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Heidegger, Levinas, and the feminine

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HEIDEGGER, LEVINAS, AND THE FEMININE

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
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Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
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Master of Arts

in

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by
Andrea Danielle Conque
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Rusti Parker-Conque and Judge Durwood Conque for their extraordinary commitment to my education. Yet, more than this, they have taught me about myself, my life, and my individual sense of the world. Although it would be impossible to enumerate the ways in which I should give them thanks, I offer this thesis to them as a token of my gratitude. Thanks.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
ABSTRACT	v
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER	
1 HEIDEGGER, LEVINAS, AND FEMINISMS	4
Poststructuralist Feminisms and Philosophy	4
In Feminist Perspective: Heidegger and Levinas.....	8
2 MARTIN HEIDEGGER AND FEMINIST THEORIES	11
Traditional Feminist Readings: Heidegger	11
Tina Chanter: Bodies, <i>Dasein</i> , and Criticism of Heidegger	13
Jacques Derrida: <i>Geschlecht</i>	15
3 EMMANUEL LEVINAS AND FEMINIST THEORIES.....	20
Levinas Judaism Alterity	20
Basic Tenets of Other-Centered Philosophy.....	22
Levinas and the Feminine	25
“ <i>And the Word Was Made Flesh</i> ” (John 1:14): With Kristeva	27
Levinas, Judaism, and the Feminine	32
Defense of Levinas: Chanter With Others	36
4 HEIDEGGER, LEVINAS, AND SEXUAL DIFFERENCE.....	39
Dwelling, the Face and the Welcome	39
ἀλήθεια, Sexual Difference, and Neutrality.....	44
Radically Re-thinking Sexual Difference	50
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	54
VITA.....	56

ABSTRACT

Herein, I will reconsider the works of Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas with a feminist focus. Through a careful analysis of both the Heideggerian and Levinasian placement of the feminine and of sexual difference, I will suggest alternatives to some traditional readings of these two prolific figures offered by feminists and feminist philosophers. I will argue, in effect, for a Heideggerian model for re-thinking sexual difference. In addition, I will offer what I believe should be a 'new' goal toward which feminism should work, one beyond the goals that have been in place thus far and one based upon a Heideggerian model.

INTRODUCTION

For some time now, there has been a great deal of debate within the philosophical community concerning both the placement of the feminine and the question of sexual difference in the works of Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas. Indeed, these two key figures in the discipline of philosophy have, somewhat unwittingly, positioned themselves on the front lines of an ongoing dispute situated at the intersection of Continental philosophy and feminism. In this paper, I would like to reconsider the philosophical writings of both Heidegger and Levinas with a focus on the questions of sexual difference and the feminine; in addition, I will strive to problematize the relationship between these two thinkers and their reception by feminism as a whole. Through a careful analysis of both the Heideggerian and Levinasian placement of the feminine and of the question of sexual difference, I want to suggest alternatives to traditional readings offered by feminist scholars and to argue, in effect, for a radically Heideggerian model for re-thinking sexual difference.

In the first chapter, I will begin with a concise discussion of how Heidegger and Levinas relate to feminism as a whole and, more specifically, how they relate to Poststructuralism feminist practice. Also, I will include a brief description of what the recent connections have been between philosophy and feminism in attempt to answer several important questions: Why should we view feminism and philosophy as disciplines that have the ability to inform one another? Why, more importantly, should we consider the works of Heidegger and Levinas through a feminist lens? What, exactly, do Heidegger and Levinas have to offer for feminist scholarship? How should these works affect feminist practice? These, and other pressing questions, will be

problematized here in this first chapter. What should we believe of Heidegger's silence on the subject of sexual difference, about his discussion of a gender-neutral *Dasein*, or about factual bodies? How should we understand Levinas's view of the feminine? Can Levinas's understanding of alterity and the Other truly speak to the concerns of feminism? These questions, and other pressing concerns, will be problematized herein.

The second chapter will focus on the feminist reception of Heidegger. Traditional feminist readings (both supportive and critical) of the Heideggerian corpus will be expounded upon, with special attention paid to the viewpoints put forth by Tina Chanter, Patricia Huntington, and Jacques Derrida on the subject of sexual difference and on the feminine in Heidegger's work. Chanter's criticism of Heidegger rests upon arguments concerning his silence about and neglect of discussions about bodies and gender differences, while Huntington and Derrida read Heidegger's silence positively, referring to several, plausible means by which to defend his work.

In the third chapter, I will discuss the correlation between the philosophy of Levinas, the feminine, alterity, and Judaism. As with Heidegger, I will recount the traditional feminist reception of Levinas's thought, conveying both positive and negative readings from a feminist perspective. I will also give an account of the basic principles of Levinas's other-centered philosophy, with the inclusion of his conceptions of the face, the dwelling, the Other, and the welcome; this will serve as a brief introduction to the whole of his work as it relates to the feminine. With the assistance of arguments made by Simone de Beauvoir, Julia Kristeva, Claire Elise Katz, Diane Jonte-Pace, D.W. Winnicott, François Raffoul, and Chanter, I will then explore the specific locales in Levinas's thought that allow us to understand his very specific placement of the feminine

as the welcoming other. Also included in this chapter will be an in depth dialogue with Chanter's defense of Levinas and of how the feminine is situated in his texts.

In the fifth chapter, I will continue to address the issue of sexual difference in Heidegger and Levinas. With Raffoul, I will give attention to some specific problems with Levinas's reflections on dwelling, the welcome, and the face; I will attempt to seek out a fair and just reading of these concepts as they relate to both the feminine and possible feminist concerns. A critical analysis of *Dasein* as gender-neutral will follow, with a translation of Heidegger's 1928-29 *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, which is a text that has previously been available only in the original German and has, therefore, not enjoyed much attention from philosophical, feminist, or feminist/philosophical scholars. With the addition of this new translation, a radical re-thinking of sexual difference utilizing a Heideggerian model is made clear and innovative readings of *Dasein* are made possible.

Lastly, in a regrettably abrupt section, I will offer a prescription for what I believe should be the 'new' goal of feminism, based loosely upon a radically Heideggerian model. Although I admit that this somewhat short section will require a great deal more analysis in the future, I want to begin to fully explicate what the repercussions of a Heideggerian model for re-thinking sexual difference might be. What the true ramifications of such a radical notion might be is still to be seen, however, I would like to posit an outline of what this kind of re-thinking and re-reading might look like.

CHAPTER 1: HEIDEGGER, LEVINAS, AND FEMINISMS

Poststructuralist Feminisms and Philosophy

Although philosophy has long been considered to be a male-dominated discipline, in the recent past many feminists have attempted to breach the barriers that exist for women within the field by working at the interface between feminist thought and philosophy. The task of feminism, when it comes to philosophy, has been to enable women to move from the margins of the discipline into the center. This has proved to be a difficult task. Historically, feminists have developed several means by which to enter into the discourse of philosophical thought; the main entry into this discussion has been through the doorway of criticism. Feminist scholars sought to re-read many canonical texts and to question their validity and the value of their application to feminist or woman-positive concerns. Yet, how should a political lens, the feminist lens, be applied to philosophical texts that do not include a political agenda of their own? How should these two, varied, separately oriented courses of inquiry into the complex, myriad, meaning of what it means “to be” ever be expected to share a common goal? Perhaps it will be useful to briefly discuss the specific branch of feminism that has been termed “Poststructuralist” for a partial answer to this query.

I have stated previously that feminisms and its goals are strictly political in nature. Let us consider this claim by entering into a discussion of Poststructuralist feminism. Although I am aware that this particular branch is merely one of many different “feminisms,” I believe that it is the most useful and pertinent site of inquiry when it comes to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas.

Poststructuralist feminism offers one set of theories that has attempted to make sense of the widespread cultural subordination of women. This approach, striving to create a relationship between “language, subjectivity, social organization, and power (Weedon, 12), is based upon the appropriations of certain psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan. Understanding the reasons for this toleration and attempting to resist it is one of the primary goals not only of Poststructuralist feminisms, but feminism as a whole.

Chris Weedon describes the agenda for feminist scholarship as a way to address the position that women occupy within patriarchal, or male-dominated, societies. In order to understand the relationship between Lacanian psychoanalytic theory and Poststructuralist feminism, it is necessary to understand what Lacan describes as the *symbolic order*. Lacan’s work in the appropriation of Sigmund Freud’s concept of *psychic sexual identities* has, in fact, proven instrumental in the development of feminist Poststructuralism. Psychoanalytic theory has itself benefited from Freudian studies of *psychic sexual identity* by the addition, along with Ferdinand Saussure, of the idea that there exist several groupings of words with specific connotations that are here termed *signifiers*. These *signifiers* are useful, in theory, in determining the social and cultural meanings of words and of what they symbolize. Particularly, *signifiers* may be considered touchstones of cultural identity from within the *symbolic order* (that order, as we have seen, which arises from the groupings of *signifiers* and words) that prove to unveil the hidden meanings within language.

In other words, the *symbolic order* is dependent upon a system of opposites that are all easily substituted for one another; it is also a concept that is based upon human

desire and upon a psychoanalytic view of the means by which we acquire language. According to Kristeva, before we are indoctrinated into the complex world language, human beings exist in a *semiotic state*. This *semiotic state* is simply the duration of time before which we have learned to communicate using speech. Lacan's reading of Freud theorized that the phallus is the primary site at which sexual difference is interpreted as lack (women do not possess a phallus), Lacan further suggests that the entirety of any signification of power rests within the emotion of desire.

Following Kristeva's analysis, in a *semiotic state*, one exists outside of language and, therefore, outside of the *symbolic order*. As children, we learn that in order to satisfy our desires to eat, drink, or to be paid attention, we must learn to speak, to use language in order to communicate our desires. Lacan, alongside such feminist thinkers as Julia Kristeva, claim that the moment of our indoctrination into the *symbolic order* does not occur solely within our indoctrination into the world of language. Indoctrination into the *symbolic order* also occurs during the *mirror stage* of our psychological development. This is the point of our psychological realization of our own subjectivity; this is the moment at which we begin to understand ourselves as a subject and others outside our selves as objects.

Kristeva and Weedon argue, alongside Lacan, that it is the moment of our indoctrination into the speaking world of language that is of greatest import because we are simultaneously indoctrinated into the *symbolic order*, which is already and eternally in place, inescapably patriarchal, and phallogocentric. After the infant has experienced the *mirror stage* of development, it begins to understand itself as a subject and not an object, as I have stated above. This all-important aspect allows the infant to comprehend that

‘others’ exist and may, therefore, be communicated with through the use of language. These ‘others’ are to be understood here as anyone ‘other’ than its own newly discovered subjective position. It is something as simple as the need to fulfill a desire that, according to Lacan, causes the infant to begin to speak, or to use language. The *mirror stage* and the moment of indoctrination of the infant into the world of language are nearly simultaneous with its unavoidable indoctrination into the *symbolic order*. As appropriated from Derrida, Saussure, and Lacan by Kristeva, this *symbolic order* is inherently male and patriarchal. From within the socio-linguistic structure of the *symbolic order*, ‘woman’ is repressed and, in fact, is revealed to have no language of her own through omission from the dominant discourse.

We must recall that, here, the *symbolic order* is a very specific set of *signifiers*; their very construction excludes ‘woman.’ Here also, discourse is referred to in the sense that Michel Foucault describes as referring to “Fixed, universal meanings of madness or sexuality [that] cannot be abstracted from history” (Weedon 1997, 105). It is clear that these “fixed, universal meanings” cannot, similarly, be removed from their embeddedness in the context of history or of the *symbolic order*.

Yet, discourses may be seen as more than means by which the production of meaning takes place. They seek to “constitute the ‘nature’ of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern” (Weedon 1997, 105). Trapped within the *symbolic order*, women’s bodies are discursively constructed by this dominant discourse in such a way as to secure their subordination. A prime illustration of this repression is the idea of the ‘nuclear’ family, which is a social norm that is a direct mandate from the dominant discourse: the *symbolic order* itself. Women

are repressed through their subtle seduction by the *symbolic order*'s normative prescriptions. Women's bodies and a discussion of their repression from within the *symbolic order* became the primary focus of Poststructuralist feminisms in the light, in part, of Foucauldian thought. From the perspective of the dominant discourse, women's bodies are confined to male-defined constructions of femininity and not female-defined femininity. It is this very constraint that is, among others, the site of their repression.

In Feminist Perspective: Heidegger and Levinas

Yet, why should we apply a political perspective such as Poststructuralist feminisms have supported, to Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas? For me, the answer to this question is simple: the philosophical works of these two men have resounding effects upon many of the basic feminist agendas. Perhaps we should address the effect of Heidegger and Levinas upon feminism separately.

Over the last several decades, the work of Heidegger has been problematized from a feminist perspective. The question of whether or not Heidegger's thought offers useful contributions to feminism is one that may never be fully brought to a sufficient conclusion. Beginning in the nineteen-seventies, and more so in recent years, feminist philosophers and scholars such as Chanter and Huntington have attempted to point out specific portions of the Heideggerian corpus as sites of inquiry. Those aligned with Chanter have also endeavored to suggest that Heidegger's philosophy, as a whole, does not support specific tiers of feminist theories. In further chapters, I will offer a brief history of feminism's relationship to Heidegger and also argue, in accordance with Huntington, for an alternative to the traditionally negative reading of his work. This alternative reading will serve to show what, specifically, in the philosophy of Heidegger

may be considered to be aligned with what I believe should be the goals and aims of future feminist discourse.

Emmanuel Levinas, contrariwise, viewed his philosophy, based upon a purely ethical relation to the other, as a religious and ‘feminist’ (though he may never have specified it this way) relation as well. This relationship extends even to the Otherness of the feminine (to the masculine). Traditionally, Levinas’ philosophy has been read by scholars such as Chanter and Claire Elise Katz as positioning the ‘otherness’ of the feminine as both positive and indispensable. In subsequent chapters, I will interrogate Levinas’ ethical prescriptions to live for-the-other and to have a responsibility-for-the-other as they relate both to the feminine and to Judaism. Focusing on the Levinasian conceptions of *dwelling* and the *face*, I will attempt to wrest out their connections with the feminine, with some feminist theories, and with the Jewish view of that femininity. I will here argue that although Levinas’ ethical philosophy centered around a responsibility-for-the-other seems at first glance to be in keeping with feminist ethical sensibilities, his link with Judaism and the Talmudic vision of ‘femininity’ lies in stark contrast to the specific feminist goal of creating a breach between ‘woman’ and ‘home’ so as to relieve the oppression of women trapped within the patriarchy of the dominant discourse: the *symbolic order*

Although it may seem that I am attempting to offer a wholly negative view of the feminine in the work of Levinas, while re-reading Heidegger’s relationship to feminism with an utterly positive lens, my purpose here should not be so readily evaluated as such. What I will strive to accomplish is to present re-readings of Heidegger and Levinas’ relationship to feminism that are meant to suggest alternatives to their traditional analyses

by feminist philosophers. My hope that that this kind of scholarship, this re-reading of the canon, will allow women who enter into discourse at the interface of Continental philosophy and feminism a means by which to decide for themselves whether or not the works of Heidegger or of Levinas are useful to their own work as women, as philosophers, as Other, and as beings relating to their own Being.

CHAPTER 2: MARTIN HEIDEGGER AND FEMINIST THEORIES

Traditional Feminist Readings: Heidegger

Although it would be impossible to give a comprehensive account of the work that has been done in feminist philosophy dedicated to the study of Martin Heidegger, it is necessary for me to give a short description of some of the particular arguments made both for and against his philosophy through a feminist lens. In the introduction to a new anthology dedicated to *Feminist Interpretations of Martin Heidegger*, Patricia Huntington offers just such an account of the “History of the Feminist Reception of Heidegger.” In Huntington’s eyes, the Heideggerian corpus deserves and has received much attention from feminist philosophers, neither strictly negative, nor strictly positive. Huntington, positing at the outset that Heidegger’s work and its relation to feminism is a worthwhile enterprise, writes,

To the extent that fostering a healthier human condition holds implications for social ontology, ethics, philosophy, of liberation, and spiritual freedom, Heidegger’s deliberately suprapolitical corpus allows feminist theories to engage and learn from his thought

(Huntington 2001, 2)

I reproduce this here in full because, even though there is nothing overtly available in Heidegger’s work to suggest his support of feminism, it is this implication that the ‘human condition’ is paramount to either the ‘male’ condition or the ‘female’ condition that is of the greatest importance. For Heidegger, ontological difference is held above biological difference. However, the ‘human condition’ Heidegger privileges is not the only site of criticism for feminist philosophers.

Fundamentally, Heidegger’s philosophy resists usage, ‘being put to work’ for ends of any kind” (Huntington 2001, 2). This becomes problematic when entering into

any discussion of feminism because the aims and goals of feminism are necessarily political. Sandra Lee Bartky's 1970 essay "Originative Thinking in the Later Philosophy of Heidegger," is considered the first article ever written about Heidegger from a feminist perspective. In this essay, Bartky summarily dismisses Heidegger's thought as patriarchal and against feminist principles. Specifically, as Huntington points out, Bartky argues that Heidegger's "notion of originative thought is far too vacuous and abstract to serve the needs of any radical world-renewing project" (Huntington 2001, 4). According to Huntington, many women fell prey to this point of view, having taken Bartky on her word with no further analysis of their own on the subject. Huntington further points out that this type of negative reading persists among contemporary feminist philosophers who are "either not Heidegger experts, never took to Heidegger during graduate study, or, having initially been attracted to his work, deliberately abandoned interest when they turned to...women's issues on the grounds given voice by Bartky" (Huntington 2001, 5).

It is clear that, in actuality, the early work of Heidegger provides feminism with the useful notion that a human subject exists as "pragmatically engaged in a world of meaningful concern" (Huntington 2001, 27). Furthermore, this early work avers that in order to truly understand any one person or thing, understanding "cannot entail abstracting from one's embeddedness in a context" (Huntington 2001, 27). If any person or thing were to be viewed outside of this context, a full meaning of their existence could not be reached. This particular portion of Heidegger's thought is in alignment with the Poststructuralist feminist idea that context is of the utmost importance in understanding how women have tolerated the subordination of their own interests in the past due to the pressure of the *symbolic order*.

Tina Chanter: Bodies, Dasein, and Criticism of Heidegger

It is through a discussion of bodies, of actual corporeal beings, that Tina Chanter finds a critical entry into Heidegger's work. In fact, Chanter's main claim against Heidegger is that his philosophy reveals a prejudicial, normative discourse at work in his thought. For Chanter, one may read Heidegger negatively from a feminist perspective because he not only "neglects feminists concerns, when treating certain topics" (Chanter 2001, 75), but his very "philosophy is formulated in such a way as to render such concerns irrelevant" (Chanter 2001, 75). While Chanter admits that certain readings of Heidegger have proven invaluable to feminism, she also argues that the Heideggerian position on the subject of 'bodies' is both insufficient and patriarchal. However, I will argue later, alongside Jacques Derrida, that the case is, in actuality, quite the opposite.

Perhaps the best way to fully explore both sides of the problem of Heidegger's gender-neutral *Dasein* (human existence, in short) is to take a closer look at both Chanter and Derrida's positions on the subject. Whereas Derrida defends Heidegger's silence, Chanter utilizes that silence as her main criticism of Heidegger's work. We shall turn first to Chanter's contentions and then, by way of utilizing Derridian arguments, refute them from this second perspective. It should be mentioned here that a focus on Chanter's criticism of "Bodies and Materiality" (Chanter 2001, 77) is necessary due to the constraints of space. This is not meant to suggest that Chanter does not delve into other areas of inquiry or criticism about Heidegger's philosophy, but merely to serve to narrow the specific locale of this debate for our purposes here.

In Chanter's recently published book *Time, Death and the Feminine: Levinas With Heidegger*, she argues that any claim that "his philosophy could be said to operate

in such a way that exhibits blindness not only to its gender bias, but also to a range of other normative assumptions it makes” (Chanter 2001, 76) rests upon a “limited understanding of the full scope of Heidegger’s philosophy” (Chanter 2001, 76). Although she would like to clearly assert that her reading should not be considered entirely negative, it seems as if the entirety of her argument is based on Heidegger’s silence on the subject. Chanter argues that her criticism of Heidegger has been complicated, by proxy, through arguments within feminism about Essentialism.

Indeed, it is perhaps the main difficulty for feminist discussions of gender difference that the charge may always be made that feminists are simply replicating the patriarchal structures that they are trying to resist. By speaking of difference as paramount, these feminists are thus basing their own arguments on the essentialism that they claim has repressed women. Chanter insists, however, that Poststructuralist feminists in particular “assume the risk of essentialism in order to alter a hierarchical power relation with male theorists” (Chanter 2001, 135). However, I fail to see how this very alteration does not merely replace one power relation with another, merely reversed instead of overcome.

Chanter’s response to my charge might be that the task of feminism and its attempt to overcome the repression of the dominant, male discourse is

Compounded by rampant cries of “Essentialism!” every time someone tries to tackle it...It is one thing to accede intellectually to the ideological impact that the patriarchal denials of bodily significance continue to exert on feminist theory, and quite another to successfully or completely live down their legacy

(Chanter 2001, 77).

Clearly, any refusal to discuss the actuality of bodies is, for Chanter, yet another attempt by the patriarchy to deny that repressed bodies exist in real life. She avers, it seems, that she would be willing to grant Heidegger his silence if the discussion remained purely on an intellectual plane and no attempt to claim that the reality of bodies was, in fact, affected by this “denial of bodily significance.” Still, it seems to me that this argument does nothing but serve to replicate patriarchal structures and does not aid in furthering the political goals of feminism in any way. Replacing the patriarchy with a competing and newly formed matriarchy in the supposed interest of fairness and ‘turn about’ would be quite useless indeed.

Jacques Derrida: Geschlecht

We find that Derrida takes up this very argument in an essay entitled “*Geschlecht: Sexual Difference, Ontological Difference.*” Derrida admits that “Of sex, one can readily remark, yes, Heidegger speaks as little as possible, perhaps he has never spoken of it” (Derrida 2001, 53). In Derrida’s view, Heidegger’s silence on the subject of sexuality is “easily remarked...which means that the remark is somewhat facile” (Derrida 2001, 54). He claims, in fact, that “Heidegger would have said nothing about sexuality by name and in the places where the best educated and endowed ‘modernity’ expected it with a firm foot, under its panoply of ‘everything-is-sexual-and-everything-is-political-and-receprocally’” (Derrida 2001, 55).

Derrida argues that if this is the central point of concern with Heideggerian philosophy, it could be eliminated by adding a few ad hoc phrase to the work and then proceeding to state that the “dossier could be shut, avoiding trouble if not risk” (Derrida 2001, 54). He asks the question: On what grounds may one criticize Heidegger’s silence?

Or, alternatively, “in which signs will you recognize his speaking or remaining silent about what you so nonchalantly call sexual difference?” (Derrida 2001, 55).

Strangely enough, the entirety of the discussion of feminism in relation to Heidegger has been dependent upon one short section of his thought. This passage of extraordinary import is found tucked away in the pages of *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*. §10 deals with the inherent sexless, gender-neutral nature of *Dasein*. While it is true that, as Huntington offers, “the general philosophy of *Being and Time* presupposes a gender-neutral view of *Dasein*, it is in §10 that Heidegger presents an actual defense of his claim in *Sein und Zeit* that *Dasein* is gender neutral. As Derrida states, “the matter was so little or ill understood that Heidegger had to explicate himself right away...in the margins of *Sein und Zeit*, if we are to call marginal a course given at the University of Marburg/Lahnin the Summer Semester 1928” (Derrida 2001, 56).

The question for Chanter and Huntington (and, indeed for us) is clear: Can the analysis Heidegger presents be read as one which promotes a discussion of gender that is aligned with the gender specificity required for recent feminist thought to reach feminist political goals, or does his account “harbor [] fundamental commitments that elide the reality of gender difference?” (Huntington 2001, 27). In other words, does Heidegger’s insistence on the neutral gender of *Dasein* signal that his philosophy is geared toward a concern for human existence as a whole, regardless of whether that human is male or female, or is he completely unaware of the importance of repressed bodies as integral to discovering or creating the means with which to resist subordination to the dominant discourse of the *symbolic order*?

Seemingly, one of Heidegger's defenses against feminisms such as the one Chanter purports is to be found in the way that gender neutrality positions gender in a place where it is no longer of very much importance. Whereas Chanter argues that this is merely an indication of the patriarchal nature of Heidegger's philosophy, I argue that the gender neutrality of *Dasein* may be read in a positive manner. If it has been necessary to discuss gendered bodies in order to further the cause of feminism, then what, if any, is the final goal of this discussion? Poststructuralist feminisms support the idea that a discussion of gender difference has no other goal than its very discussion. Certainly, one could argue that this is, in fact, the very nature of feminisms influenced by Post-modern sensibilities. A discussion of gender difference in this Post-modern context need not have a goal at all, save that of insisting on the continuance of such a discussion.

However, because feminism is also necessarily political, I argue that a discussion of difference must have another goal. Here, I want to suggest that the goal of such a discussion of difference should be to reach the very view that Heidegger holds about gender. Heidegger does not defend the gender neutrality of *Dasein* in order to purposefully uphold the patriarchal structures of the dominant discourse that subordinate women's bodies. Clearly, Heidegger is not politically motivated in this way and is, instead, attempting to put forth a philosophy for humans, for *Dasein*, which is always and only a being-with (*Mitsein*) cannot be accounted for by merely suggesting that it is an outgrowth of existing in close proximity to others. *Mitsein* "cannot be explained solely on the basis of the supposedly more primordial species-being of sexually differentiated bodily creatures" (Heidegger 1978, 139). In fact, "the species-like unification metaphysically presupposed the dissemination of *Dasein* as such...But this basic

metaphysical characteristic of *Dasein* can never be deduced from the species-like organization of being-with [*Mitsein*]” (Heidegger 1978, 139).

Yet, what of the remaining problem of the reality of actual existence of physical bodies in day-to-day real life? Can this prescription of Heidegger’s for a ‘human’ *Dasein* as opposed to a gender specific celebration of the differences in human existence truly account for or solve the real-life problem of the repression of bodies? Perhaps a gender-neutral *Dasein* cannot be used for such a politically motivated enterprise such as feminism because Heidegger would like for his philosophy to resist this very usage. However, it remains that if, as human beings, we cannot move past a discussion of difference (that exists merely for the sake of its own discussion!), subordination of actual bodies will continue. If a ‘new’ goal of feminism, which I will discuss in later chapters, could be defined as reaching the point at which there is no privileging of one gender over another, then feminism itself must avoid replicating the self-same patriarchal structures it seeks to ‘overthrow.’ Here, ontological difference is privileged over sexual difference. Although Poststructuralist feminists would argue that this is indeed the reason for a plurality of the myriad of differences remaining within a discussion of difference itself so that none is privileged over another, I disagree. I argue that this is not a measure that is sufficient for ensuring the prevention of the subordination or repression of actual bodies. While I do not want to argue that this discussion is not necessary, I suggest that it need only be a tool for feminism so that we may, finally reach a place and space within the equality of gender that is so solid that we may again consider ourselves all a human, gender-neutral set of *Daseins* that are engaged in being-with one another. If this kind of equality is not to be the goal of feminism, then what else could eliminate the widespread

subordination of gendered bodies? For that matter, how could any privileging of one race, one class, or one gender ever eliminate repression? Any attempt by feminists such as Chanter to silence Heidegger through a critique of his silence is an operation that represses the body, the corpus, of his work and texts in a replication of the self-same patriarchal tendency to repress actual bodies.

CHAPTER 3: EMMANUEL LEVINAS AND FEMINIST THEORIES

Levinas Judaism Alterity

Emmanuel Levinas' philosophical thought is more easily explicated than the Heideggerian texts we have examined thus far. Levinas' work has basic tenets that are consistent throughout, whereas Heidegger's texts have more subtly hidden 'themes' or 'central ideas.' In the aftermath of the Second World War, Levinas, a naturalized French citizen originally from Lithuania¹, where "Talmudic study was a way of life" (Chanter 2001, 6) seems to have taken on the task of preserving the memory of the genocidal horrors enacted upon the Jewish community during the Nazi regime. Simultaneously, Levinas seems to have also accepted the work of creating a new ethics, a new philosophy that would involve caring for one another. Following the liberation of France, Levinas penned a series of essays on Judaism entitled *Difficult Freedom*, in which he characterizes Judaism's post-W.W.II inward turn as a result of the extermination of millions of Jews by Hitler's Germany. It is within that collection of essays that Levinas offers a clear picture of the Talmudic version of femininity and, therefore, offers also an explanatory basis for his philosophy, which centers upon others.

In the introduction to *Feminist Interpretations of Emmanuel Levinas*, Chanter poses the question: "How does one read Levinas as a woman, that is, without reading over what is said of the feminine as if it had nothing to do with being a woman?" (Chanter 2001, 1). Here, Chanter points to two important sites of inquiry in Levinas's texts: a) how the reader should understand Levinas's work from a woman's perspective and b) how to understand the distinction Levinas attempts to make between the 'feminine' as a concept and the 'feminine' as it describes actual women.

¹ See *Ethics and Infinity*, introduction for more biographical information.

Simone de Beauvoir's criticism of Levinas occurs in a footnote to the Introduction of *Le Deuxieme Sexe* [The Second Sex]; it is perhaps the best-known criticism of Levinas's philosophy from a feminist perspective, if only due to its position as the first analysis of this work through a feminist lens to bring to light some important and complex issues concerning Levinas. De Beauvoir takes issue with the way in which Levinas writes of the feminine. Particularly, de Beauvoir argues that Levinas's conception of the Other as both alterity and feminine only serves to replicate patriarchal structures that feminists have challenged over the years. One such structure is that of the subject and object correlation in Levinas's work. For de Beauvoir, the feminine as it exists in Levinas's work is described in terms of lack, in terms of the privileging of the male point of view, or subject position. This position goes against the very project of de Beauvoir's text: "to show exactly how the concept of the 'truly feminine' has been fashioned – why woman has been defined as the Other – and what have been the consequences from a man's point of view" (de Beauvoir 1970, xxix). Therefore, for de Beauvoir, Levinas's "description [about the feminine], which is intended to be objective, is in fact an assertion of masculine privilege" (de Beauvoir xvi, footnote).

Chanter merely dismisses de Beauvoir's claims because they do not take into account what Chanter would consider a more careful or generous reading of Levinas's work. Chanter suggests that the connection that Levinas makes between alterity and the feminine "plays a major part in the challenges he issues to a philosophical heritage that assumes the primacy of the same" (Chanter 2001, 3). She further argues that, although Levinas cannot escape from being perceived as aligned with traditional, patriarchal views about the alterity of the feminine as Other, "his entire philosophical project, contrary to

the tradition, seems to establish the imperative of alterity as formative of the urge for systematicity” (Chanter 2001, 3).

How, then *are* we to read Levinas’s ethical contentions? Clearly, this is a complex issue that must be considered from a myriad of different angles in order to begin to formulate an answer to this question. Perhaps it would be helpful, in the beginning, to explicate several of the main concepts in Levinas’s philosophy so that we may understand it better as an ethical system of the Other.

Basic Tenets of Other-Centered Philosophy

Arguing for the relationship between Same and Other, Levinas contends that our “basic posture is for-the-other” (Levinas 2000, 158) and that it is through disquietude and responsibility for-the-other that this relationship is significant. This relationship can signify nothing except the Infinite (here God); “It must be outside being and nothingness in the form of *trop plein*, as a modality in which the more disquiets the less...” (Levinas 2000, 144).

Levinas suggests that it is this very “non-response” (Levinas 2000, 144) that succinctly describes the relationship with the Other as responsibility. This responsibility is “without escape, and an irreplaceable uniqueness” (Levinas 2000, 144) and individuates through its inability to be interchangeable. The Other, in causing the awakening of the Same, also causes the Same to burst “under the shock of the Other” (Levinas 2000, 145). This bursting is similar in character to a traumatic experience; “the Other intervenes as a trauma; that is the manner peculiar to it” (Levinas 2000, 145).

For Levinas, “ethics is a relationship with another [*autrui*], with the [*prochain*]” (Levinas 2000, 138). It is, therefore, the nearness of the *prochain* that defines my

relationship to the Other as a responsibility. The nearness of the Other forces me to question my “in itself [*en soi*]” (Levinas 2000, 138) and, in this way, I am taken hostage by the Other, who, in turn awakens me in responsibility for him.

My responsibility for the Other cannot be measured out in terms of a debt that is quantifiable, nor can I ever expect it to be reciprocated. I owe the absolute and the infinite to the Other; I am in debt, held prisoner. We are defined by our responsibility to others, which is an obligation without the power of authority. Instead, our authority is based on the naked vulnerability of the Other’s face. I am for the sake of the Other. We are ethical beings, obligated to the Other by nature. Yet, this is not a matter of solidarity, because I suffer too. Responsibility for-the-other is uni-directional; we do not hope for reciprocation.

The question now at hand is the question of what particular attributes or qualities of the Other cause the bursting and awakening of the Same. For Levinas, it is the nudity of the face of the Other in its vulnerability that contributes to and could, in fact, be considered to be the catalyst of the awakening of the Same to the Other. The person’s face here is phenomenologically investigated. There is something more to the face than its parts, an invisible element that cannot be thematized, but leads to obsession. However, it must be made clear that perceptual objectification of the face does not occur. There is a kind of surplus to the face that harbors the ‘thing’ that is invisible about it. The face may, therefore, be seen as an ethical phenomenon and the surplus, responsibility.

The Other affects me despite myself and I am, therefore, drawn to the Other. Let consider, then, the example of a beggar on the street whom we may encounter daily. According to Levinas, the nearness of the beggar determines the fact that you,

specifically, have been elected by their vulnerability, the very nudity of their face. Through this election, you are individuated. If, having already seen the beggar and having been exposed to his vulnerability, you choose to refuse to accept the responsibility for-the-other foisted upon you *by* the Other, then you will feel guilt. Levinas believes that we should be moved by this guilt. He determines that we are made human when we apprehend the vulnerability of the Other. If something must be done about the condition of the beggar, then *I must be the one to do it*. There is something before ‘me,’ something in ‘my’ being, which is pre-originary and *is* the Other. It is for this reason that the Other takes priority over the Same; “it is the priority of immediate exposure to the Other [*Autruï*], an exposure in the first person, who is not even protected by the concept of the I [*Moi*]” (Levinas 2000, 138).

Clearly, even Levinas’ reference to “*le moi*” refuses to be abstract. Here, “*le moi*” is in the accusative sense, not the nominative; I am ‘me’ (*moi*), as called, or named by, the Other. My entire self, even my birth, springs from the other. It is pre-originary with an absolute past. Therefore, I belong to the Other.

No one, however, may replace me in my relationship with the Other. The subject construction of I [*Moi*] differs from the I [*je*] in that the I [*je*] retains its unique qualities because it would be “impossible to avoid the other man in the exigency of his *face*, which is extreme immediate exposure, total nudity...” (Levinas 2000, 138). Contrariwise, the “*le je*” or “*mon moi*” somehow escapes this openness, this liability, to the extent that it seems to experience individuation. Therefore, “This I [*je*] eludes, but it remains I [*je*]” (Levinas 2000, 139).

“Me” is never a concept for Levinas. It can never be “*le moi*,” but must, instead, be simply “*Moi*” in this sense. The ego is preceded by the Other; it interrupts myself from within. I am born as a response; I am, therefore, second to the Other. Subjectivity survives the explosion of the nucleus of the ego inherently *because* of its relation to the Other. Responsibility for-the-other is not interchangeable with any other than ourselves. We must claim our responsibility for-the-other simply because it is inescapable and pre-originary; “There is so little slavery [in this relationship] that the uniqueness of the ‘me’ [*Moi*] is required by and in responsibility: no one could replace me” (Levinas 2000, 152). My own subjectivity may only be found in its displacement and deposition, in “*la dénucléation du moi*” (Levinas 2000, 138).

Levinas and the Feminine

Let us now consider Levinas’ relationship to the feminine. When entering into any discussion including both Levinas and the feminine, it must be made clear that the Other that has hitherto been discussed is a ‘general’ Other; the Other that will heretofore be discussed becomes, here, a very specific Other, the Other that has the quality of being feminine. As Levinas writes, “The feminine is other for a masculine being not only because of a different nature, but also insomuch as alterity is in some way its nature” (Levinas 1985, 65). The alterity of the Other is always part and parcel of its existence. Alterity is the very nature of Other-ness. For the sake of clarification, however, I must point out that, for Levinas, “– the feminine is described as the *of itself Other*, as the origin of the very concept of alterity” (Levinas 1985, 66), which may then be applied to other Others.

Levinas describes the feminine with language that is quite unsettling to feminist sensibilities. Consider that Levinas deems the very “way of existing of the feminine ...[as]...hiding, or modesty” (Levinas 1985, 67); this is the very kind of language that de Beauvoir found problematic in Levinas’s conception of the feminine. He understands the feminine to be aligned with the archaic image of woman as mystery, as alterity, as that which possesses a kind of undecipherable mystique.

The *face*, which is the medium for Levinas’ ethical relation to Others, is described as itself feminine. The feminine face is the one that we first encounter, first ‘see,’ and the one that welcomes us to the dwelling. The *face* of the Other indicates an unthematizable *something* that is more than the physicality of the face, but commands “Thou shalt not kill” (Levinas 1985, 89). It is important to remember that, in creating a direct relation between the feminine and the *face*, the feminine also becomes a direct access to the Infinite, or God, as well as to the welcoming of the dwelling.

To seemingly solidify this perception of femininity, despite what he claims in other philosophical works above described, Levinas attempts to relate the notion of the feminine with *dwelling*. The link between the feminine and the *dwelling* is uneasy in Levinas’s work; it conjures up images of the patriarchal ideal including the woman tending to hearth and home while the man accomplishes more important tasks and is dangerously close to throwing feminism back into its own dark ages of a sort. Why, however, should Levinas, after having argued that the Other is pre-originary and that I have a responsibility-for-the-other and that I have a responsibility for-the-other, suddenly connect the feminine with these oppressive, patriarchal ideals? It is here that our

discourse shifts to the religious connections Levinas has to Judaism and its consequent relevant ramifications.

“And the Word was Made Flesh” (John 1:14): With Kristeva

Amidst a myriad of essays on Judaism itself, we find a short essay within the pages of *Difficult Freedom* entitled, “Judaism and the Feminine.” In this brief discussion, the ties between Levinas’s view of the feminine and his view of the theological are revealed to us with a Judaic spin. Here, according to Talmudic writings, *dwelling* and the feminine are joined somehow, become one and the same, inseparable in their relationship to one another.

First, Levinas does not include a discussion of the status of women in Judaism in his essay on the feminine. He fails to mention that the Jewish tradition is heavily reliant upon the interpretation of certain sections of Judaic texts that have been directly propagated by supporters of the Talmudic tradition. This becomes an important factor when considering that, until quite recently, women were not allowed to read the Torah because they were not allowed to touch it. They were, therefore, denied access to nearly half of their religious tradition; they could not interpret the scriptures themselves in a timely and efficient manner and they had no choice but to believe and to accept the word of rabbinic scholars. This denial of knowledge, or denial of the access to knowledge, is similar to the Poststructuralist feminist theory that women have no language of their own, no access to language. In particular, the Poststructuralist feminist theories of Julia Kristeva become an integral portion of this discussion; Kristeva’s theories of motherhood, the feminine, and the religious both stem from and differentiate themselves from these earlier conceptions.

In an article entitled “Situating Kristeva Differently: Psychoanalytic Readings of Woman and Religion,” Diane Jonte-Pace addresses both the structural history and ramifications of the disciplines of study relating to women, psychoanalysis, and religion. She points to the persistence of the idea of the homology of both women and religion and attempts to interrogate the reasoning behind its survival. Jonte-Pace asks the question: What exactly does ‘woman’ mean? The answer to this question is simply not accessible and is merely and constantly deferred. Kristeva, continuing in some respects the theories of Jacques Lacan, avers to do away with this question entirely, as will soon be made clear.

Let us then begin our detour into Kristevan feminist thought with the linkage between the feminine and the specific psychoanalytic theory of Freud that addresses the Oedipal complex. According to Freud, the maternal relationship with a son is quite different from the relationship that a mother has with her daughter. The Oedipal complex is described as the means by which the male child differentiates himself subjectively within his familial structure. Simply put, the well-known conceptions of *penis envy* and *the castration complex* are thought to stem from the male child’s possession of a phallus (his penis), his mother’s lack of a phallus (as she has no phallus), and his desire to overcome the only other possessor of a phallus in his immediate vicinity, his father, through a sexual relationship with his mother. Clearly, another outgrowth of this theory is that the male child is constantly afraid that his mother. The mother exhibits what Freud terms *penis envy* and the male child fears that she will castrate him. Thus, he develops a *castration complex*.

In other words, the way in which Freud links the feminine to the Oedipal system is not clear. How is the female child to differentiate herself subjectively? Does the female child have no means by which to become independent in the way that the male does through these elaborate psychological rites of passage? Freud does not leave us with any explanation for this omission; we are left to make our own conjectures. D. W. Winnicott believes that there is room for a reversal of this idea of the uniqueness of the mother-son relationship by suggesting that the idea of the “good enough mother” (Jonte-Pace 1992, 2) may offer a way in which the maternal-child relationship becomes central as opposed to the Oedipal conflict. Consequently, these differing opinions about the psychological placing of “woman” have parallels and effects in the realm of the theological.

Through creating a relationship between the feminine and inferiority in his discussion of the Oedipal conflict, Freud is simultaneously making the claim that the “‘feminine’ illusion of religion will be renounced in favor of ‘masculine’ rationality” (Jonte-Pace 1992, 3). Conversely, Winnicott attempts to reclaim faith and the feminine by linking religion with mothers and children. Instead, Winnicott posits that the relationship between mother and child is of greater import than the relationship solely between mother and son. He challenges the Freudian notion that the Oedipal stage is the point at which subject-formation occurs and replaces that conception with the idea that the maternal-infant relationship is responsible for the differentiation of the subject because the mother represents the model for subjectivity (through, ostensibly, providing for its needs) that the infant will wish to emulate.

Let us now consider how Lacan interprets the positioning of “woman” in psychoanalysis and religion. Lacan enters into this discourse with an “attack on all ‘universals,’ ‘humanisms,’ and ‘truths’” (Jonte-Pace 1992, 5). He argues that his notion of *jouissance* (here sexual or spiritual ecstasy) eliminates essences from the idea of woman. He writes, “there is no such thing as The Woman, where the definite article stands for the universal. There is no such thing as The Woman since of her essence...she is not at all...There is woman only as excluded by the nature of things which is the nature of words” (Jonte-Pace 1992, 6). Lacanian psychoanalysis is revealed to be connected mainly to theories of language and language-acquisition. In this way, it becomes clear that “woman” is outside of language and discourse altogether; she has no language of her own. Accordingly, “ ‘Woman’ is doubly barred from the ‘symbolic,’ phallogocentric realm of linguistic discourse” (Jonte-Pace 1992, 6).

Lacan argues that the *jouissance* of woman in conjunction with her alterity becomes her link with the religious, with God, with mysticism. He insists that woman’s *jouissance* somehow manages to surpass the *jouissance* provided by the phallus and it is this supplementary *jouissance* that allows woman to be aligned with the other, the infinite, the beyond, and the supreme being’s. After all, God is the “word made flesh” and is often called *Yaweh* (the “unnamable”) since the name of this God of the Hebrews cannot be named. “Woman,” in her exclusion from language, or her Otherness to language, is the very thing that aligns her with the religious and with God. God, too, is beyond language and, therefore, other to language in the same way that woman is. Yet, woman should not be considered to have another, pre-originary essence in the archaic

religious sense that we often relate to God. It is only through woman's negation in language that she is other in her absence from discourse and language.

The Kristevan analysis of the conjunction of women and religion does not leave behind these Lacanian notions previously delineated, but embraces them lightly, while managing to move past them. Kristeva is careful as well not to define "woman" in order to avoid the dangerous pitfalls that come part and parcel with arguments including any resemblance to biological essentialism. Let us now consider these Kristevan appropriations and additions to our discussion of the feminine and religion.

Although there are many specific places within the 'body' of Kristeva's work where this "homology of women and religion" (Jonte-Pace 1992, 7) is discussed, I would like to focus on one particular essay, "Stabat Mater."² The "Stabat Mater" is actually a Latin Hymn, describing the sorrow of the Virgin Mary at the feet of the crucifixion of Christ. In Kristeva's essay, there appear two parallel columns, one depicting the woman's personal view of maternity, childbirth, motherhood and the mother-son relationship and the other describing these same subjects from the patriarchal male point of view of the church. The columns may be understood to illustrate the vast difference between not only the male and female points of view, but also between the "father's discourse on motherhood...[and the] mother's discourse on motherhood" (Jonte-Pace 1992, 8).

Through utilizing language that describes emotions, sights, smells and sounds, these two columns "evoke the Kristevan, prelinguistic...semiotic" (Jonte-Pace 1992, 8) that is in opposition to the masculine rationality of the symbolic and the symbolic order of language. Kristeva attempts to identify "Marian theology as a dramatic splitting of

² The full text of this essay may be found in the *Kristeva Reader*.

the woman: maternal generativity is split from sin, from sex, and from death” (Jonte-Pace 1992, 9). While Kristeva still admires the ability of the Cult of Mary the virgin to empower women and as a well-spring of powerful feminine symbolism in an otherwise male-saturated church HIS-tory, she also “urges a search for a new feminine ethic...separated from morality, an her-ethics...” (Jonte-Pace1992, 9).

In this sense, I would like to affirm that woman and religion are here intertwined irrevocably. Woman’s maternal relationship that relates her to God is what Kristeva finally attempts to interrogate and explore. She “reveals a maternal substratum to the paternal Christina discourse, and hints at an association of motherhood, religion, and death” (Jonte-Pace 1992, 9). Here, the word is not only related to language, but also to the idea of God as Word, word made into flesh through the womb of the mother (the Virgin Mary). The Word is wrapped in the mother (inside of her womb) who is outside the discourse of a patriarchal symbolic order, left with no language of her own. Yet, the mother carries a god within her that is also outside of the discourse due to the very nature of his divinity. What of his masculinity, then? Does the child, in this prelinguistic sense, exist in alterity as an Other due to his divine nature, or due to his relationship, both psychological and physical (as he is inside the literal womb) to the mother just as she is outside of the discourse? These are questions Kristeva does not consider.

Levinas, Judaism, and the Feminine

Thus far, I have explored the complex and myriad ways in which the feminine can be discussed in relation to religion or theology. I have also deciphered a good portion of Levinas’ ethical philosophy of responsibility for-the-other and interrogated what this might mean for the Other that is “woman” in her alterity. In addition, I have also

delineated a few other considerations, mainly that of how the feminine may be seen as either Other to discourse, language, and the Infinite (God?) or aligned with it irrevocably.

Now, I will focus upon Levinas' conception of the feminine as it relates to his own religious faith: Judaism. Again, I would argue that though Levinas' philosophy seems at first glance to privilege the feminine, or uplift it in its very alterity and Otherness through an attempt at its inclusion in his discourse, beneath this thin veneer is an archaic, patriarchal indictment of the feminine.

Levinas begins his discussion of the feminine as it relates to Judaism by embarking upon the task of naming and "honoring" several "charming feminine figures of the Old Testament" (Levinas 1990, 31). He mentions such figures as "the wives of the patriarchs, Miriam and Deborah the prophetess, Tamar the daughter –in-law of Judah...Naomi, Michal, daughter of Saul, Abigail, Bathsheba, the Suunammite, and a whole host of others" (Levinas 1990, 31) and suggests that these women "all play an active role in the attainment of the biblical purpose and are placed at the very pivot of Sacred History" (Levinas 1990, 31). He even goes so far as to argue that the way in which the Torah speaks of women is vastly different from how women are treated in the "Orient, where, at the heart of a masculine civilization, woman finds herself completely subordinate to masculine whims or reduced to charming or lightening the harsh life of men" (Levinas 1990, 31). Yet, this is the very context Levinas goes on to speak of women in.

In another attempt to "honor" these biblical figures of femininity, Levinas recounts their stories in detail, each time reminding his reader that if it were not for this particular woman, who was operating behind the scenes, some grand biblical event would

never have taken place and Judaism would not be as prolific as it is today. He describes these instances, which I here will reproduce in full because of its importance, finally as such:

All the switches along this difficult path, on which the train of messianic history risked being derailed a thousand times, have been supervised and controlled by women. Biblical events would not have progressed as they did had it not been for their watchful lucidity, the firmness of their determination, and their cunning and spirit of sacrifice. But the world in which these events unfolded would not have been structured as it was – and as it still is and always will be – without the secret presence, on the edge of invisibility, of these mothers, wives and daughters; without their silent footsteps in the depths and opacity of reality, drawing the very dimensions of interiority and making the world precisely habitable

Levinas 1990, 31

I wish to reiterate that I have chosen to reproduce this quotation in full so as to highlight the magnitude of Levinas' claims. In the above quotation, it seems at first as if Levinas were truly accomplishing the task he believes he has set out to do: he wishes to honor these women and to make certain that their accomplishments are not only recognized as of central importance in the action of the bible, but also as of central importance to the notion of woman as an identity. Levinas, in a condescending manner similar to the Oriental habit of reducing women to their supporting roles in the lives of men that he formerly criticized, wants to equate not only the *face* of the Other with femininity, but also to equate woman with dwelling or home. I argue that these connections are opposed to feminism itself and that Levinas ultimately fails to address the true problem: he reinforces the patriarchal ideal in his attempt to eliminate it.

Levinas writes of the Talmud; the Talmud reads, "The house is woman" (Levinas 1990, 31) and is, therefore, connected to hearth and home. She operates "behind the

scenes” so to speak and keeps the home in good condition for her family and not for herself. In this vision of the feminine, the woman must masochistically subordinate herself and her own interests to the interests of her family and male partner. Men, traditionally, are not asked to do this; it is only women who have been required to participate in this form of masochism. Clearly, this association with hearth, home, and, therefore Levinas’ notion of dwelling, is a mere reaffirmation of oppressive patriarchal ideals that persist in some forms of contemporary Judaism.

In yet another attempt to uplift the feminine, Levinas makes the clarification that woman is not, in the sense that she is discussed in his essay, to be considered a mere slave or an entity that is without power or resistance of any kind. He points out that the very etymology of the Hebrew word for woman (*ishlah*) is connected with man (*ish*) as it is “derived quasi-grammatically from man” (Levinas 1990, 34). True, she is not a slave, but how far is she from oppression when her importance rests solely upon her relationship to others, specifically men? In this way, Levinas inadvertently equates “woman” with traditional female archetypal associations such as gentleness and nurturing.

Levinas struggles to create a new ethical philosophy that entails having an ethical relationship to others, the Other, our fellow human beings that is, in fact, a responsibility for-others. This responsibility has its theological roots in Judaism for Levinas and his philosophy is informed not only by his religious leanings but also by the time in which he wrote.

Whether the Other is the bum we encounter on the street, or the alterity of the feminine, it is clear that Levinas attempts to form an ethical suggestion for the avoidance

of something on the scale of the Holocaust, the near-extirpation of an entire race, ever occurring again. It is literally the feminine *face* of the Other that commands me not to kill. Woman and the feminine become part of this infinite; the *face*, and therefore the feminine, is access to the infinite and, presumably, to God. This relationship is further solidified in Winnicott and Kristeva's ideas that the feminine is related to the infinite by way of both existing in alterity, on the margins, and without language.

This brings us to the Talmudic and, by proxy, Levinasian vision of woman as connected to hearth and home and in the role of the support of the family in masochistic subordination of their own interests. It is at this point that Levinas takes an irreconcilable turn away from feminist principles and begins to unwittingly replicate archaic patriarchal structures and ideals of femininity while attempting to uplift it instead.

Clearly, therefore, Levinas' philosophy of having a responsibility for-the-other is not what it seems to be at first glance: a philosophy working in and with otherness, difference, and alterity to release it from the bonds of oppression. Indeed, quite the opposite is the case. I am held hostage by the Other; I cannot escape from the pre-originary existence, from the ethical relationship to the *face* that exists and, here, is aligned with the feminine. Thus, although Levinas' ethical philosophy centered on a responsibility for-the-other seems to be in keeping with feminist ethical sensibilities, his connection with Judaism and the Talmudic conception of femininity and of "woman" lie in stark contrast to feminist ideals.

Defense of Levinas: Chanter With Others

In her recent publication, *Time, Death, and the Feminine*, Tina Chanter explores the important question of the place of the feminine is granted in Levinas's work. She

also takes to task the Heideggerian corpus and its near refusal to address sexual difference. Chanter admits that “The way in which the feminine functions in Levinas’s texts, often in an explicitly subordinate or supporting role to the dominant themes, would appear to exceed to refuse to be contained by the very structures that might seem to keep it in check” (Chanter TDF, xiii). Her focus on the concept of time makes it difficult, in some respects, to completely categorize Chanter’s arguments as an attempt to discover a defense of Levinas’s placement of the feminine. While offering an excellent exegetical account of the basic themes and polemics in both Heidegger and Levinas, the leap that Chanter insists that we make with her in order to read Levinas in a more positive light in relation to discourse on the feminine seems unfounded. The result is a tentative reader-response; students of phenomenology and feminism hesitate to ignore the inconsistencies in Levinas’s conception of the feminine. However, here I am most willing to offer an account of his defense, though I find it difficult to agree with Chanter’s conclusions on this issue.

Several matters surround a feminist defense of Levinas. We have already delineated some of these central aspects through a discussion of Levinas’s Talmudic view of femininity. Yet, Chanter would like us to focus on temporality and finds there a hint of what she believes to be a Levinasian placement of the feminine in a different space than the one I have suggested.

The feminine is, by all accounts, connected to the dwelling and the feminine face that welcomes therein. However, when Chanter considers Levinas’s version of the ‘feminine,’ she argues that it should be seen as unrelated to female bodies; instead, the feminine should be seen as a mysterious, engaging withdrawal from ontology and the

‘being’ or conception that leads to the heart of the ethical by drawing others to the brink of their ethical selves. Here, the feminine is *the* pre-originary other that entreats and calls us to the ethical. In this sense, Chanter reads the positioning of the feminine as privileged; as the singular otherness that engages as one half of the face-to-face; as the alterity that calls us to ethical relations and to fully understand our responsibility-for-the-other as the apex of ethicality.

Yet, what can be said of the withdrawal of the feminine after the call has been ‘voiced’ and answered? Where, in all its mystery and refusal to engage with Being itself can we find this evidence of privileging without understanding the very mystique of the feminine as unable to achieve the ethical itself? Derrida offers one answer, perhaps.

CHAPTER 4: HEIDEGGER, LEVINAS, AND SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

Dwelling, the Face, and the Welcome

In a passage from *Adieu to Emmanuel Levinas* that Chanter herself includes in her argument, Derrida avers that “this thought of welcome, there at the opening of ethics, is indeed marked by sexual difference” (Derrida 1999, 45) and that the feminine welcome “takes place in a place that cannot be appropriated in an open ‘interiority’ whose hospitality the master or owner receives before himself then wishing to give it” (Derrida 1999, 45). Still, Derrida must also concede that the feminine welcome that seems privileged in its pre-original status takes only a second place to ultimate paternal and masculine concept of hospitality; the masculine is in the position of host, while the feminine is resigned only to welcome and to withdraw (Chanter TDF 58-60).

Effectually, Derrida’s conclusions could be charted in a simple manner. Is there truly a place within the realm of ethics to discuss the feminine in Levinas by either offering a feminist reading, or a critical reading that characterizes Levinas’s philosophy as extraordinarily problematic for feminism? In other words, is it fair to question Levinas’s placement of the feminine when it comes to ethics?

The reasons are clear, therefore, for Chanter to choose the issue of temporality to focus upon in her defense of Levinas’s ‘feminine.’ Because, for Levinas, I am constantly ensconced in an ethical relationship with the other, the other becomes privileged, no matter what gender might be represented by that concept. My posture is continually one of substitution, even when it comes to death; I must be willing to substitute even my own death for the death of the other. It is the other itself, the primal force of alterity that calls everything that I am to responsibility. For Levinas, this call cannot be, or should not be,

ignored. I am always and eternally responsible-for-the-other. This becomes even more coherent when we consider that it is the face of the other that makes this responsibility clear to us. The other's face, in all its 'beauty' and alterity, allows us to visibly take account of another, an Other. In some respects, we see a glimpse of a soul within the alterity of the Other's face. As in the example of the beggar on the street, the other is always put before my self, is always pre-originary and ever entreating us to responsibility.

Yet, this feeling of responsibility could be characterized as being so weak and unable to care for itself that we are required to take responsibility-for-others out of something akin to 'pity.' If this is the case then clearly, taking into consideration the traditional patriarchal notions that confine the definition of femininity as weak and helpless, it is difficult to understand any interpretation of this simple fact as other than a re-statement of patriarchal dominance that has, for Levinas, a basis in the culture of a faith that, during Levinas time, offered women a tenuous place in the domestic realm, while men moved within and controlled the public realm. If women (and by this I mean factual, bodied women) are aligned with the feminine and with the ultimate alterity that Levinas claims leads us to the heart of ethics, then for whom are they responsible if they only serve to withdraw from the ontological? Where can the 'feminine's' relationship to ontology find its own force, apart from the benevolent assistance it gives on the way to ethics? If the feminine leads us to responsibility, then who will lead the feminine to ethics? She cannot be ethics itself, therefore are we to understand the feminine as connected with traditional patriarchal views of purity and virginal ethicality? Who will withdraw from the feminine; how will the feminine ever achieve the posture of being an

ethical being? Where will we place the feminine? Shall we place the feminine in confinement within the dwelling, welcoming and withdrawing, or in the forefront, with its own relation to ontology?

Another response to this problematic that I have put forth comes to us from François Raffoul in “The Subject of the Welcome: On Jacques Derrida’s *Adieu à Emmanuel Levinas*.” With a close analysis of Derrida’s text, in conversation with Levinas, Raffoul offers a discussion of subjectivity as it relates to hospitality and the welcome. Raffoul strives to “articulate and discuss the redefinition of the subjectivity of the subject as *hospitality*, i.e., as a welcome of the other” (Raffoul 1998, 212). He sets his task as that of exploring “subjectivity as it is redefined through the pivotal notion of *hospitality* as ‘subject of the welcome’” (Raffoul 1998, 212).

For Raffoul, the issue of subjectivity is the key to understanding both hospitality and the welcome through ethics. According to Derrida (with Raffoul) “Levinas offers us a genuine ethics of hospitality, that is to say, an ethics *as* hospitality” (Raffoul 1998, 213). Here, hospitality is considered the “*ethicality* of the ethical” (Raffoul 1998, 213) itself. Hospitality grants us a means by which to reach the ethical, it “provides access to this *possibility* of ethics, to an ethics of hospitality, an ethics *as* hospitality” (Raffoul 1998, 214).

Concerning the term “host” itself, it is of interest that Raffoul points to the double meaning that the term *hôte* has in French; *hôte* can refer to both the host and to the guest. It is this double meaning that Raffoul emphasizes as the crux of Derrida’s argument. Even more crucial to this analysis, this means “the subject, *as such*, is a welcome and hospitality of the other, before any self-positing identity” (Raffoul 1998, 214). The

welcome that the other ‘offers,’ then “defines the subject. As such the subject *is* that of the very welcome” (Raffoul 1998, 214).

For Levinas, then, the meaning of ‘subject’ becomes a reversal of the traditional view of subjectivity; there is no longer any difference between Other and Same as there is in Cartesian subjectivity. Here, the subject is not separated from the welcome; it *is* the welcome itself. Even further, Raffoul posits that “The subject is no longer a self-identity, an ego, a consciousness, even an intentional consciousness. The subject is an openness to the other, insofar as it is a welcome of the other, and defined as host/guest” (Raffoul 1998, 214). This marks, again, a complete reversal of the traditional concepts of subject and object, allowing the Other and the Same to be one (and the same).

Not only is the other inseparable from the welcome, but also “the welcome of the other is a welcome of an infinite” (Raffoul 1998, 214). Within this model of the welcome as the welcome of the infinite, we also find that “The subject is thus open to an other which is higher than itself. The welcome welcomes beyond its capacity to welcome” (Raffoul 1998, 215). It is the traditional Cartesian subjectivity that suffers; the other that welcomes is not an ego, instead, “The subject is exhausted in the welcome of the other: it neither pre-exists nor survives it” (Raffoul 1998, 215).

Furthermore, an analysis of the host and guest as one within the other seems to suggest that the “*host is first and foremost a guest*” (emphasis in original) (Raffoul 1998, 216). If we advance this argument, we find that there can be no claim of ownership upon a ‘home’ where a guest and host might be privileged; the face of the welcome, though it has been described as feminine, is inseparable from the host that has been described as masculine: they are one and the same. According to Derrida, “The face always lends

itself to a welcome, and the welcome welcomes only a face... but that, as we know from reading Levinas, must exclude thematization” (Derrida 1999, 21). In short, the previously ‘feminine’ face that is the welcome and the masculine host are unthematizable – they resist any subjectivity and they resist any attempt to privilege one over the other. I am the hostage of the other, after all, and can only respond to the other; I am always in a posture of response to the other and do not, as a subject, possess any intentionality. Yet, the other exceeds the subject and allows access to the infinite. Perhaps Raffoul puts it best when he writes that the “subject, finally, is not a subject, i.e., a substrate or foundation, but is *subjected*, as a hostage, to the other” (Raffoul 1998, 219).

The host cannot be separated from the guest, nor can it be separated from the notion of the welcome. The subject, too, is no longer separated from the welcome and subjectivity does not exist for Levinas as it is described in the traditional sense of an ego. Therefore, feminine and masculine subjectivities not only cease to exist here, but they are also inseparable from one another. This could serve as another defense of Levinas’s placement of the feminine. If there is no difference between femininity and masculinity because there is no difference between guest, host, and the welcome, then neither is privileged and both are equal.

Yet, even this defense seems insufficient when we consider that, as Derrida asserts, that the “ ‘feminine alterity’ before the transcendence of language, the height and illeity of the face, teaching, etc. – *from* the ethical, as if there could be a welcoming, indeed, a welcoming ‘par excellence,’ ‘in itself,’ *before* ethics. And as if the ‘feminine being’ as such did not have access to the ethical” (Derrida 1999, 39). Therefore, we

encounter the same problem as before: the feminine face as the welcome is privileged as offering access to the infinite and the ethical, but having no access to either itself.

ἀλήθεια, Sexual Difference, and Neutrality

The Heideggerian corpus has proved resistant to generalizations. Unlike the work of Levinas, there is no main theme or idea that flows through the entirety of Heidegger's philosophy. Defending Heidegger's apparent silence on the subject of sexual difference proves equally problematic. Yet, perhaps his silence in this matter has not been as elusive as I have been, until now, willing to concede out of respect to his critics. In § 20 of a German text which has only recently been translated, entitled "*Einleitung in Die Philosophie*" (Introduction into Philosophy, hereto referred to as GA 27), we find a second, hitherto unexplored explicit explanation of not only the subject of sexual difference, but also of the gender problem of the analytic of *Dasein*. The section, "Community on the basis of the with-one-another," serves to unravel some of the mysteries about what Heidegger meant when he declared *Dasein*'s gender 'neutral.' Here, I will give a detailed analysis of this text in an attempt to provide a Heideggerian model for re-thinking sexual difference. This close examination will also offer, in part, a timely clarification of 'sexual difference' in Heidegger's work. As Heidegger might have responded to his critics, "confusion always results from a half-truth being made into a universal principle" (GA 27, 147).

In § 20, the notion of being-with (*Mitsein*) is revealed as the key to this complex labyrinth of sexual difference, as does the existential of individuation. I argue that the construction of *Dasein* is actually *inclusive* of a philosophy of the "with" in the sense that

it must include, constitutionally, not only others in the form of *Mitsein*, but also the Other. First, however, I would like to clarify the Heideggerian conception of *Mitsein*.

The essential characteristic of *Dasein* is “being in the world” (Heidegger 1996, 112). Yet, Heidegger also addresses the fact that the world in which *Dasein* exists is a world with others. Therefore, “Being is being-*with*-others” (Heidegger 1996, 112). Heidegger terms this “being-with” *Mitsein*, however, being-with still describes *Dasein* existentially, even when others are not physically present or seen. Even the “Being-alone” (Heidegger 1996, 113) of *Dasein* is dependent upon this “being-with” because “being-alone” is only defined in terms of lack. The possibility of “being-alone” is made possible by the existence of “being-with.” Inherently, therefore, *Dasein* includes the existential determination of the *Mitsein* of others and, by proxy, “being-with.” Considering this, “the understanding of others already lies in the understanding of the being of *Dasein* because its being is being-with” (Heidegger 1996, 116). *Dasein*, in its inclusion of “being-with” as part of its constitution, cannot, in a sense, be considered separate from others and, therefore, the ‘other’ must be one ‘with’ *Dasein*. The being of *Dasein* is “being-in-the-world” and, therefore, also *Mitsein*, “being-with” others.

This suggests that the structures of *Dasein* that are “being with” are “equiprimordial with being-in-the-world” (Heidegger 1996, 107). It is this “mode of everyday being” (Heidegger 1996, 107) that leads us to the Heideggerian conception of the “they.” He chooses, once again, this neutered terminology because it suggests that the others on the world of *Dasein* are neither unique nor irreplaceable. Yet, even though this “they” is a phenomenon within the conception of *Dasein*, in its positive sense as primordial, it is inauthentic. In order to experience an authentic mode of being, the self

cannot be separate from the “they,” but it must recognize the “they,” instead as “an essential existential” (Heidegger 1996, 122) in its own right.

§ 20 of *Einleitung in die Philosophie* begins with a quite typically Heideggerian claim about *Dasein*: “The being that we in each case are, the human (*Mensch*) is in its essence neutral. We call this being *Dasein*” (GA 27, 146). Thus far, this new translation offers us nothing we do not already know, nothing of any particular interest. In § 10 of *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* this much has already been said of the gender of *Dasein*; this very section has, in fact, proved to be the central source of the ongoing debate I have related in previous chapters. However, § 20 holds much more than a simple repetition of § 10 in *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*; § 20 holds surprising revelations.

Heidegger continues, “Yet, it [*Dasein*] belongs to the essence of neutral *Dasein* that it has a necessarily broken neutrality, insofar as it in each case factually exists. That is, *Dasein* is as factual in each case male or female, it is a gendered being (*Geschlechtswesen*). This involves a very particular [being]-with and –to one another” (GA 27, 146). This marks quite an explicit and important revelation: *Dasein* is revealed not only to be a gendered being, but also to include the possibility of being factually male or female! To our astonishment, Heidegger avers that

The possibilities of human existence that are not determined by the sexual relation (*Geschlechtsverhältnis*) can only be pointed to. However, this sexual relation is only possible, because *Dasein* is already determined in its metaphysical neutrality through the with-one-another. If each *Dasein*, which is factually in each case male or female, were not essentially with-one-another, then the sexual relation as something human would be absolutely impossible

(GA 27, 146)

He warns us, however, that “the thought is simply nonsense that one can attempt to explain the ‘with-one-another’ as an essential determination of *Dasein* through the sexual relation” (GA 27). Instead, we should begin to clearly see a carefully woven pattern that skillfully stitches its way through several portions of the Heideggerian corpus.

As in Heidegger’s discourse “On the Essence of Truth,” we find that one term, ἀλήθεια (*alētheia*), can reference both concealment and unconcealment. He chooses the Greek formation of ‘truth’ over the Latin *veritas* because of its inherent double meaning; he deems it a “clearing (*Lichtung*)” (Heidegger 1993, 138). He translates the word as “‘unconcealment’ rather than ‘truth’” (Heidegger 1993, 125) in order to further emphasize its power of reference.

Heidegger makes a similar move when he first chooses ‘neutrality’ to refer to the gender of *Dasein*. In § 20 of *Einleitung in die Philosophie*, he writes,

The broken neutrality of its essence [*Dasein*] belongs to the essence of the human. That is, this essence can only primarily [nur primär] be made into a problem from its neutrality, and only with a reference to this neutrality is the rupture of neutrality itself possible (emphasis mine). Sexuality (*Geschlechtlichkeit*) is only a moment of this problem and not the primary one (thrownness).

GA 27, 147

It is *Dasein*’s ‘broken neutrality’ that allows us to see the ‘rupture of neutrality’ itself. The very reference to neutrality signifies a rupture that gives birth to neutrality itself. This form of ‘self-revealing disclosure’ is what is fascinating and brilliant about Heidegger’s work. Here ‘neutrality’ stands as self-revealing by making a ‘reference’ to its own rupture. This represents a complete reversal of the original determination of (among others) feminist scholars as to what ‘neutrality’ should be understood as.

Clearly, we can no longer simply define the term in its traditional way; in the light of this newly translated text, we see that the ‘neutrality’ of *Dasein*’s gender is not a true neutrality at all; instead, it makes a reference to both male and female in the way that it serves to rupture itself as part of the “broken neutrality of its essence” (GA 27, 147).

Yet Heidegger’s discussion of the neutrality of the gender of *Dasein* in § 10 of *The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic* has not stood alone as the basis of feminist critiques of Heidegger. In fact, what seems more disturbing to scholars such as Chanter is Heidegger’s refusal to exist in any other realm but the ontological. How can the analytic of *Dasein*, often defined simply as ‘human existence,’ ever be useful to feminist scholarship when Heidegger never discusses *factual bodies*? Chanter stresses this point in a section of *Time, Death, and the Feminine* dedicated to “Heidegger and Feminism” and subtitled “Bodies, Others, Temporality.” Therein, Chanter argues, “the nature of Heidegger’s critique leads him away from any sustained consideration of lived bodily experience” (Chanter TDF, 82). She makes this claim she believes that a “far-reaching feminist critique of Heidegger could be launched” (Chanter TDF, 75) and that

Such a critique would consist in exposing a normative bias that is built into his ontological method in such a way as to cover over its prejudices...Heidegger’s ontology has pretensions to a neutrality and universality , this reading would suggest, that it cannot sustain. His philosophy could be said to operate in a way that exhibits a systematic blindness not only to its own gender bias, but also to a range of other normative assumptions it makes

Chanter TDF, 75

Though Chanter states that “this reading has a certain legitimacy” (Chanter TDF, 75), she does not, in all fairness, claim that this is the only way to read Heidegger’s ontology; she seeks to problematize this critique later in the text. Yet, the problem of the inclusion of factual bodies still remains.

Indeed it is perhaps the main difficulty for a feminist discussion of gender difference that the charge may always be made that feminists are simply replicating the patriarchal structures that they are trying, in reality, to resist. By speaking of difference as paramount, some feminists thus base their own arguments upon the self-same essentialism that has repressed 'woman' in the past. Chanter insists, however, that Poststructuralist feminists in particular "assume the risk of essentialism in order to alter a hierarchical power relation with male theorists" (Chanter TDF, 135). However, I fail to see how this very alteration does not merely replace one power relation with another, only merely to be reversed instead of overcome.

Clearly, this refusal to believe that the denial of a discussion of bodies is, for Chanter, yet another attempt by the patriarchy to deny that the actualities of bodies exist in repression and in 'real life'. She avers, it seems, that she would be willing to grant Heidegger his silence if the discussion remained purely on an intellectual plane and no attempt to claim that the reality of bodies was, in fact, affected by this "denial of bodily significance." The question is clear: Can the analysis Heidegger presents be read as one which promotes a discussion of gender that is aligned with the gender specificity needed in recent feminist thought to reach feminist political goals, or does his account "harbor [] fundamental commitments that elide the reality of gender difference" (Huntington 2001, 27). In other words, does Heidegger's seeming previously understood insistence on the neutral gender of *Dasein* signal that his philosophy is geared toward a concern for human existence as a whole, regardless of whether that human is male or female, or is he completely unaware of the importance of repressed bodies as integral to discovering or creating the means with which to resist subordination to the dominant discourse.

Surprisingly, this new translation holds the key to this argument as well. The last portion of § 20 reads as such:

Since *Dasein* exists bodily [*leiblich*], particular conditions underlie the factual grasping of the other by the self and the self by the other, but the bodily co-determining relations of the grasping of *Dasein* and *Dasein* does not constitute the “with-one-another” but rather pre-suppose it and are determined by it.

GA 27, 147

Here, Heidegger not only admits to the bodily and factual nature of *Dasein* in a clear and unquestionable manner, but he also argues that the “being-with” of *Dasein* is *pre-supposed* by the “bodily co-determining relations of the grasping of *Dasein*” (GA 27, 147).

No longer shall we accuse Heidegger of ignoring sexual difference or factual male and female bodies. Their neutrality is a broken one and their essence cannot be understood without its own rupture. Factual, bodies are not constitutive of *Dasein*; instead, the body is placed in the position of pre-supposing *Dasein*! Neutrality is revealed as a self-revealing and bodies are proved to be privileged instead of ignored. Can we, indeed, continue to criticize Heidegger for his silence after having read this *explicit* and engaging account? I argue that we cannot.

Radically Re-thinking Sexual Difference

Poststructuralist feminisms, as I have stated above, support the idea that a discussion of sexual difference has no other goal than that very discussion itself. Certainly, one could argue that this is, in fact, the very nature of feminisms influenced by Post-modern sensibilities. A discussion of gender difference in this Post-modern context need not have a goal at all, save that of insisting on the continuance of such a discussion.

However, because feminism is also necessarily political, I argue that a discussion of sexual difference (or any difference for that matter) must begin to have another goal. Here, I want to suggest that the goal of such a discussion of sexual difference should be to reach the very view that Heidegger seems to hold about gender. Again, I would like to argue for a Heideggerian model of re-thinking sexual difference. Heidegger does not defend the ruptured gender neutrality of *Dasein* in order to uphold the patriarchal structures of the dominant discourse that subordinate women's bodies.

Clearly, Heidegger is not politically motivated in this way and is, instead, attempting to put forth a philosophy for humans, for *Dasein*, that is always and only a being-with (*Mitsein*) cannot be accounted for by merely suggesting that it is an outgrowth of existing in close proximity to others. *Mitsein* "cannot be explained solely on the basis of the supposedly more primordial species-being of sexually differentiated bodily creatures" (Heidegger 1978, 139). In fact, "the species-like unification metaphysically presupposed the dissemination of *Dasein* as such...But this basic metaphysical characteristic of *Dasein* can never be deduced from the species-like organization of being-with" (Heidegger 1978, 139).

However, it remains that if, as human beings, we cannot move past a discussion of difference (that exists seemingly for the sake of its own discussion), then the subordination of actual bodies will continue. If this "new" goal of feminisms that I suggest is to be defined as reaching the point at which there is no privileging of one gender over another (as in the broken neutrality of *Dasein*), then feminism itself cannot replicate this self-same patriarchal structure.

Although Poststructuralist feminists would argue that this is indeed the reason for a plurality of the myriad differences remaining within a discussion of difference itself so that none is privileged over another, then I must disagree. I argue, instead, that this is not a measure that is sufficient for ensuring the prevention of the subordination or repression of actual, factual bodies. While I do not want to argue that this discussion is not necessary or important, I suggest that it need only be a tool for feminisms so that we may, finally, reach a place in which the equality of gender is so solidly believed and taken as a given that we may again consider ourselves what Heidegger meant when he used the term *Dasein*: gendered, but existing as humans with a broken or ruptured neutrality, as beings engaged in being-with one another.

If this kind of equality is to be the “new” goal of feminisms, then what else could eliminate the widespread subordination and oppression of actual, factual, gendered bodies? For that matter, how could the privileging of any one race, class, or gender ever eliminate repression? The attempts of feminists to silence Heidegger through a critique of his own silence is an operation that represses the body, the corpus, of his work and texts in a replication of the self-same patriarchal tendency to repress actual bodies.

I offer this argument for the hope of a “new” goal of feminisms because I believe that at attempt equality, whether politically or personally (or reciprocally) motivated, has been the intention of feminisms all along. Something has been lost along the way, however, and I believe that we must retrieve it. What has been lost? Indeed, it is the very question that Heidegger would remind Philosophy of: the question (or to question) the meaning of Being. My hope is to remind feminism to ask this question as well. Heideggerian endeavors to privilege ontological differences over sexual differences may

now be seen in a new light. For what better way to begin to strike a blow to oppression than to privilege Being over differences? After all, the one commonality that we share with one another is that we are all beings, all described by the analytic of *Dasein*, before we are anything else. We are beings before we are beings that are women and men of differing races and gendered identities. Therefore, it makes a certain kind of sense to privilege ontological difference over and above other differences. Perhaps this will lead us to recall the importance of questioning the meaning of being when it comes to existence instead of continuing to be mired in the questions of differences.

This is not to say that differences should be ignored. On the contrary, to privilege the question of the meaning of being over all other questions should, in fact, include a celebration of all other differences, with the understanding that ontological difference is paramount. If we begin to understand the broken neutrality of factually male and female *Dasein*, then we can move away from the kind of thinly veiled, complimentary oppression that Levinas's work hides so well.

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