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The Neutrality of Dasein and the Shame in the Female Experience: A Feminist Philosophical Analysis

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Abstract

In this paper I examine the convergence of gender neutrality and the gender binary through the philosophical framework of Martin Heidegger and the critical responses of prominent thinkers such as Jacques Derrida and Simone de Beauvoir. The focal point of this inquiry is the gender-neutral concept of Dasein, which has permeated and, in some ways, helped shape contemporary queer theory, particularly through the work of scholars like Judith Butler. While there is no singular or definitive approach to this issue, in this paper I explore the various factors that shape the existence of an individual within the world, especially in the context of *Mitwelt* (being-with-others). By situating Heidegger's ontological arguments alongside social and biological dimensions of existence, I argue that the societal norms in conjunction with embodied experiences elucidate the ontology of Dasein as a being thrown into a preexisting world.

Keywords: gender, neutrality, Dasein, ontology, Heidegger

Introduction

The intersection of phenomenology and feminist theory has prompted significant discourse, particularly in the work of feminist phenomenologists engaging with Heidegger's concept of Dasein. Central to this debate is the tension between Heidegger's notion of Dasein as a genderless, existential being and the realities of gendered existence, especially for women. While Heidegger himself does not directly address sex or gender in his seminal work *Being and Time* (1927), his brief engagement with the question "What is woman" in his 1923 Freiburg lectures, later published in *Ontology- The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, reveals historical underlying assumptions about the nature of gender and the constructions of womanhood. Heidegger quotes historical figures like St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas, presenting man as the rational, God-reflecting being, while leaving the question of woman unanswered, suggesting a subtle critique of the rigid separation of the genders.

The debate surrounding Dasein and gender centers on whether Heidegger's concept of a gender-neutral Dasein excludes or transcends the complexities of the lived female experience. Feminist scholars like Jill Drouillard argue that because Dasein is thrown into the world without predetermined qualities or a clear plan, it rejects essentialist views of women as biologically predisposed to certain roles, such as motherhood. Furthermore, Jacques Derrida's readings of Heidegger suggest that the "originary positivity" of Dasein- its potential for transcendence- requires the erasure of gendered categories, allowing for the neutralization of sexual difference to reveal the true nature of existence.

Yet, the notion of Dasein as neutral and detached from social constructions is complicated by the lived realities of women, who have been historically socialized within a framework that demands recognition primarily through their relationship to men. The phenomenon of *Mitsein*- being with others- is crucial for understanding this framework in ways in which women's existence is shaped by external recognition and objectification. Simone de Beauvoir's feminist critique draws on Heidegger's

ideas, arguing that women are often relegated to the status of the “Other” in patriarchal societies, requiring a form of recognition that traps them within fixed, objectified identities. The relationship between existential guilt and feminine subjectivity, as well as the pervasive sense of shame that characterized much of women’s lived experience, will be explored to understand how these emotional states reveal both the limitations and possibilities of Dasein as a social and embodied being. In particular, the emotional registers of guilt and shame—central to Heidegger’s account of existence—are reexamined here through the experiences of women, who often carry the burden of these affects in disproportionate and socially mediated ways. Drawing on the works of Beauvoir, Derrida, Bartky, and others, I aim to uncover how shame operates not merely as a moral or emotional response, but as a mode of being shaped by the demand for recognition within a gendered *Mitsein*.

Through this inquiry, I argue that the phenomenological neutrality of *Dasein* offers an opportunity to rethink subjectivity in ways that resist gender essentialism. At the same time, I assert that neutrality must be contextualized within the embodied, historical, and affective experiences of women. Only then can we grasp the full scope of what it means to be a gendered being-in-the-world, and the ways in which guilt, shame, and recognition disclose both the limitations and possibilities of existential freedom.

Dasein and Womanhood

There has been a debate amongst feminist phenomenologists on what Heidegger’s genderless Dasein means for women within the context of Heideggerian thought. Heidegger himself does not mention anything about sex or gender in *Sein und Zeit* and the only time he explicitly mentions women is in his 1923 Freiburg lectures that were later published as *Ontology - The Hermeneutics of Facticity*. He poses the question “Problem: What is woman?” and he proceeds to quote St. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and others in a historical depiction of misogyny with passages in which they describe man as an

intellectually superior being that mirrors God through his display of rationality and prudence.¹ The question “What is woman” is never answered but I believe that by listing these quotes that attempt to define man in a completely different manner than woman, he showcases his belief of the unnecessary separation of the genders. Jill Drouillard notes that Dasein has no plan; we are thrown into the world with no a priori qualities and no blueprint, which means that we cannot come into the world with a contemplative nature that is supposedly highly rational. Based on this claim, women cannot be thrown into the world with a predisposing nature for fecundity and an inherent feeling of shame and guilt in the case in which childbearing it is not realized.²

In the *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* (1928), a work that was published after *Being and Time* (1927) and in which he explores existence through a metaphysical lens, Heidegger mentions women as he addresses the pre-historical state of the world and whether it is related to Dasein. He distinguishes the ontic-existential concept from the ontic-natural concept. The ontic-natural (human) concept that indicates the origins of the being is deemed as pre-philosophic, while Dasein holds an ontologically metaphysical essence that enables it to transcend from the world.³ The limit of the pre-philosophical world is its duality. The fact that it consists of men and women. “The transcendence of Dasein surpasses itself as a being; more exactly, this surpassing makes it possible for Dasein to be something like itself”.⁴ The transcendental quality of Dasein that surpasses itself is what makes it ontologically metaphysical and at the same time distinguishes it from the pre-philosophical human concept. This ability of Dasein entails nonetheless the possibility of it becoming “something like itself”. Something that resembles the human qualities of the ontic-natural conception of being that is perceived like the same within itself, but at the

¹ Heidegger M., *Ontology - The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, translated by John van Buren, Indiana University Press, 1999, pp.18-21.

² Drouillard J., “Heidegger on being a sexed or gendered human being”, *Gatherings: The Heidegger Circle Annual*, 2022, pp. 162-164.

³ Heidegger M., *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, 1928, pp.180-181.

⁴ Ibid, p.182.

same time inherently different when we are confronted with the different processes that lead to a being's creation. The totality of possibilities that Dasein has, when it's thrown into the world, cannot be limited the predispositions that dictate a "natural" duality as it is presented in pre-philosophical traditions.

The gender-neutral Dasein shall not be considered a negation nor an abstraction; Heidegger himself has noted that it is an "originary positivity (ursprüngliche Positivität) and power of essence [être] (Mächtigkeit des Wesens)." Derrida in "Geschlecht" points out that the genderless Dasein does not need a lack of sex for its being, only a lack of predetermined, pre-dual sexuality. He supports that sexual division is the one that leads to negativity and neutralization is the effacement that is required for an "original positivity to become manifest." Dasein is not the existent, but existence has its originary source (Urquell) and its internal possibility in the neutrality of Dasein. Derrida interprets it as the division of the sexes that leads to negativity and neutralization is the only way for original positivity to manifest itself. Dasein exists only for itself (unwillen seiner), in its ipseity, in its own Selbstheit. This ipseity is neutral, but it does not entail the isolation of the individual within an existential solitude as "if the philosophizing being were the center of the world." Derrida points out that every manifestation of Dasein is gendered (corps propre) because there is no Dasein without its own body.⁵ The factual dispersion (faktische Zerstreuung) of Dasein in its own Leiblichkeit und damit in die Geschlechtlichkeit, supports this fluidity of gender within an obviously sexed body.

⁵ Derrida J., "Geschlecht: sexual difference, ontological difference", *Research in Phenomenology*, 1983, pp.72-75; Kakoliris Gerasimos, "Jacques Derrida and René Schérer on Hospitality", *Dia-noesis: A Journal of Philosophy*, 6, 2019, pp. 23-42.

Mitsein; the recognition of another

“Dasein is fascinated with its world. Dasein is thus absorbed in the world.”⁶ Here, Heidegger points out that Dasein can never be found detached from the everydayness of the world. It is essential for Being-one’s-Self (Selbstein) for a Being-with (Mitsein) and a Dasein-with (Mitdasein to exist). The essence of Dasein is in the manifestation of its existence. A definite being that exists as an individual amongst other definite beings within a world that condones many positive possibilities of existence rather than hostile Hegelian cases of recognition. The Mitsein seems to be a characteristic of Dasein. Not just a Being-there-too (Auch-da-sein) as mere coexistence, but a togetherness and a cooperative nature that Mitsein involves. The being shares the with-world (Mitwelt) with others and its salience when it comes to Dasein is obvious by the presenting of Being-alone as a lacking state that needs to be part of the Being-with.⁷ So Dasein is meant to exist within a world of other Daseins and even in its solitude it cannot evade the practices of coexisting in a Mitwelt.

It seems however that when Dasein acts within the world it is not itself. Being-with-one-another is only possible because of the positive existential mode of Dasein that works within an environment. Empathy for example is not a prehistoric existential concept but nevertheless we could support that it tempers with the integrity of Dasein that leads to its drifting from itself. It alters its understanding of the stranger that can only be possible through a hermeneutical approach that allows for a positive existential condition.⁸ Mitdasein is a part of the world in a way that establishes its possibility for individuality, but at the same time, by straying from itself within it, it is prone to the susceptibility of the Mitwelt and the other Mitdaseine that work within it. Either way, Dasein cannot completely lose itself through the prementioned modes. Inauthenticity and failure in standing by one’s self does not entail the

⁶ Heidegger M., *Being and Time*, transl. by Macquarrie J. & Robinson E., Blackwell Publishers Ltd, Oxford, United Kingdom, 1962, p.149.

⁷ Ibid, pp.156-157.

⁸ Ibid, p.164.

complete loss of the essence of the Being. It does not devalue the facticity of Dasein, “just as the ‘they,’ as the ‘nobody’ is by no means nothing at all.”⁹ The existence of others as they-self is the proof of the everydayness and averageness of Dasein. “The Self of everyday Dasein is the they-self, which we distinguish from the authentic self.”¹⁰ For the sake of this line of argument I will not go into what constitutes an authentic self, but its nevertheless a crucial part to the understanding of Being. The “they” is the component of realization when it comes to existence, but its everydayness is also the reason the Being “misses itself and covers itself up.”

Heidegger acknowledges the existence of others within the world to contradict the cartesian idea of an I that is separated from the world in a solipsistic way. His Dasein is not detached from the mundane everydayness as it interacts with others within a Mitwelt. In Heidegger’s idea of Mitsein, women ought to take part in the (masculinist) world. Simone de Beauvoir appropriates these Heideggerian concepts in her *Second Sex* as she argues in favor of the emancipation of women not in a way that a woman would cease to exist as a recognition of the other (in this case of a man), but in a way that she is not limited by her relationship with him. Beauvoir mentions Hegel master-slave relationship as one that requires recognition by each other for-itself, but differentiates the recognition process when it comes to women. Women require recognition in an object-like manner that is based on specific fixed qualities as essentially in-itself. She does not consider hostility a necessity for recognition as Hegel and Sartre do, but a necessity is the distance between the others and the self that will aid the creation of a genuine human relationship.¹¹

Heidegger avoids using the terms “human” or “man” when he discusses Dasein’s essence in a conscious effort to create universality and homogeneity that can be limited by using language of sexual difference. It leaves space for the individual to

⁹ Ibid, p.166.

¹⁰ Ibid, pp.167-168.

¹¹ Bauer N., “Being-with as being-against: Heidegger meets Hegel” in *The Second Sex*, Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2021, pp.130-133.

cultivate a unique identity within its neutral essence.¹² This unique type of existence that Dasein allows, encourages a flourishing of an unbiased relationship between the Mitdaseine as they are limited by their gender. However, Simone de Beauvoir supports that woman is socialized to lose herself in the Mitsein by letting others (men) dictate their identity. This demand for recognition that Being-with involves, creates space for judgment from the other on an impulse to be altered by the other.¹³

The Ontology of Dasein's Guilt in Women

In this part of the paper, I will proceed under a positive assumption of guilt that involves the notion that guilt can serve as an indication that women are more in touch with their authentic selves. In *Being and Time* II.58, Heidegger focuses on guilt. Researchers have separated his ideas on guilt on three categories: ontic, ontological and factual. The ontological or existential guilt is what Heidegger calls "primordial" guilt as it is a quality of the being itself. Factual guilt is concerned with normative demands in particular everyday situations and ontic guilt involves Dasein projecting itself onto one of the possibilities of Being. Guy Elgat suggests that ontic guilt functions as a bridge, connecting the abstract nature of ontological guilt with the specific conditions of factual guilt. He also asserts that "ontic guilt makes factual guilt possible."¹⁴ Given the central role of responsibility in factual guilt, I will be focusing primarily on the other two types of guilt (ontological and ontic) as they offer deeper insight into the existential structure of the female subjective experience.

The phenomenon of guilt exists in conjunction with a primordial idea, which means that it is not "arbitrary and forced

¹² Seol M., "Heidegger's Fundamental Ontology and Feminist Philosophy: Issues of Sexual Difference and Neutralization", *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 2024, p.12.

¹³ Bauer N., "Being-with as being-against: Heidegger meets Hegel" in *The Second Sex*, p.144.

¹⁴ Elgat G. *Heidegger on Guilt: Reconstructing the Transcendental Argument in Being and Time*, p.917

upon Dasein”.¹⁵ Guilt is therefore a Being-the-basis that requires a “not”; the “not” does not signify a lack of existence, on contrary it signifies its very existence as its thrownness, which is released from its basis to itself. Dasein as “Being-the-basis of nullity” determines the projection of one of the possibilities that could manifest through its thrownness. It is not something that vanishes after substantial progress has been made, but it exists as an obscure characteristic of Dasein. Guilt for Heidegger exists before morality and outside the notions of good and evil. The Dasein is not guilty because of its mistakes or its lacunae but because of the authentic acknowledgment of its own inauthenticity, because of the way it projects one specific potentiality authentically but does not project one of its other possibilities.¹⁶ Ontological guilt therefore is not at all negatively charged as would be factual guilt which is based on actions, but its nullity can be considered a positive in terms of its understanding of the limits of its authentic projection.

Specifically in the case of women, feelings of guilt appear more frequently and with greater intensity. The way women are thrown into the world seems to not always be based on freedom. Hye Young Kim mentions the similarities of Heidegger’s with Kierkegaard’s guilt of knowing that is based on the metaphor of Adam in the Christian tradition.¹⁷ Even if that is the case, Heidegger places guilt outside of morality¹⁸ which would mean that he places himself outside of this religious doctrine that relates to guilt. However, Being-guilty is the reason that conscience is possible, because when the Being is closed off, whilst it is thrown, it presents its projection (the Being-guilty itself) “as something which at bottom we are to understand”.¹⁹ This means that the primordial feeling of guilt strengthens the understanding of the possibilities of Dasein,

¹⁵ Heidegger M., *Being and Time*, p.326.

¹⁶ Ibid, p.333

¹⁷ Kim H. Y., “Is Guilt a Feeling? An Analysis of Guilt in Existential Philosophy”, *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* Vol.9 No.3, 2017, p. 239

¹⁸ Swazo, N. K., “Werner Marx and Martin Heidegger: What “Measure” for a Post-metaphysical Ethics?”, *Conatus - Journal of Philosophy*, 9 (2), 2024, 249–281.

¹⁹ Heidegger M., *Being and Time*, p. 332.

which would potentially mean that if someone were to contemplate on their personal path, then this person would have more profound understanding for their authenticity. Perhaps the feeling of guilt that many women feel in terms of the lives they experience is exactly that. Dasein itself is not gendered, but when it is thrown into the world, it embodies these specific gender conforming roles and subsequently paths that people who are especially bound by them are able to understand them better. This is not limited to just women, but it involves all who are conscious of their paths because of the understanding of their thrown authenticity. Guilt, in this way, becomes a trace of self-understanding, an existential echo of the possibilities that could have been.

The disclosing of the self and shame in Simon de Beauvoir's thought

Simon de Beauvoir was notably exposed to Heidegger's ideas through Corbin's translation of *Being and Time*. Although Corbin translated Dasein as "human reality" (réalité humaine), which has been characterized as too anthropological, the notion of disclosedness (Erlossenheit/devoilement) as the openness of the Being that enables accessibility to the Being itself as well as other Beings has found fertile ground in De Beauvoir's thought. De Beauvoir's dismissal of the idea that there is "female essence" agrees with the fact that Dasein is thrown into the world not in a fixed manner but becoming through its openness to possibilities²⁰.

De Beauvoir explores the idea of existing as oneself also in *She Came to Stay* through the story of Francoise, who felt strongly that she was herself when she was little, but she was unable to understand why that was the case. Trying to understand whether she could exist as a jacket by continuously uttering "I am old, I am worn" just because she is able to utter it and realizing that she could not speak in terms of self ("I")

²⁰ Gothlin E., *The Cambridge Companion to Simon de Beauvoir*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 47-53.

for no one else except herself.²¹ But the fact that the self exists as a sole manifestation of different possibilities does not mean that the self exists uninterrupted by factors outside of itself. In becoming, de Beauvoir speaks of “anatomic destiny” which is “profoundly different in man and woman, and no less different is their moral and social situation”.²² Based on this “anatomical destiny” women are positioned in a socially primitive and restricted freedom, which in sexual activity entails notions of “service” rather than pleasure. In Heideggerian terms, the Dasein is thrown into the world and as part of the world it moves towards the world with more involvement through its intelligible understanding of it.²³ Understanding the traditionally sexist social structure is something that happens to the Dasein when it is inauthentically disclosed in the world. This exposure to inauthenticity is the reason that shame is such a vast part of the female experience, and particularly the female sexual experience.

The young girl quickly finds out that her body is not actually hers and its value exist not in itself but in the gaze of others. There begins a journey of reclaiming one’s body within the patriarchal society, but its achievement of the reclaimed sexuality is not guaranteed. The body is not merely a thing, but a situation, “an instrument of our grasp upon the world, a limiting factor for our projects”.²⁴ The embodied experience of a woman as a process of becoming is although different as De Beauvoir supports in that it is a continuous lesson in shame. Shame exists in the lived body which itself exists within a social and political framework. In a society that perpetuates the feeling of shame in women, “she is afraid of becoming flesh and afraid to show her flesh.”²⁵ This shame of one’s body that stems from the alienation from the body and consequently

²¹ de Beauvoir S., *Philosophical Writings*, Illinois: University of Illinois, p. 42

²² de Beauvoir S., *The Second Sex*, London: Jonathan Cape Thirty Bedford Square, 1953, p.368

²³ Heidegger M., *Being and Time*, p. 118, 119

²⁴ de Beauvoir S., *The Second Sex*, p .61

²⁵ Guenther L., “Shame and the temporality of social life”, *Continental Philosophy Review*, Vol. 44 No.1, p.12.

from the self itself, is a consequence of society's restless conditioning in the axiological importance of women's attributes that has historically placed the female body in the highest positions when ranked. Lisa Guenther points out that "shame is a way of getting stuck in an impossible moment that I can neither inhabit nor flee, a time that goes nowhere and yet, precisely because of this ambivalence, still retains a transformative potential".²⁶ The uncertainty that encompasses shame does not exist in a specific incident but lurks in the shadows of experience, unsure of the projection of its existence.

Shame and Feminine Masochism

Having examined shame through Beauvoir's existential framework, I now turn to how Sandra Bartky conceptualizes shame within a more socially situated critique of femininity. Here I will draw a distinction between Heideggerian primordial guilt and women's experience of shame as it is described by later feminists. Sandra Bartky in *Femininity and Domination* mentions that Dasein has some a priori characteristics of existence like understanding (Verstehen) and state-of-mind (Befindlichkeit). The states-of-mind that are based on emotion "constitute a primordial disclosure of self and world" and are a necessity for human existence. This means for Bartky that pure recognition cannot be fully achieved when it comes to Dasein.²⁷ She mentions that the differences between women and men in a social environment cannot be neglected and that a genderless approach within a traditional male dominated field as philosophy is just "a male subject in disguise".

The process of recognition entails different effects for women than men. For example, the feeling of shame is more prominent to women than men. That's not to say that they have some kind of exclusivity to specific emotions, but that they experience them in a more profound way. Within a social totality

²⁶ Ibid, p.15

²⁷ Bartky S. L., *Femininity and Domination; Studies in the phenomenology of oppression*, Routledge, Chapman, and Hall, Inc, New York, 1990, p. 83.

that subordinates and oppresses women, the feelings of shame and guilt are related to the different weight that recognition holds between the different genders. Bartky explains this by suggesting that women are more prone to “the blissful loss of self in the sense of merger with another; the pervasive apprehension consequent upon physical vulnerability, especially the fear of rape or assault”.²⁸ This is remarkably interesting as for the importance of the embodied human experience that inevitably takes place within a social environment. The physicality of human experience has historically involved an objectification of the female body and consequentially its recognition by another within a *Mitwelt* does not have the same starting points. The idea that the female body is merely a spectacle (which has only been supported by the art world), creates a sense of powerlessness even in an individual’s recognition of itself. Shame is therefore an emotion that is based on internalized gender-biased views that women have come across, before they would even come across a situation that would require mutual recognition. Bartky quotes John Deigh when he defines shame not as “a reaction to a real loss, but as a reaction to a threat”. A threat on a woman’s body and identity. Therefore, even if guilt preexists shame as for Heidegger it is primordial, it can be considered that is rooted deeper than guilt in the social experience, as it is “an experience of violation of trust in oneself”.

Shame can be a very a powerful driving force of behavior. Sexual desire has been linked throughout history to shame and this is the case especially in the case of women. The exploration of sexuality through shame is essential in understanding the masochistic dimension of sex for many women. The fetishization of male domination that stems from the internalization of sexist social concepts is both rooted in shame and creates shame as a result. This web that has been woven through the centuries around women’s experiences may never be disentangled. The female urge to always look presentable is a bondage that lies within unattainable standards that encourage this vicious cycle of negative emotions. Bartky notes that “feminine masochism, like femininity in general, is an economical way of

²⁸ Ibid, p.84.

embedding women in patriarchy through the mechanism of desire, and while the eroticization of relations of domination may not lie at the heart of the system of male supremacy, it surely perpetuates it.²⁹ Feminine masochism can also dictate simple everyday choices such as makeup and clothing as well as plastic surgery and sexual desire. From the literal extreme pain that females endure to conform to a societal ideal, to their misguided ideas about sexual intimacy that are based on internalized sexism. The hateful and alienated approach to one's body is surely not a monopoly of women, as it is involved in many situations of oppression, where the oppressed individual feels a detachment from one's body and identity. These are so deep-rooted that even realizing their falseness does not suffice for their end. Women as well as queer people are more inhibited as they have historically been taught to believe that their sexual desires are shameful. Bondage and rape fantasies are not unusual for many oppressed individuals

Conclusion

The discourse surrounding gender -whether advocating for a strict separation between the sexes or promoting a universal, gender-neutral approach- has gained significant attention in the recent decades. Central to this discussion is Heidegger's concept of Dasein, which, due to its fundamentally unhistorical nature and its "thrownness" into the world, suggests a framework that is, in theory, gender neutral. This notion has deeply influenced feminine theorists like Judith Butler, who supports the idea that sex and gender are both socially constructed rather than biologically determined. This theory has been proven particularly useful in understanding the fluidity of gender identity, offering a more inclusive framework for individuals who identify as transgender and non-binary as it permits a wider spectrum in the embodied experience for the individual within a social construct.

²⁹ Ibid, p.51.

However, while this approach may provide valuable insight, it is not without its complexities and limitations. Most notably, the biological differences between the sexes- such as hormonal variations that shape women's menstrual cycles and men's twenty-four-hour cycles- cannot be disregarded. These biological rhythms, while not deterministic, can influence emotional and behavioral patterns, and their role in human experience warrants acknowledgment. In dismissing such differences, there is a risk of ignoring how these bodily functions can contribute to the forming of social interactions, particularly in contexts where women have historically been either defined by or denied recognition of their biological functions. Thus, while crucial to avoid reducing individuals to their biological sex, it is equally important to create the space that respects and acknowledges these biological realities without stigmatizing or silencing them.

In addition to biological considerations, the concept of Dasein overlooks the historical context in which individuals, particularly women, exist. Heidegger's concept³⁰ assumes that Dasein enters the world without prior engagement with the social structures and history that has shaped human existence. For women, this means a failure to recognize the history of gendered oppression that has influenced their identities, experiences and rights. While Dasein offers the potential for a free, unencumbered existence, it neglects the weight of intergenerational trauma and the systematic barriers that women have faced throughout history. This lack of historical consideration is not necessarily something negative, but it does present a gap when applying it to gender studies, where historical injustices must be factored into contemporary understandings of identity and power.

Rather than dismissing the neutrality of Dasein outright, this inquiry has argued that it can be reappropriated as a site of potential: a starting point from which the self can emerge not as fixed, but as becoming. However, this potential must be grounded in an acknowledgment of the specific ways bodies

³⁰ Papacharalambous C., "Other's Caress and God's Passing By: Levinas Encountering Heidegger", *Dia-noesis: A Journal of Philosophy*, 11, 2021, pp. 77-94.

are gendered, disciplined, and rendered intelligible within sociohistorical contexts. Shame and guilt, in this light, are not just emotional residues but ontological markers—signposts of the constraints and openings through which feminine existence is negotiated. Ultimately, I believe that there is merit in both approaches: embracing gender neutrality while recognizing the intricacies of women’s experiences. It is vital to support the individual’s right to establish themselves within a society in ways that are not biologically dictated, but at the same time we should be vigilant in acknowledging the centuries of women’s oppression, the violent disenfranchisement and the immense abuse women have suffered through history. Thus, the challenge lies in balancing these two perspectives- respecting the fluidity of gender while remaining mindful of the historical realities that continue to shape women’s existence.

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