplicity’) which is present in every factually individuated Dasein as such” (GA 26, 172-173/137). The distinction between multiplication and multiplicity is key here, for multiplicity implies that a plethora of attributes are already found in Dasein that then becomes factually dispersed, whereas multiplication signifies the *process* of such dispersed multiplicity (the how and not the what).

In this section, I’ve further demonstrated the fluidity of sex and gender, by drawing from Heidegger’s concept of neutral Dasein set forth in *GA 26*. Here, he describes the process by which one becomes a sexually differentiated being. I also suggest that by declaring, “Dasein is neither of the two sexes,” Heidegger is trying to separate himself from any *Lebensphilosophie* influenced by evolutionary theories of the time, theories for which sex and death were essential concerns. Though I do not wish to reify sex and gender as binary categories, and I’ve tried not to offer determinate definitions of either attribute, I believe Heidegger comments on the duality of the sexes insofar as he is thinking sex in terms of reproductive difference, in terms of generation. Heidegger is thus contesting evolutionary theories for whom the actions of Dasein would be essentially motivated by sex and death.

c. implications of Heidegger’s sexed/gendered bodies [*Körper/Leib*]

The process by which Heidegger describes the formation of sexed/gendered bodies could have significant impacts on the field of ontology, a philosophy whose goal at defining “what is” has been criticized for its exclusionary practices. For example, if I state that a woman is “x,” I necessarily exclude all persons who do not fit the unequivocal criteria required for membership of “x.” What is insightful about Heidegger’s historical ontology is that he is not interested in the “what” of identity but the “how,” the process by which, for example, one *becomes* sexed. Heidegger’s remark that Dasein is “neither of the two sexes” can be read alongside contemporary

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thinkers of the feminist new materialist tradition such as Elizabeth Grosz (2011) and Stephen Seely (2016), both of whom draw from Gilbert Simondon (2017). In *Becoming Undone: Darwinian Reflection on Life, Politics, and Art*, Grosz follows a Bergsonian understanding of freedom as she asserts,

Indetermination is the 'true principle' of life, the condition for the open-ended action of living beings, the ways in which living bodies are mobilized for action that cannot be specified in advance (2011, 69).

Such indetermination sounds a lot like Heidegger's not-yet determinedness of neutral Dasein. What's more, Grosz will further elaborate on this freedom and posit sexual difference as the "indeterminable difference, the difference between two beings who do not yet exist, who are in the process of becoming" (2011, 146). Such a statement parallels the "both/and" of Heidegger's "neither of the two sexes" as a process of becoming.

Such a process is possible due to Dasein's primordial constitution as transcendence, it's possibility of becoming a subject in the world, a subjectivity that is fundamentally characterized as sexed. But, does this mean that there is a part of Dasein that is immaterial in its transcendence? Heidegger states, "Dasein harbors the intrinsic possibility for being factually dispersed into bodiliness and thus into sexuality" (GA 26, 172-173/137). Does this presume a consciousness, unfettered by a body, thus risking a form of Cartesianism? We are tempted to think so, but this would be a mistake, for "bodiliness" has two separate meanings for Heidegger, *Körper* and *Leib*. Body is not just mere physical matter (*Körper*) but a way of interacting with the world (*Leib*). To say that neutral Dasein is prior to a factual dispersion into bodiliness does not insinuate that Dasein is prior to physical matter. As Heidegger highlighted in the Davos debate with Cassirer, Dasein is "chained to a body" in a milieu that is always historical and

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contingent (1972, 44). Thus, if Dasein is always already in a material body, three possible thoughts follow from his assertion that Dasein is neither of the two sexes: 1. Sex does not refer to biological matter here, insofar as Dasein is always chained to a body, as physical matter, prior to dispersion, 2. Sex does refer to a biological category but such matter is historically contingent and not given and/or 3. Sex is not just physical matter but an interaction of said matter with the world, what certain theorists would describe as gender.

Heidegger's clarification of bodiliness pulls from all three, ultimately insinuating that sex does have to do with physical matter, but such matter is historically contingent and dependent upon one's interaction with the environment (the way one chooses to set up a world). It is this interaction between one's body and the environment, the "how" of world-forming, that constitutes Dasein's spatiality, that constitutes how neutral Dasein is disseminated in space as a sexed body. Heidegger recognized the difficulty in explaining this process and has been denounced by several French philosophers for his lack of attention paid to the body (Askay 1999). In *Being and Time*, he declared, "bodiliness hides a whole problematic of its own, though we will not deal with it here" (GA 2, 143/109). Thirty-seven years later in the *Zollikon Seminars* (1965), he "deals with it" explaining, the problem of the body is a problem of method, as we cannot distinguish *psyche* from *soma*, nor can we objectify ourselves for measurable analysis. The problem of the body, of which sex is a privileged attribute for Heidegger, is tied to the same problem of the ontological difference, namely how to describe Being without turning it into a being (to be measured), something that every utterance of "Being is..." necessarily accomplishes.

In clarifying this problem, Heidegger reproaches his French critiques who scorn him for his neglect of the body, asserting they fail to understand the complexity of the matter insofar as

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their language only has one understanding of body, *corps*. As previously notes, Heidegger distinguishes between two understandings of the body *Körper* and *Leib*. While *Körper* stops at the skin, *Leib* takes into account our spatiality and ecstatic opening that allows us to encounter entities and others. *Leib* "says" something about our way of Being (where to say [*Sagen*] means to show [*Zeigen*]). It appears that in distinguishing *Körper* from *Leib*, the former is only concerned with ontic entanglements (corporeal limits) whereas the latter is ontologically significant. For example, my eyes are made of physical matter (*Körper*), but they also "body forth" in their receiving and perceiving of an entity that matters to me (*Leib*). This "bodying forth" [*Leiben*] is historically contingent, as Heidegger states, "the limit of my bodying forth changes constantly through the change in the reach of my sojourn" (GA 89, 114/87). Sojourn indicates a being here for a while at a particular time.

Derrida appears to miss this notion of "bodying forth," as he tries to unpack the following assertion from Heidegger: "Dasein in general hides, shelters in itself the internal possibility of a factual dispersion or dissemination (*faktische Zerstreung*) in its own body (*Leiblichkeit*) and thereby in sexuality (*und amit in die Geschlechtlichkeit*)" (1983, 75). Here, Derrida understands body (*Leiblichkeit*) as *flesh*, asserting that *flesh* draws Dasein into its dispersion (1983, 75). Yet, body as *Leiblichkeit* does not refer to corporeal limits (*flesh*) but rather to the way in which our spatial encounters make sense, the receiving and perceiving of things of my concern. Thus, my body as matter exists for neutral Dasein, but such matter does not make sense as sexed or gendered prior to the process of "world forming."

The question remains as to whether sex and/or gender are privileged attributes in the process of such "world forming," in establishing ground. That is, in undergirding Dasein's sexual neutrality, in stating that Dasein is "above all" neither of the two sexes, is he merely responding

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to a student's inquiry, contesting religious origin stories founded on sexual difference, or setting himself apart from evolutionary theories of his time? In denouncing the relevance of sex, is he implicitly privileging such a trait? Whether or not sexed or gendered traits are privileged attributes that describe the whatness of my being remains open-ended. However, if we pose the question, "Problem: What is Woman?" within the parameters of Heidegger's larger ontological project, we must conclude that the properties of sex and gender are fluid and not already determinate characteristics of Dasein, as they only show up after an original position of carelessness prior to world-forming. To say that Dasein is sexed or gendered describes the "whatness" of my being, but it says nothing of the neutral temporal structures that make such attributes possible (the "how"). Heidegger's historical ontology could prove useful for future feminist work that questions static properties of sex and gender. While Heidegger may not have been able to think outside of sexed/ gendered binaries, his language of neutral temporal structures, his contestation of evolutionary fatalism founded on sex and death, and his distinction between *Körper* and *Leib* offer rich insights for exploring the fluidity of sex and gender.

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<sup>1</sup> I speak of sex/gender facticity, and at times, I reference sexual difference in a way that uses both terms “sex” and “gender” interchangeably. While I question the context in which Heidegger uses the word *Geschlecht*, I offer no determinate definitions of sex or gender here. I reference Butler’s assertion that “sex is always already gender” in section IIIa, and I tend to agree with this statement insofar as definitions of both are socially, culturally, and historically contingent.

<sup>2</sup> According to Genesis, “Man ought not cover his head,” because he was made in the glory and likeness of God. Woman, however, was made in the glory of man. She must cover her head to show submission to him. Hair has also been a symbol of seduction, so woman must cover her head lest she shame herself by attracting men.

<sup>3</sup> The “second sex” is a reference to Simone de Beauvoir and her insight that “man” is defined as the neutral standard whereas “woman” as the “second sex” is always defined as other in relation to man. Feminist scholars have critiqued Heidegger for passing off his masculine viewpoint as one of “neutrality.” Here are a few examples: Luce Irigaray argues that Heidegger’s philosophy is one of phallogocentrism that forgets the feminine. Carol Bigwood also highlights the

suppression of the "feminine" by technology and western culture in general. Though, Bigwood does find paths in Heidegger's later thought that opens up the question of the "feminine." Tina Chanter accuses Heidegger of focusing on work-oriented tasks at the expense of issues such as sexuality and eroticism. Nancy J. Holland and Patricia Huntington edited a volume, *Feminist Interpretations of Martin Heidegger* that provides a range of chapters that explore "the feminine" in Heidegger's work. Huntington also wrote a monograph, *Ecstatic Subjects, Utopia, and Recognition: Kristeva, Heidegger, Irigaray* where she undergirds his masculine ethos. Anne O'Byrne illuminates Heidegger's inability to address the significance of natality and birth in his discussion of finitude. See references for full citations.