

Ontology and Agency: Martin Heidegger and the Problem of Reification

by

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Abstract

This thesis explores the potential for interpreting the work of Martin Heidegger as a resource for social and critical philosophy. I begin by intervening in the debate between Axel Honneth and Raymond Geuss on the usefulness of Heidegger in the recent re-activation of the problem of ‘reification.’ According to Honneth’s reading *Being and Time* critiques the epistemological model of subjectivity at the root of reification *and* provides a positive account of a more primordial way of being. I am skeptical of whether or not *Being and Time* should be understood this way, but nevertheless affirm that the anthropological *implications* of Heidegger’s ontology can benefit social and critical philosophy. I argue that Heidegger’s description of the way in which the world is first disclosed through pre-reflective practical activity implies how it can be that a human agent is both limited by its worldly conditions and yet still able to modify them.

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Introduction

This thesis began with the intuition that something has been left unexplored. It is difficult to accept that a work like *Being and Time*, a rich and powerful descriptive account of what it means to exist, could offer no insight on how it was that one could actually *modify* their own existence. After all, Heidegger always placed possibility higher than actuality.

This of course is a rather exaggerated claim about the actual status of *Being and Time*. While it would be incorrect to say that nobody tried, for lack of a better phrase, to put the book “into action,” so much Heidegger scholarship has struggled over whether it is even possible, in principle, to interpret the text with an eye to its moral, political, or critical implications.

Whether it’s the result of the increasing distance from “The Heidegger Controversy,”¹ or the exhaustion of some of our intellectual resources, the tide appears to be turning. Contemporary theorists have begun to ask how it is that Heidegger stands with critical philosophy. Often this involves putting him in line with figures more easily situated within that tradition, be it Marx,² Foucault,³ or even Hegel.⁴ Scholars are increasingly willing to at least attempt an interpretation

¹ See Jürgen Habermas, “Work and Weltanschauung: The Heidegger Controversy from a German Perspective,” in *The New Conservatism*, (ed.) and (trans.) Shierry Nicholsen (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 140-172.

² See Laurence Paul Hemming, *Heidegger and Marx: A Productive Dialogue over the Language of Humanism*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013)

³ See Robert Nichols, *The World of Freedom: Heidegger, Foucault, and the Politics of Historical Ontology*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), [Manuscript on file with author].

⁴ See Nikolas Kompridis, *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory Between Past and Future* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006)

of Heidegger that emphasizes our capacity to critique and correct our worldly conditions. It is from this point of view that I began my own project.

In the recently published *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea* German philosopher and social theorist Axel Honneth attempts such an interpretation. For Honneth, himself in line with Western Marxism, Heidegger could function as a kind of foil for any philosophical position that posited the human being as first and foremost a *cognitive* subject. The preoccupation with achievements of the intellect works to conceal the fact that human beings are actually inter-subjectively related to one another in an emotionally thick and cooperative manner. A cognitive picture of humanity encourages instrumental, thing-like social relations that Honneth finds far too prevalent in his analysis of the present day. If the idea of the cognitive subject needed to be overturned, the critique of epistemology Heidegger expounds in *Being and Time* would be an excellent starting point. Supplemented with the notion of ‘care,’ Honneth attempts to reveal a more basic and concerned way of being with others that a cognitive stance obscures.

However, both Martin Jay and Raymond Geuss are quick to point out that on Heidegger’s terms, ‘care’ doesn’t directly translate into something like human empathy. Rather, it is merely that which must be the case for something to *matter* in the most general way. That is, in order to be disposed in a loving or hateful way to another person, one must have ‘care’ as the structure of their existence. This point is a gross oversimplification of what is actually revealed in the existential

analytic of Dasein, but nonetheless it gets at the trouble with Honneth's interpretation.

My reading takes a different strategy. The purpose of this thesis is to address and affirm the objections raised against Honneth, but to argue that it is still possible to derive tools of social criticism from Heidegger's work on ontology. That said, I want to endorse the *idea* of social criticism that Honneth and György Lukács before him worked with. The goal of a diagnosis and emancipation from pathological forms of human activity will therefore remain intact. In surveying the critical potential of Heidegger's ontology, I want to highlight the critique of epistemology but also draw attention to the implicit theory of agency I believe can be gathered from the preparatory work of the first division of *Being and Time*. This reading focuses on the way in which Heidegger's Dasein is an agent that acts on the basis of possibilities presented in the understanding of its specific worldly conditions. One of the basic arguments I will put forward is that a world of meaning and the possibilities for action within it are first and foremost revealed through pre-reflective human activity. In other words, what counts as possible and meaningful forms of behaviour is constituted and revealed by our everyday actions. Though we find ourselves in conditions we aren't the ultimate source of, we are able to work out for ourselves different modes of human activity based on possibilities handed down to us, and then re-disclose the world according to our choices. To link these ideas back up with critical philosophy, one of the questions we need to ask is whether or not there are

historically specific sets of activities that work to hide their status as historically specific, and therefore conceal the way in which they re-disclose the world.

Chapter 1

-Surveying the Debate: the Problem of Reification-

Within this chapter I detail the means and ends of Axel Honneth's "Reification and Recognition: A New Look at an Old Idea," and consider in a provisional fashion objections to the project posed by Raymond Geuss. I aim to provide the foundation upon which the disagreements over Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time* takes place – the re-activation of reification as a concept for critical analysis – and to offer a preliminary assessment of that interpretive conflict. Though I will temporarily confirm Geuss' skepticism toward Honneth's understanding of *Being and Time*, in the chapters that follow I will gesture at how, through a deepened reflection, the conclusions Geuss draws from his skepticism are ultimately unwarranted. The basic position Geuss takes is that Heidegger's insights with respect to the tradition of philosophical anthropology, specifically the challenge he poses to epistemology, while innovative, serve no function to the purposes of a critical philosophy. It is this stance toward Heidegger that ultimately I seek to deny.

Reification: Marx, Lukács, Honneth

Generally speaking the work of Axel Honneth and other recent critical theorists like Rahel Jaeggi has involved the development of a philosophical vocabulary that can diagnose and emancipate social pathologies prevalent within liberal capitalist societies. Honneth's particular project revolves around the renewal of a tradition of critical philosophy (especially prominent within Western

Marxism) concerning the phenomenon of reification. The impetus of “Reification” is found in the attempt to re-activate the Marxist concept through a critical reflection on the text that initially made it famous, György Lukács’ “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat.” Building on the groundwork of Karl Marx’s analyses of commodity exchange and the way in which the social circumstances of capitalism foster the treatment of individuals as thing-like or instrumental, Lukács characterizes reification as a pervasive condition of a society that takes hold when the commodity relation extends toward and alters the form of inter-subjective social relations. Raymond Geuss helpfully reiterates the idea as regarding a “systematic, nonmoral defect or pathological feature of contemporary society” whereby “humans treat themselves and others as if they were things, not people, and experience social relations generally as if they were relations between nonhuman entities”.¹ There are at least two levels on which Lukács’ notion of reification is meant to function: First, commodity fetishism entails a way of perceiving a commodity as a static entity or thing. Although the commodity is treated as the object in which value inheres, the dynamic social relationship it expresses is, in truth, that value’s actual source. The qualitative functionality of one item is difficult to isolate and compare with that of another. Instead, what one ends up measuring is the *exchange value* of an item, its ability to be exchanged for something else. But what the notion of an exchange value of individual commodities conceals is the way in which value is itself dependent on objectified human labour:

¹ Raymond Geuss, “Philosophical Anthropology and Social Criticism,” in *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea*, (ed.) M. Jay (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 123. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as “PA.”

To sum up, then: the use-value of every commodity contains useful labour, i.e. productive activity of a definite kind, carried on with a definite aim. Use-values cannot confront each other as commodities unless the useful labour contained in them is qualitatively different in each case. In a society whose products generally assume the form of commodities, i.e. in a society of commodity producers, this qualitative difference between the useful forms of labour which are carried on independently and privately by individual producers develops into a complex system, a social division of labour.²

Hidden within commodity exchange is a social activity that takes account of technology, available resources, and the relationship between employers and employees: the factors that actually bear the value of an object.

Second, so-called laws of exchange and production are interpreted as objective and external to human control and re-formulation. Though these laws of a capitalist economy can be evaluated, this is often accomplished from what Lukács calls a contemplative stance, which further conceals the human activity involved in the construction of these exchange relations. Important for Honneth is the way that the fetish character of commodities outlined by Marx is re-imagined in *History and Class Consciousness* as having a determinant effect on the

² Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Volume One*. (tr.) B. Fowkes. (Middlesex: Penguin Publishing, 1976), 132-133.

*subjectivity*³ of the participating agents in the increasingly commodified or reified society. Reification is understood both as “an objective form and also as a subjective stance corresponding to it.”⁴ At the objective level reification is the process by which market and commodity relations externalize into laws – *real* objective laws with a *real* autonomy independent of the experience of the working class. Christian Lotz identifies that this is no mere epistemic error, no error of category. Commodity relations don’t simply *appear* objective, they take on their own reality:

As a consequence, the fetishism is itself objective since, in capitalism, value (as a pure and universal abstraction) appears as a natural property of things, which leads to a “turnover” of all social relations. Social relations, in other words, become

³Christian Lotz has recently noted that Husserl used the term reification while warning his readers against the dangers of naturalizing consciousness. Heidegger also discusses the reification of consciousness in its connection to philosophical projects that posit a subject over and against an external world; see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (tr.) J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1962), §10, 72/46. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as *BT*, beginning with the paragraph number, followed by its English pagination and finally the original German page number. Lotz however does not immediately see the relation between reification as it pertains to consciousness and reification as “the increasing independence of social relations and the appearance of those social relations as something that they are not,” see Christian Lotz, “Reification Through Commodity Form or Technology? From Honneth Back to Heidegger and Marx,” in *Rethinking Marxism: A Journal of Economics, Culture & Society*, 25:2 (2013), 184. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as “RCFT.” On his reading of these traditions, thinking of reification as the objectification of individual things turns the phenomenon into a subjective or even psychological concept, whereas Marx’s description of reification actually concerns the objective totality of social relations. These two ways of understanding reification are somewhat incommensurate for Lotz, and according to this reading both Honneth and Lukács are equally guilty of conflating the two senses of the term. What Lukács, Honneth and Jaeggi are really concerned with, according to Lotz, is subjectivity and therefore alienation. Lotz maintains a strict division between subjective theories (Lukács, Honneth, Jaeggi, early Heidegger) and asubjective theories (Marx, late Heidegger). I hope to show how this binary of subject and object is somewhat misleading.

⁴ Georg Lukács, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat,” in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, (tr.) R. Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 83. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as “RCP.”

themselves more thinglike and are not simply (mis)conceived or (mis)perceived as thinglike (versächlich). (“RCFT” 189)

At the subjective level, the mode of being of the working class is determined by its relation to the mechanics of the market. Lukács names this process rationalisation, which expresses itself as the ability “to predict with ever greater precision all the results to be achieved is only to be acquired by the exact breakdown of every complex into its elements and by the study of the special laws governing production” (“RCP” 88). Rationalisation is the subjective stance toward the objective character of the market that it must conform to:

It is no less evident that the more reality and the attitude of the subject ‘in action’ approximate to this type, the more the subject will be transformed into a receptive organ ready to pounce on opportunities created by the system of laws and his ‘activity’ will narrow itself down to the adoption of a vantage point from which these laws function in his best interests (and this without any intervention on his part). The attitude of the subject then becomes purely contemplative in the philosophical sense. (“RCP” 130)

The normative upshot of the contemplative stance referred to here is best understood as a lack of participatory involvement in the forces of economic exchange. In short a lack of agency. The relation one has to the world is viewed over and against external and objective laws to which human behaviour must correlate. Though Lotz rejects the inclusion of subjectivity in a description of

reification, he nevertheless notes that Marx himself explained that “beliefs are established objectively, behind the backs of the social agents, through the objective act of exchange” (“RCFT” 191). This implies that “the argument is not that in capitalism certain reifying ideologies are formed; rather, the argument is an ontological argument: the being of beings now appears in a new light – namely, in the light of the commodity form” (“RCFT” 191). Being disposed to one’s world in this way conceals those laws as the *product* of human agency. Further still, the abstracted stance of instrumentalization and calculation fails to see itself *as a stance*, even less as one that is constituted by historical forces. Anita Chari writes that

Lukács makes explicit an unconscious link between subjects’ everyday practices and the dynamic of the capitalist economy. The concept of reification there describes the ways in which individuals in capitalist society fail to recognize that the economy is constituted by human practices, even as it appears to be an autonomous and self-perpetuating dynamic.⁵

In summation, one of the most important insights Honneth draws from Lukács is the way in which a historically contingent mode of subjectivity can come to (mis)understand itself as natural – in other words, that mode of subjectivity is reified. Equally important is the way Lukács meshes a model of knowing the

⁵ Anita Chari, “Toward a Political Critique of Reification: Lukács, Honneth and the Aims of Critical Theory,” in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 36.5(2010), 589. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as “TPCR.”

world with a description of human agency. In this particular case, the perceived distance between the market and the subject gives way to a passive, disengaged mode of subjectivity.

We have then a rough sketch of the way in which a social, person-to-person relationship can take the form of an interaction between person and object, both in the general epistemological sense and in practical everyday activity. At its extreme, the content of the individual in this interaction is radically altered so as to render it a relation essentially between object and object. When the force of a market becomes so strong it appears impervious to human intervention, the agent is paralyzed or rendered inert. The once autonomous subject concedes to the now autonomous object. In Margaret Kohn's words "reification extends beyond social relations and comes to define the subject and his relation to the external world. The individual objectifies himself and *perceives* the world through the lenses of a 'detached observer.'"⁶

Lukács holds fast to the idea that he can construct a critique around the notion that this perceiving or taking-as is in fact a *literal* error. Honneth writes that Lukács "took the concept of reification literally in that he assumed it possible to characterize a certain kind of social behavior as being mistaken solely because it doesn't correspond with certain ontological facts."⁷ On this view, to objectify, or to be reified, is to in some way distort the ontological facts of society.

⁶ Margaret Kohn, "Books in Review: Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea," in *Political Theory*, 37:1 (2009), 310. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as "BRR."

⁷ Axel Honneth, "Reification and Recognition: A New Look at an Old Idea," in *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea* (ed.) M. Jay (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 20. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as "RE."

Reification is a *deviation* from a more genuine form of human praxis as a consequence of an economic system that structures social experience. Understood this way, reification is therefore not a moral failing of individual human beings. Critical theorists like Honneth inherit from Lukács and Marx the idea that these analyses revolve around how a society *produces* individuals in this or that way. More specifically, these theorists seek to explain how pathological forms of human activity and self-understandings result from social relationships that are formed on the basic structural elements of a society, such as, in Lukács' case, the market economy. Honneth refers to this as the indirectly normative status of Lukács' thought, in that it arises from "the descriptive elements of a social ontology or philosophical anthropology that endeavors to comprehend the foundations of our existence" ("RE" 21). For Honneth the underlying normativity is the result of the belief that the modern understanding of the self is *anthropologically false* as a consequence of the capitalist mode of production.

Honneth's goal is to parse "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" in order to bring forward the idea that reification is a type of social pathology. Though it refers to a distorted, misguided way of interacting with the world and others, Honneth wants to de-emphasize the notion that this distortion is simply the result of a monolithic capitalist mode of production. Instead, he offers a more general explanation of reification, one rooted in an epistemological model that suggests that humans comprehend and engage the world at a cognitive distance *from that world*. He identifies a number of explanatory gaps in Lukács' work and re-formulates the project in the light of his criticisms. Two of his major

objections are worth considering. First, if the notion of reification is of a kind of distortion, there must be something undistorted of which we can speak: a basic underlying way of relating to ourselves and to others that Honneth finds under-theorized in “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat.” What Lukács fails to explain are “the sociological, phenomenological, or psychological bases of nonreified social relations” (“BRR” 311). Second, Honneth believes that Lukács’ extension of the commodity relation is somewhat tenuous. The concern is whether or not a certain kind of economic instrumentalism can account for all the instances of reification, where one treats what is primarily not an object as if indeed it were. Taken further, Honneth notes that Lukács is unable to interrogate how a commodity relation can extend itself to the point that it becomes the *primary* mode of being for an *entire* society. This issue, which is not completely novel, speaks to the explanatory gap that results from the reliance on a “flawed base-superstructure model that reductively explains all of culture in economic terms” (“BRR” 311). The question then becomes, how does the idea of a social pathology help Honneth explain reification, given that he rejects the Lukácsian thesis that the source of pathology is rooted in a capitalist economic system?

What Honneth ultimately counts as reification includes experiences such as the objectification of human capacities for reasons of instrumentality, the feeling of alienation toward the market system, emotional self-manipulation for the purposes of economic gain, and the explanation of human-life through a detached, physiobiological analysis (“RE” 18-20). The proposed solution is a re-fashioned or re-constructed critical theory, one that draws upon Marx and Lukács

but supplements their work with insights from developmental psychology, Hegel, American pragmatism and Honneth's own previous endeavours. Of course, most pertinent to this thesis is the way in which Honneth also draws extensively from the work of Martin Heidegger, primarily *Being and Time*. The originality of the project is the result of the understanding of reification as functioning on two distinct yet inextricable levels. First, as a model of human agency that stems from a cognitivist theory of epistemology that eventually became a full anthropological account of the human being. This cognitivist theory refers, in general, to any philosophical position that understands subjectivity as primarily involving the evaluation of beliefs in order to determine those that can properly be called *correct* cognition of the world. It is the theory that the self is "a free-standing, self-regulating, cognitive subject" ("PA" 121). Second, as a distorted set of inter-subjective social relations that gives them an instrumentalized or object-like character. While both of these may be characterized as reified, they are so in different and non-reducible ways. At the same time, they appear related in some significant manner. One of Honneth's basic claims is that a philosophy that posits the human as a cognitive agent first and a practical agent second fails not only to explain reification, but also serves to *perpetuate* that very problem. The theory of human agency built around a cognitivist picture of subjectivity supports and preserves a form of inter-subjective human activity that is fundamentally centred around object manipulation and in turn the manipulation of other subjects.

The invocation of figures like Hegel, Heidegger and Dewey is therefore meant to help explain the way that reifying practices can best be understood as the

consequence of a certain (false) anthropological claim about what the human subject is. Honneth argues that the picture of the human as an abstracted, cognizing agent fails to recognize the way in which we interact with our world first and foremost in a practical and emotionally saturated manner. Importantly, the idea of the cognizing subject fails to see itself *as an idea*, and thus masks the fact that humans are situated within a set of circumstances out of which theories take their orientation. On Honneth's reading the utility of Heidegger as a critical resource in this set of problems lies in his ability to mediate between the two levels of reifying phenomena – the false anthropological picture and the instrumentalized character of social relations. Honneth attempts to resolve the ambiguous relation between these levels by arguing that Heidegger's notion of *care* highlights the way in which individuals are essentially concern-full agents, that is, fundamentally practical and literally *concerned* with their everyday dealings in the world ("RE" 30). It is this basic practical directedness that a cognitive model of human subjectivity obscures, because it takes the cognitive stance toward the world as *primary* in both chronology and importance with regard to everyday human activity. Through Heidegger, Honneth hopes to invert this formulation and place both the "formation and evaluation of beliefs in the context of a wider and prior kind of human praxis" ("PA" 122). In other words, Honneth understands care as a critique of the cognitivist theory, one that can be extended to the practices that such a picture of subjectivity promotes. If the instrumentalized character of social relations are at best masked by and at worst the result of the cognitivist theory of subjectivity, a successful critique *of that*

model should address both notions of reification initially outlined. Through Hegel, Honneth gives an account of an antecedent inter-subjective relation that the cognitive model has obscured. Reification is thus characterized as a forgetting of the primary inter-subjective stance of recognition, one that fosters non-pathological behaviour *and* grounds act of cognition. But by taking inter-subjectivity as the normative basis for the criticism of reification, Honneth appears to have left a number of things out of the original formulation, to the chagrin of some of his readers. For starters, he appears to have given precedence to the self-other relation, seemingly ignoring the self-self or self-object relation.⁸ Elsewhere, Chari condemns the setting aside of the socio-economic basis of the problem in favour of an “ahistorical concept of reification that is inadequate for theorizing contemporary political possibilities” (“TPCR” 591). Most curious is perhaps the fact that Honneth seems unsatisfied with Lukács even though *History and Class Consciousness* is replete with references to the philosophical model that prioritizes rationalisation, supplanting the socio-economic explanation with this insight. As Lukács puts it “modern philosophy sets itself the following problem: it refuses to accept the world as something that has arisen (or e.g. has been created by God) independently of the knowing subject, and prefers to conceive of it instead as its own product” (“RCP” 111). Extending this point, Chari urges that “*From the activity of philosophy to industrial labor, Lukács shows that the defining feature of reification, the pervasive aspect of capitalist subjectivity, is the*

⁸Dirk Quadflieg recently noted this curious lack of the self-object relation in Honneth’s formulation of reification, even in light of the attention Adorno once paid it. See Dirk Quadflieg, “On the Dialectics of Reification and Freedom: From Lukács to Honneth – and back to Hegel,” in *Symposium* 17.1 (2013), 131-149.

misrecognition of the practical basis of human activity” (“TPCR” 590, emphasis added).

Geuss’ Riposte

In a published response to Honneth’s project, Geuss returns to Lukács in order to better frame how the notion of reification incorporates important philosophical insights from *both* critical and anthropological sources. Initially suggested in “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat” is the idea that the circumstances that create social relations that are experienced as relations between objects are also the circumstances where the false notion of the human subject as cognitively distanced or merely contemplative finds its footing. In such a world what one can primarily do is attempt to understand or cognize about an external objectivity over which it has no control (“PA” 123). Narrowing in on the idea that a reified human subject therefore holds *false* anthropological beliefs about itself *and* about the society in which it lives (“PA” 123), Honneth jettisons the Lukácsian/Marxist base-superstructure explanation in favour of a primordial form of recognition that makes up the condition of possibility for cognitive acts, thereby de-essentializing cognition and overturning the false anthropology. What Honneth attempts to add to the critical tradition’s account of reification is the need for an *ideal account* of the human being in light of the *distorted form* that has previously been diagnosed. Geuss thus outlines the basic composition of Honneth’s argument in the following manner:

(A) Recognition is a precondition of cognition.

(B) Reification is a failure of recognition.

(C) Because of the overwhelming importance of cognition in society, we have good ground to criticize any feature of society that undermines the preconditions of cognition.

(D) Thus we have grounds to criticize society that is reified. (“PA” 124)

For Geuss, Honneth’s idiosyncratic use of the term recognition is therefore designed to satisfy two conditions at once:

on the one hand, the recognition in question is supposed to be something which is a strict precondition for any form of human cognition, and, on the other, this recognition is supposed to provide the foundation for a nonmoralizing analysis of social pathologies, and thus for radical criticism of societies. (“PA” 126).

But the project of Honneth’s “Reification” and the recourse to recognition faces two major questions. First, can the phenomena of the objectification of human capacities, alienation, self-manipulation, and physiobiological anthropology properly be grouped under the single heading of reification? Second, and more central to the purposes of this thesis, can the knowledge that the cognitive picture of the world is based on a more primordial way of being serve an emancipatory purpose in some important way? This is the question of whether or not insights

regarding philosophical anthropology⁹ can effectively mediate problems concerning social criticism. It is on this ground that Geuss believes Honneth's project is most suspicious, for even if the content of *his* anthropological claims are true – that a concerned engagement is prior to acts of cognition and thus instrumentalization – it does not follow that stable social criticism flows as a result. Geuss is insistent on this point, and finds Honneth's attempt at invoking Heidegger problematic: “from the fact that care for the world is prior to cognition, it does not follow that I must have a basically affectionate, optimistic, or fostering attitude toward anything in the world in particular” (“PA” 127). We might summarize Geuss' as saying that Honneth, in his diagnosis of distorted human praxis, seeks to supplement his argument with an ideal form of activity that may not follow from the resources he draws on.

Honneth must illustrate that holding a false anthropological picture has consequences at the social level and therefore that emancipation from pathological, reified social practices first requires a re-configuration of our current model of subjectivity. Geuss objects on the grounds that in *Being and Time* the idea of care refers only to what must be the case for meaningful action to be possible *in general*, it does not give any kind of normative basis for preferring one way of acting over another. Stated more accurately, that an individual can take a certain attitude toward objects, other individuals or oneself *reveals* that said

⁹ It will be important to note that I do not understand Heidegger as advancing a theory of philosophical anthropology in *Being and Time*, though at times it appears that Honneth interprets it in this way. My question deals with the anthropological *implications* of Heidegger's ontology in *Being and Time*, and if they can serve some function for social criticism. Expanding on Geuss' points here, Chapter Two and Three of this thesis will explain in detail that there is no Heideggerian anthropology *as such*.

individual has care as the basic structure of their existence. Thus to be concerned is not necessarily to be empathetic, and it does not rule out the possibility of being cruel or objectifying. Care is characterized as “a primordial structural totality, [that] lies ‘before’ [“*vor*”] every factual ‘attitude’ and ‘situation’ of Dasein, and it does so existentially *a priori*; this means that it always lies *in* them” (*BT* §41, 238/193). As a structural condition, care is “ontologically earlier” than any attitudinal phenomena (*BT* §41 238/194). According to Geuss, while Heidegger remains an important figure in overturning traditional epistemology and the subsequent ideas of anthropology that followed it, this is of no use to the tasks of social criticism, *according to the terms Heidegger sets himself*. Moreover, Geuss rejects the very possibility of bridging the anthropological and the critical and therefore denies that Honneth (or anyone) could mediate between a theory of subjectivity and criticism of social relations. In order to understand why it would be the case that, in theory, anthropological philosophy could not provide the basis for the criticism of pathological subjectivity, we will need to explore further the distinction between these two storied traditions.

Dividing the Anthropological and the Critical

Citing John Dewey, Geuss describes philosophical anthropology as a Western intellectualist bias that expresses itself through an attempt to “analyze the essential properties of human beings” (“PA” 120). According to this tradition, what constitutes the human’s singularity is the ability to form and systematically evaluate its own beliefs (“PA” 120). Amended to include the notion of a certain kind of reason, one that regulates the acceptance of certain beliefs over others, we

get a kind of “traditional rationalism” that Geuss calls the “default position for most philosophers since Plato: If my reason has evaluated the beliefs I have formed, those that satisfy the standards that reason imposes on them can count as (correct) cognition (of the world)” (“PA” 120-21). A problem this line of thought eventually faced is that in order to be a suitable account of human life, and particularly of human *action*, it had to include something more than an explanation of “the mere generation of beliefs” (“PA” 121). Geuss describes this as the need for a certain kind of motor:

something that actually moved a human agent out of the realm of speculation – of merely entertaining thoughts and beliefs – and brought it about that the agent acted in the external world in one way rather than another. (“PA” 121).

The need therefore had a practical dimension and required the explanation of phenomena like desire, want, impulse and emotion: “the things that provided the push, as reason provided the guidance, for human action” (“PA” 121). Geuss notes that at the very end of the 18th century, starting with the work of Fichte and continuing through the tradition of German Idealism, a certain upheaval began to take place. The realm of the practical slowly took philosophical precedence over that of the purely cognitive or rational (“PA” 121). By the 20th Century, the philosophy of belief formation increasingly became the philosophy of basic human praxis (“PA” 122). Two prominent figures in this upheaval are Heidegger and Lukács:

for Lukács, doxogenesis had to be understood as embedded in the social activity of a historically constituted socioeconomic formation; and for Heidegger, the final framework for conceptualization and the formation of beliefs was a kind of “being-in-the-world” that was essentially constituted by a concerned, pre-predicative engagement in existing human projects. (“PA” 122).

The second strand of Western thought is defined by what Geuss calls the post-Enlightenment attitude that “tells of the dissatisfaction with the social, political, existential, and aesthetic condition [...] which begins to be expressed in the late eighteenth century and grows more common as the nineteenth century progresses” (“PA” 122). Geuss identifies some of the great thinkers of this tradition – Marx, Durkheim, and Nietzsche – and finds that despite the major differences in their diagnoses of modern society, they all make reference to a similarly structured, non-moralizing argument:

One thing that these forms of social criticism have in common is that the more interesting of them do not intend to be moralizing – that is, they do not discuss the defects in society relative to subjective failings of individual agents or relative to notions of responsibility, guilt, regret, or any of the rest of the Christian and post-Christian apparatus. (“PA” 123).

Important for Honneth is the notion that the diagnosis of and emancipation from pathology be the task of a *social* philosophy, as distinct from a moral or political one. This social philosophy is concerned with the understanding of the social processes of modern civilization that facilitate human development as *mis-*development – as pathological or *Fehlentwicklung* (Roberts, 303-04). When the mode of social organization becomes an objective feature of existence that is difficult to call into question, it simultaneously privileges a model of subjectivity that will naturalize reified practices and fail to see itself as doing so. This model of the cognizing or contemplative subject is the false anthropological picture that masks the more primordial, undistorted way of being that Honneth finds in Heidegger. Bad philosophical anthropology therefore becomes inept social criticism.

However, for Geuss the bridge between the anthropological and the critical is not so easily crossed. To begin, it needs to be shown that forms of human action we take to be normatively problematic or pathological are in fact the outgrowth of an intellectualist anthropology. It must be proven that objectification in the case of something like the obsession with commodities is actually rooted in the more general, *epistemological* sense of objectification. In short, it would need to be demonstrated that a cognitivist theory of subjectivity encourages pathological behaviour, and that it is not merely the condition of its possibility. Next, if Honneth's argument states that cognitivism is in fact a false anthropology, it would still need to be shown that the 'true' anthropology he borrows from Heidegger encourages normatively preferred behaviour. It is on this front

that Geuss finds Honneth most vulnerable – if the structure of care, or for that matter *any* anthropological proposition, simply articulates what must be the case for the human agent to act in any and every manner, the critical and emancipatory potential of that anthropology is essentially neutralized. If Geuss is correct and care is nothing other than that which must be the case given *any* character of human activity, it is difficult to see how one could maintain a distinction between pathological/distorted and non-pathological/un-distorted behaviour in the first place.

Provisionally, we can say that Honneth and Geuss disagree over the possibility of Heidegger (or anyone) mediating between anthropological and critical insights. Honneth's goal is to show that there is in fact a Heideggerian anthropology and that it can be wielded against the false picture of subjectivity owed to cognitivist epistemology. Geuss' claim, on the other hand, is to say that not only is Honneth's reading of Heidegger inaccurate, but that the possibility of moving from the anthropological to the critical is non-existent from the outset. The purpose of this chapter was to sketch the general outline of that debate. What follows in the next two chapters is an increasingly detailed account of the implications Heidegger's *ontology* has for any attempt at philosophical anthropology. The goal of this deepened reflection on *Being and Time* is simultaneously to avow the skepticism Geuss has toward Honneth's understanding of care, a skepticism I take to be warranted given how Heidegger himself characterizes it. That said, I should like to deny the second thesis that no critical possibilities are opened up by *Being and Time*, that is, that the text offers

no benefit to those who wish to critically modify social relations. This involves taking a middle position between Honneth and Geuss. On my reading, *Being and Time* is not a philosophical anthropology, and therefore Honneth's attempt to utilize as such is affirmed as problematic. However, the criticisms of the epistemological model within *Being and Time* do serve a mediatory function between full-fledged anthropologies and problems for critical philosophy, in this case reification. In what follows I will attempt to explain how Heidegger can be interpreted as un-masking the false anthropology initially diagnosed by Lukács and how that un-masking can have relevant consequences for issues that revolve around emancipatory human activity.

'Practical' behaviour is not 'atheoretical' in the sense of "sightlessness". The way it differs from theoretical behaviour does not lie simply in the fact that in theoretical behaviour one observes, while in practical behaviour one acts [gehandelt wird], and that action must employ theoretical cognition if it is not to remain blind for the fact that observation is a kind of concern is just as primordial as the fact that action has its own kind of sight. Theoretical behaviour is just looking, without circumspection. But the fact that this looking is non-circumspective does not mean that it follows no rules: it constructs a canon for itself in the form of method. (Heidegger, BT §15, 99/69)

Chapter 2

-The Being of Dasein-

The purpose of this chapter is to address in tandem the reasons why Heideggerian ontology could be an attractive option for the aims of Axel Honneth's "Reification," but how it would need to function in light of the criticisms made by Raymond Geuss. I offer here a preliminary sketch of the existential structures of Dasein's being that are disclosed through its pre-reflective activity, which are subsequently explored more carefully in Chapter Three. This chapter and the next proceed by way of a targeted reading of *Being and Time* that understands the preparatory work of its first division as a negative critique of the traditional subject-object model of epistemology. The critique is characterized as negative because, contra Honneth, it offers no positive or idealized anthropological account of the shape human activity must or should take. Rather, it demonstrates that which must be the case¹ given the different forms of meaningful human action available to us, including what we generally understand

¹The phrase 'that which must be the case' is meant to indicate that Heidegger is interested in the ontological foundation of a given phenomenon while being wary of the more common language, 'conditions of possibility.' The concern with the latter phrase is the result of its perceived Kantian heritage and its implication in what Heidegger calls the metaphysics of presence or the priority of the actual over the possible. The way Heidegger understands himself as divergent from this tradition will be discussed later on in Chapter Two.

to be accomplishments of the intellect. Specifically, this reading of *Being and Time* unsettles the epistemological picture of subjectivity by articulating how knowing the world cognitively is a *particular* way of being involved with entities that presupposes a more basic and practical mode of engagement. Counter to Honneth's argument in "Reification," this is a descriptive claim about what humans actually *do*, as opposed to what they *are* primordially. Chapters Three and Four will go a step further by demonstrating that cognitive actions actually require the prior disclosure of a space where the subject and object, as they are conventionally understood, can meaningfully interact. This point is furthered by the fact that this disclosure occurs through *pre-reflective* human activity, and therefore that concrete acts of reflection are founded on practical, everyday ways of being toward entities. Where strict acts of cognition presuppose the prior disclosure² of a world through practical activity, the opposite cannot be said to be true. These insights drawn from Division I will build toward the account of transformative agency put forward in the final chapters of this work.

The Problem of Cognitivism

In order to better understand the goals of "Reification" and the relative usefulness of *Being and Time* as a resource, it is first worth considering the philosophical project that Honneth often places in contra-distinction to his own enterprise. That project is usually characterized as the cognitivist approach or cognitivism, expressions that are designed to capture the fixation upon and

² Heidegger's notion of disclosure is discussed briefly in Chapter Three and extensively in Chapter Four.

privileging of the subject-object model of epistemology and the crucial role played by knowledge in the human agent's formation and activity within the world. Flowing from Descartes through Kant and Husserl, Honneth understands cognitivism as privileging the notion of a self-contained subject in opposition to an external world or object domain about which claims can subsequently be made. Correct claims or propositions about the objective world count as correct cognition *of that world* and through this process objective or rational knowledge can be accumulated. For Honneth, this epistemological model is the lynchpin that holds objectification, knowledge, epistemology, and the epistemic or cognitive subject together in their conceptual and historical unity.³ Manifesting itself in the model of human subjectivity that portrays cognitive efforts as the expression of the true essential nature of humanity, this philosophical tendency is for Honneth both paradigmatic and troubling. As mentioned, of particular importance to both Geuss and Honneth is the way they understand cognitivism as both a theory of knowledge acquisition *and* an anthropological account of the essential features of the human being, full stop. Those salient features of cognitive epistemology in turn come to define human existence. Geuss takes Honneth as saying that the extension of cognitive epistemology has produced *false* anthropological beliefs that give way to a *distorted* form of social activity whereby "humans treat themselves and others as if they were things, not people, and experience social relations generally as if they were relations between nonhuman entities" ("PA" 123). It is on the basis of this false anthropology that one mediates their world in

³See Piet Strydom, "Cognition and recognition: On the problem of the cognitive in Honneth," in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, 38:6 (2012), 593. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as "CR."

such a way as to ground and reinforce the pathological subjectivities that constitute a reified society. Hence cognitivism begets reification. In this case the task of a critical social philosophy is to de-naturalize the idea that cognitive epistemology gives a complete trans-historical account of what the human being is. Though this epistemological model is itself part of a historically specific tradition of Western philosophy, on Honneth's reading it has been privileged to the point of concealing its own genesis, becoming an objective and seemingly impenetrable feature of human existence.

Piet Strydom questions Honneth's somewhat caricatured reading of the tradition of cognitivism, noting that since the 1950s, when cognitive theories of the subject were at their peak, few have maintained the argument that the generation of knowledge is exclusively the accomplishment of the intellect, hence "cognition cannot summarily be reduced to knowledge" ("CR" 593). The real target, according to Strydom, is the Habermasian re-formulation of critical theory along the lines of communicative rationality, which Honneth feels over-emphasizes rationalistic, and therefore cognitive, human activity:

Having replaced the productivist by the communication paradigm for the purposes of which he then developed universal pragmatics, Habermas came to emphasize the centrality of linguistic rules in a way that refocused critical theory on whatever restrictions are imposed on the application of those rules. Since emancipation thus became dependent on the process of communicative rationalization and since this is a high-level process which transpires above the

heads and behind the backs of social actors, however, critical theory in its new guise was rendered incapable not only of linking up with the moral experience of the members of society, but by the same token also of diagnosing social pathologies. (“CR” 601)

The overly rationalistic nature of the problem-solving function of critical theory is understood by Honneth as a narrowing of its potential, divorcing itself from the experiential level of everyday activity in favour of an increasing pre-occupation with linguistic rules and therefore high-order cognitive achievements. As an interesting point of contrast to the analyses that follow in chapters three and four of this thesis, Habermas once wrote that “With the interpretation of truth as disclosure, Heidegger further ignores the aspect of unconditionality that attaches to a validity-claim, which, *as a claim*, transcends all merely local standards” (*The New Conservatism* 147). Habermas and the notion of unconditionality put critical theory at a distance from its left-Hegelian and Western Marxist roots as a tradition that sought to diagnose and emancipate pathological forms of human activity. Curiously, as mentioned in Chapter One, Honneth leaves behind the socio-economic explanation of reification and its analysis of the reproduction of the passive, contemplative stance toward the world through the commodity relation and the concealing of human agency *via* the agent’s actual behaviour. For Lukács, human activity under the capitalist mode of production *and* the philosophy of the day needed to be considered in their intimate relation:

This rationalisation of the world appears to be complete, it seems to penetrate the very depths of man’s physical and psychic nature.

It is limited, however, by its own formalism. That is to say, the rationalisation of isolated aspects of life results in the creation of – formal – laws. All these things do join together into what seems to the superficial observer to constitute a unified system of general ‘laws.’ But the disregard of the concrete aspects of the subject matter of these laws, upon which disregard of their authority as laws is based, makes itself felt in the incoherence of the system in fact. (“RCP” 101)

It would however be inaccurate to portray Honneth as advancing the thesis that *all* acts of epistemic objectification are also acts of reification, or that objectification itself must be *completely* eradicated. It is therefore unfair to characterize Honneth’s standpoint as one that views objectification in absolute opposition to Hegelian recognition or Heideggerian care. In fact, as was demonstrated in Geuss’ breakdown of Honneth’s major arguments, recognition is *that on the basis of which* cognition, and therefore objectification, is possible. Honneth is quite clear here and worth quoting at length:

One could say with Dewey that in this case reification consists in nothing but this reflexive act of detachment through which we, for the purpose of attaining objective knowledge, extract ourselves from the experience of qualitative interaction in which all of our knowledge is always already anchored. If this view is correct, if reification is indeed identical with an objectification of our thought, then every social occurrence demanding such

objectification would be a manifestation of the process of reification. In fact, there are many passages in *History and Class Consciousness* which suggest that Lukács intends to assert that reification consists solely of a socially compelled neutralization of our antecedent stance of empathetic engagement. We can already see that this assumption must be inaccurate, because it would have totalizing ramifications; until now we have understood the antecedent act of recognition not as the contrary of objectified thought but as its condition of possibility. In the same way that Heidegger conceived of scientific knowledge as a possible and legitimate continuation of “care,” Dewey was also convinced that all objective thought is rooted in the reflexive neutralization of our original qualitative experiences. Both of these thinkers regarded the recognitional stance as a practical, non-epistemic attitude that must be taken up if one is to attain knowledge of the world or other persons. It thus appears highly implausible to assume with Lukács that this kind of recognitional perspective must stand in any kind of tension with cognition, or that they might even be irreconcilable. In fact, the objective understanding of persons, objects, or issues is a possible product of an antecedent act of recognition and is not its polar opposite. (“RE” 54)

Honneth is primarily at odds with the *theoretical* tradition that fails to recognize that a cognitive stance is first and foremost rooted in the way that we relate to our

own self, the world and to others in an emotionally saturated and affective matter. This is at least in part the result of a philosophical system that prefers and attempts to prioritize detached or worldless intellectual activity. To understand the generation and evaluation of beliefs as the *most basic* way of being toward one's world is for Honneth to mistake a part for the whole. A major goal of "Reification" is to effect a change in our self-understanding – in this case through an act of remembering – in order that we can remind ourselves that we are always already engaged in an empathetic relation of 'caring'⁴ toward ourselves, the world and others. Honneth is not arguing that cognitive epistemology is patently false, and therefore the point is not to say that a cognitivist stance is in principle an illusion or self-deception. Nor is it to say that a cognitive stance is intrinsically detrimental. Confirming Geuss' narrative regarding the introduction of passions and emotions into major philosophical analyses, Heidegger himself writes that while "Any cognitive determining has its existential-ontological Constitution in the state-of-mind⁵ of Being-in-the-world" it does not follow that we "surrender science ontically to 'feeling'" (*BT* §29, 177/137). If Honneth is correct, he has also met a challenge he originally posed to Lukács, which stated that any notion of distorted behaviour must make some reference to a more genuine form of

⁴ For the sake of clarity certain Heideggerian terms will need to be differentiated from their ordinary use. In what follows, any word contained in single quotation marks will designate its typical understanding. Where I intend to make use of Heidegger's meaning, no single quotation marks will appear. As an example, 'care' as it is ordinarily understood would be written as "I 'care' for you," or "I do not 'care' about that." Care as it is understood in *Being and Time* would appear as "Dasein's being we will call care."

⁵ See note 4. By state-of-mind Heidegger does not mean what we would commonly refer to as a 'mood,' in the way one might be "in a poor mood." Nor does he have in mind a purely mental phenomenon, such as what is meant when we refer to someone as "being in a state of euphoria." Instead, state-of-mind refers to an existential of Dasein that belongs to being-in-the-world, addressed further in this chapter and the next.

human praxis, about which Lukács has little to say (“RE” 20). Further still, if Honneth can maintain that the notion of care or recognition is presupposed by a cognitive stance and is not its diametric opposite, he can affirm value in the non-pathological forms of objectification that may be important to a society. This means that a *reified* society that “undermines the preconditions of cognition” – non-pathological cognition – is worthy of our critical attention (“PA” 125). Though veiled in part by the pervasive language of the subject-object model, the ever-present precondition that underlies any act of cognition is the kernel from which Honneth draws much of his critical insight. Heidegger and Lukács are therefore helpful in that they explicitly engage in an attempt to upset the self-understanding of a society that has literally forgotten the primordial preconditions of cognition:

Both Lukács’ allusions to engaged praxis and Heidegger’s notion of care designate that form of practical orientation that is especially characteristic of the structure of the *human* mode of existence. For in opposition to the prevailing conception that has become second nature, and according to which humans primarily and constantly strive to cognize and neutrally apprehend reality, humans in fact exist in a modus of existential engagement, of “caring,” through which they disclose a meaningful world. Lukács assumes that even in social circumstances that, due to the expansion of commodity exchange, have been reified, this elementary characteristic of human activity must be present in at least a rudimentary form.

Otherwise, Lukács would not be able to assert that only an act of becoming aware of what one is in fact already doing (and not, for instance, some more complex act of anticipation or recollection) is required to bring our practical involvement in the world to light in spite of prevailing reified social relations. In this sense, both thinkers are convinced that even in the midst of the false, ontologically blind present circumstances, the elementary structures of the human form of life characterized by care and existential interestedness are always already there. (“RE” 32)

The problem, as it was expressed in Chapter One, is that Honneth’s understanding of Heideggerian care implies that remembering the basic pre-conditions of cognition will ultimately give way to positive and empathetic worldly relations. In other words remembering that we are structured by care should produce subjects who quite literally ‘care for’ one another. This reading, on my view and Geuss’, is incorrect. Not only that, but it potentially runs into a host of problems revolving around philosophical anthropology and the metaphysics of subjectivity writ large. As James Strydom puts it:

Cognition appears as the figure and recognition as the ground. The former is derivative, while the function of origin, basis and foundation is ascribed to the latter. This position, which is clearly the product of conceiving the relation between cognition and recognition in dualistic terms, gives rise to the unfortunate

impression of a new version of foundationalism or philosophy of origins. (“CR” 595)

This criticism is similar to those by made Geuss, and it is also on this point where my analyses diverge from Honneth’s. In the remainder of this chapter, I hope to demonstrate that the insights of *Being and Time* should not be understood as an argument for a positive philosophical anthropology full stop, let alone one that sees empathetic engagement as its logical outgrowth. Instead, I will offer an interpretation that poses a negative critique of the subject-object model, one that grounds the acts of cognition in an ontologically prior way of being. It is in this sense that a cognitive stance toward the world will be demonstrated as derivative. In saying this, what I want to affirm is that a cognitive stance toward the world is problematic primarily when it fails to see itself as a stance. As derivative, cognition is preceded in chronology and importance by Dasein’s practical involvement in its everyday environment. Therefore cognition is not a false way of viewing one’s world, but it is also not the most basic. Through *Being and Time* it will be demonstrated that the cognitive *anthropology* is false in that the cognitive disposition toward the world already presupposes a *context* of practical engagement. What *is* wrong to think is that cognition should preside over all our other ways of being disposed. Severing an object from its environmental context in the hope of purely perceiving it ultimately leaves us with a plethora of subject-object difficulties. This also speaks to the Western Marxist desire to move away from universalistic moral critiques and toward social criticism. Propositional statements can never outstrip the specific situation from which they arose. In other

words, they presuppose a context that allowed them to be a meaningful possibility of human activity⁶. In other words, no correlation between a universalistic moral claim and the world as an objective totality could, in principle, be established. What the contemplative stance fails to realize is that it can't actually detach itself from its world of practical meaning, and that being detached is simply another way of being involved. Pace Geuss, our inherited interpretive traditions tend towards understanding the world as composed of discrete objects over which we struggle to gain knowledge. What Heidegger will attempt to make clear in *Being and Time* is that perceiving and cognition are located on a larger horizon, and rely on other ways of engaging the world which do not themselves rely on perceiving and cognition.

Geuss is correct in that Honneth's understanding of Heidegger conflates the a priori structure of care with empathetic human engagement. Honneth misunderstands that as the structure of Dasein's *being*, care doesn't mean that one is always already 'caring for' oneself or for others in the way the word is conventionally understood. It does not mean that I am first and foremost disposed positively to myself or to another person. Instead, as an existential structure, care can be revealed by a multitude of dispositions we take toward our world. Empathy and disdain are both concrete manifestations of this structure. In short, I will deny the strong thesis that grounding cognition in a more primordial state will ultimately produce 'care' in the colloquial sense; but I will affirm a weaker thesis. If cognition can be demonstrated to be derivative of a more basic way of being

⁶ The idea that propositions presuppose a prior disclosure of the world is discussed explicitly in Chapter Four.

towards the world, the intellectualist bias of Western philosophical anthropology could and should be overturned. For the third chapter I leave myself the task of further showing how these implications of *Being and Time* can serve as the starting point for a rich account of human agency. To better understand how that might be the case we will first need to pay heed to the more explicit aims of Heidegger's great treatise.

The Project of *Being and Time*

Though it had long been forgotten, the question of the meaning of being *qua being* was, once again in 1927, *the* fundamental question that stood before philosophy. And while this question had once spurred the thought of Plato and Aristotle, it had since receded as a theme for serious inquiry, and would require considerable effort in order to ask it anew. Nevertheless, as William Richardson writes, one fact is clear: “even before posing the question, man has some comprehension of Being.”⁷ Foreshadowing much of what is to follow, Heidegger begins with the seemingly minute insight that all positive investigation made by a science must be guided in advance by an understanding “of the area of subject-matter underlying all the objects a science takes as its theme,” and that “basic concepts determine” the way in which we receive that understanding in the first place (*BT* §3, 30/10).⁸ For instance, the concept of matter works to ground a

⁷ William J. Richardson, *Heidegger Through Phenomenology to Thought*, (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2003), 33. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as *TPT*.

⁸ In a 1941 lecture course Heidegger states that by basic concepts one usually has in mind “those notions that delimit a region of objects as a whole, or according to single, leading aspects. Thus the concept of “force” is a basic concept of natural science, the concept of “culture” is a basic concept of historiology [...] So understood, basic concepts assist the particular sciences with the investigation of their regions as guidelines for questioning, answering, and presenting.” See

physicist's comportment toward a world composed of particles. The modern scientific understanding an individual carries is projected upon the world, rendering it legible in light of the conceptual inheritance said individual has appropriated⁹ (Dea 61). As a science, the ontology Heidegger undertakes in *Being and Time* "leaps ahead" into the being of those entities which it takes as its object, even when that ontology is itself unclear (*BT* §3, 31/10). We can say then that all sciences understand and deal with the *being* of their respective entities. *Being and Time* attempts to move beyond traditional ontological research toward a *fundamental* ontology that asks after the meaning of being itself. In order to be fundamental, it must therefore aim at "the possibility of those ontologies themselves which are prior to the ontical sciences and which provide their foundations" (*BT* §3 31/11). Heidegger calls this the *ontological* priority of the question of being. There is an explicit rejection of the typical terminology of the self or the I in favour of the somewhat strange expression Dasein, which describes a way of being that in each case has some familiarity *with* being, and therefore with itself in its *own* being. Dasein holds priority and is ontically distinct from other entities in that it is in such a way that it can understand being, though often in an imprecise manner. This *ontical* priority of the question of being is an early indication that, as a text, *Being and Time* is deviating from traditional epistemological notions of subjectivity and objectivity. Thought this way, Dasein is itself ontological. But if ontology is a term reserved for the thematic inquiry

Martin Heidegger, *Basic Concepts*, (tr.) G. Aylesworth (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 9-10.

⁹ Shannon Dea, "Heidegger and Galileo's Slippery Slope," in *Dialogue* 48.1 (2009), 61.

into being, Dasein at this point is better described as “pre-ontological” which signifies that while it can often understand its own being explicitly, it is not yet in the position to ask the fundamental question of being itself (*BT* §4, 32/12).

To have one’s own being as an issue is characterized by the expression *mineness*. My being is in each case my own, your being is in each case your own. As a methodological consideration, this means that Dasein is the initial entry point for the analysis of the meaning of being in general. Dasein does indeed have *some* understanding of being in advance, but this understanding requires an interpretation in order to be clarified. The first division of *Being and Time* is the interpretation of the understanding Dasein already has, that is, an interpretation of the way in which Dasein *already* interprets its own being. This understanding-in-advance is rooted in what Heidegger calls the existential fore-structure, explained further on in this chapter and given considerable attention in the next. The interpretation of the being of Dasein is the preparatory work of Division I that was to ultimately lead to the question of the meaning of being in general. Referred to as an existential analytic, this interpretation is specific to Dasein in its distinctiveness as that being which has existence as its *way* of being. The basic structures of Dasein that are the theme of the analytic are accordingly named existentials. The analytic is the vehicle through which the greater questions of fundamental ontology can eventually be posed. But as Heidegger has reminded us, the question of being is not one that just anyone can pose. Dasein is distinct in that it is a way of being that inquires *into* being; Dasein *is* a mode of inquiry. Since not everyone has asked the question of the meaning of being it must be the

case that not everyone is Dasein. As such, the interpretation of Dasein should not be understood as an anthropological account of the human being. The inquiring is best understood as a way of being, but not one that exhausts *all* the ways of being human. Heidegger is asking after *how* it is that an understanding of being is latent in Dasein. To reiterate, he's asking how it is that Dasein could inquire into being itself.

Some further commentary on Heidegger's method is required. One of the more obvious doubts an attempt to critique cognitivism faces would note that giving a *theory* of subjectivity – even one that is decidedly non-cognitive – is itself an example of detached, contemplative, cognitive agency at work. Anticipating such an objection, Heidegger's ontology begins by articulating that any analysis of the structures that make existence possible must take as its point of departure the *experience* of that existent entity. The character of mineness attributed to Dasein comes into full view when we properly understand the existential analytic as a process of self-interpretation where one's own experience is reflected upon in order to reveal those structures that must be the case in order for those experiences to have occurred. By definition, *self*-reflection will in each and every case be my own. For these reasons, we say that Heidegger's method is hermeneutics of facticity – a self-interpretation of one's own worldly experience. The initial objects of inquiry are those which we deal with and exhibit an understanding of in our everyday activity:

Hermeneutics has the task of making the Dasein which is in each case our own accessible to this Dasein itself with regard to the

character of its being, communicating Dasein to itself in this regard, hunting down the alienation from itself with which it is smitten.¹⁰

This pre-conceptual¹¹ or unthematized understanding of the being of entities is illustrated through Dasein's practical everyday behaviour. The ontology of *Being and Time* seeks to explicate the pre-understanding of Dasein, the conditions under which entities appear as what they are, by way of an analysis of the pre-reflective activities in which one is involved. If we can employ the term knowledge here, what Heidegger wishes to demonstrate is the way that our use of objects in the world is an outgrowth of the pre-conceptual understanding of what that entity *is*. Dasein employs a common know-how in its use of the hammer, without first having to explicitly consider its meaning in abstract. This pre-conceptual know-how is what makes practical activity possible. The pre-understanding of the being of the hammer, and of other entities, is made clear by way of the seamlessness with which Dasein is involved in its activities. No stepping back in order to reflect is required. These pre-reflective activities of practical Dasein are therefore the initial object of Heidegger's study.

We know now that fundamental ontology requires the preliminary task of the existential analytic, in which the ontological structures of Dasein – the existentials – are outlined. Of major importance is the demonstration of how it

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger, *Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, (trans.) John Van Buren (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999), 11.

¹¹ See Note 8. Heidegger's use of terms like "concept" and "conceptual" can at times be difficult to pin down and as a result some controversies have arisen. For a short survey of this debate, see T. Kostroman, "The Need for a Hermeneutical Logic: Heidegger's Treatment of Concepts and Universals," in *Symposium*, 10:2 (2006), 493-502.

could be that Dasein, in its ontical comportment, can have a pre-ontological understanding of being, not as a superfluous characteristic but as essential to its very existence. What makes Heidegger distinctive as a philosopher is that he believes such an investigation must always start from an ontical ground. We have said that Dasein is that entity which relates to beings in their being through its intentional comportment in everyday existence, and that this relatedness can be interrogated ontologically because Dasein is itself “the ontico-ontological condition for the possibility of any ontologies” (*BT* §3, 34/13). Everyday intentional comportment is unpacked so as to discover the existential structures that make such behaviour possible – it is an interrogation into the way in which Dasein is open to being. Any fundamental ontology must therefore begin with an examination of the being of Dasein, because Dasein is “that entity which already comports itself, in its Being, towards what we are asking about when we ask this question [the question of Being]” (*BT* §3, 35/14). The goal is thus the thematization of “an essential tendency-of-Being which belongs to Dasein itself – the pre-ontological understanding of Being” (*BT* §3, 35/14). The question is of course, how can one understand something without explicitly reflecting on it? What this kind of ontological analysis will demonstrate is the way in which cognitive claims are preceded in advance by a background understanding; an inexplicit condition whereby a horizon of intelligibility discloses the being of entities prior to any cognition of them. Two further explanations are now called for. First, I would like to give a richer sense of what is meant by the pre-reflective activity of Dasein. This will help shed light on the way in which the explicit

acquisition of knowledge the cognitivist model of epistemology privileges is derivative of the existential structures of Dasein's being. Second, I will further clarify the pre- or background understanding Dasein exhibits in its relation to entities.

The Existentials of Dasein

One of the most ordinary ways we find ourselves pre-reflectively engaged in the world is through what Heidegger calls our existential state-of-mind (*BT* §29 172/134). The everyday experience of a mood, when reflected upon, can reveal the ontological-existential meaning of our state-of-mind that makes the mood possible. As ontological-existential, state-of-mind isn't meant to indicate a mental state as we normally understand it. Rather, it explains how we can be *taken* by a mood, which according to Heidegger is not a fleeting phenomenon but a persistent one. Even "pallid neutrality" or disinterestedness are instances of the general way in which Heidegger understands a mood to function (*BT* §29, 173/134). While ontically one might evade their experience of a mood, existentially that evasion is just another way in which Dasein is disclosed as a being that *is*, in this case a being that is in this or that mood. Still, the quality of merely being, the quality of simple presence, belongs primarily to entities that are not in the way that Dasein is. In being revealed through a mood, what one simultaneously discovers is the existential quality of thrownness: Dasein is "brought before itself [...] in the sense of finding itself in the mood that it has" (*BT* §29, 174/135). Crucially, Dasein is disclosed to itself "*prior to* all cognition and volition, and *beyond* their range of disclosure" (*BT* §29 174/135). In other words, the experience of a mood, when

reflected upon, reveals the existential condition called state-of-mind that can then reveal Dasein as *thrown*: as always-already brought before itself with a certain inflection. Using neutrality as an example was therefore not without its point. Under this description even a neutral stance must be understood *as a stance* one finds oneself taking toward the world. The mood holds sway over Dasein and as prior to cognition allows for the disclosure of the world in some manner or another. Thus, the way in which the world can *matter* to me is limited by the mood that holds me. In Heidegger's example of fear, that a thing can appear as to-be-feared is available as a possibility only as a consequence of the fearfulness that holds Dasein and discloses the world: "We do not first ascertain a future evil and then fear it" (*BT* §30, 180/141). We are now in a position to better understand how "Any cognitive determining has its existential-ontological Constitution in the state-of-mind of Being-in-the-world" (*BT* §29 177/138).

Equally fundamental to the being of Dasein are the existentials Heidegger calls understanding and interpretation. As existentials they are not forms of cognition. Understanding is not meant in the way we might say we 'understand' why we have to go work today. The understanding of Dasein allows for meaningful interaction with entities, because it is that existential structure through which ontic-ontological Dasein is related to the *being* of those entities. When we deal with objects in our everyday activities (what Heidegger calls the ready-to-hand), we understand them as being part of a referential totality in which they exist as the thing they are. The idea is that typically we understand things as part of a horizon of meaning that, in advance, guides our everyday activities. Dasein

understands that the ruler is *for measuring* because Dasein is that being that exists understandingly. The being of Dasein is therefore always implicit in any taking an entity as for this or for that. In being ready-to-hand, entities appear in their significance as things to be used, or more generally as things *for Dasein*. This understanding, however, typically remains inexplicit. For instance, we understand that the chalk is for writing even in advance of our actual use of it. This quality of understanding in advance Heidegger calls the “fore-structure” (*BT*, §32 191/150), and it is meant to indicate the way in which an inexplicit background understanding precedes and is revealed by our practical activity in the world. We understand the chalk is for writing given that it sits on a chalkboard in a classroom within the institution of the university – it is understood within a certain frame of reference. No individual act of cognition is required to make use of the chalk in this example. Even when the chalk breaks and stands before us as a simple thing, divorced from its practical context, the board and classroom are still understood as ready-to-hand. In other words, the horizon of meaning out of which the chalk was understood remains intact. They are part of the practical context within which the now *broken* and *impractical* chalk appears. The background context in a sense structures and confines how the individual entity we foreground for use is going to be interpreted. The foregrounding accomplished in interpretation is what constitutes the as-structure of the thing. What a particular object that is ready-to-hand appears *as*, what its purpose is, is revealed in advance of our use of it out of the background understanding we have. The background enables us to see writing as a meaningful possibility for using the chalk. This seeing requires “no assertion

which definitely characterizes it” (BT §32, 189/149). We understand the chalk as part of a totality of involvements that belongs to the university and through interpretation we make what that chalk is for explicit through interpretation. Again, we do not first cognize an object that is present-at-hand or merely there and then designate it as that thing it is. In Heidegger’s words:

In interpreting, we do not, so to speak, throw a ‘signification’ over some naked thing which is present-at-hand, we do not stick a value on it; but when something within-the-world is encountered as such, the thing in question already has an involvement which is disclosed in our understanding of the world, and this involvement is one which gets laid out by the interpretation. (BT §32, 190-91/150)

Knowledge, if we give it the sense of cognitive knowledge, is for Heidegger a *form* of knowing that is in no way more fundamental than the pre-understanding that governs everyday existence, and the design of *Being and Time* is to prove this point via an analysis of that everyday, pre-reflective activity. Dasein is always-already taking entities as what they are according to a certain stance toward their being, and is therefore always in some form or another related to the being of entities. Things appear as intelligible to Dasein because of the basic background structure of understanding that renders the thing *as the thing it is* in advance.

To say that this structure of understanding is constitutive of Dasein’s being is not to say that it is a quality or property of Dasein, and it is most certainly not what a willing subject chooses to do. Rather it is that constitutive element that is

revealed in Dasein's activity as having to be the case. In contra-distinction to a purely cognitive model of subjectivity, Dasein is unique in that its understanding is not defined strictly in terms of its cognitive, contemplative or theoretical acts. Rather, the structure of understanding stands a priori to *all* the ways Dasein can be and therefore *all* the ways it can be toward itself, others, and the world. Even questioning should be understood as the behaviour of a questioner, and thus at the same time as a possibility of Dasein's being (*BT* §2, 24/5). When reflected upon, in questioning there is always an asking on the part of the questioner *about* something, and therefore an interrogation *into* something. There must also be that which is to be discovered in the asking and interrogating itself (*BT* §2, 24/5). Heidegger urges that questioning as a seeking is always guided by what is sought, and therefore one who questions always stands in an understanding relation to what one seeks as its goal. An inquirer whose way of being is inquiring is essentially related to what is being inquired about, which is that thing's being. Dasein is this questioner "which each of us is himself and which includes inquiring as one of the possibilities of its Being" (*BT* §2, 27/7). From this standpoint we can begin to round out the being of Dasein as being-in-the-world.

Cognition as a Founded Way of Being Towards the World

The discussion of being-in-the-world is another part of the preparatory work of the first division of *Being and Time*. It begins with the attempt to ground two preliminary insights regarding the concrete character of Dasein's being, both of which I have mentioned briefly. First, that Dasein is a being that understands its own being, albeit in an unthematized fashion (*BT* §12, 78/53). Second, that

mineness belongs to any existent Dasein; hence “Dasein is an entity which in each case I myself am.” (*BT* §12, 78/53) At this point in the analysis, the concretizations of Dasein’s being are important in that they open up the possibility of interpreting the existential structure upon which they are grounded a priori.

The somewhat awkward composition of being-in-the-world is designed to highlight the way in which it must be understood as a unitary phenomenon in spite of being composed of several principal elements (*BT* §12, 78/53). However, if proper emphasis is placed upon this unity, the individual (but never isolated) elements of being-in-the-world can be brought to the fore. Through a dissection of the compound phrase Heidegger isolates three constitutive features: first, in-the-world; second, the entity/the who that in each case has being-in-the-world as its way; third, being-in. If through an analysis of the constitutive pieces of being-in-the-world Heidegger can ground his claims about Dasein’s mineness and its prior understanding of being, he can illuminate being-in-the-world as ontologically prior to any cognitive way of being. If successful, any claim about an entity as an entity would have to first be structured ontologically, and would only be possible on the basis of Dasein’s understanding of being as grounded a priori in being-in-the-world.

It should therefore be noted that, even when the constitutive components of being-in-the-world are dissected individually, they still belong to the being of Dasein. The difficulty lies in understanding the component parts “in” and “world” as something other than external objects a subject encounters. At the same time,

the world is not Dasein's as if it were achieved through an act of self-creation. Dasein is not the author of world. In-the-world, the entity that is in the way of being-in-the-world, and being-in are all existentials of Dasein. As a priori, they cannot be entities, nor can they belong to the being of an entity which is not Dasein. Dasein is to be understood existentially, whereas entities that are not Dasein are understood categorically. Important for our analysis is that the attempt to understand Dasein in a categorical, pure object manner is precisely the kind of pathology Honneth finds so insidious. However, this is not to say that *any* attempt to understand things categorically is an instance of pathology. It is instead to emphasize that only *things* can be understood this way, precisely because they are things which do not have Dasein as their way of being. The mistake would be to think that the understanding of thinghood is foundational, when in fact only those beings that are being-in-the-world can disclose entities as the kind of entities they are. In order to disclose being-in-the-world it only makes sense to begin with the pre-reflective activities of Dasein.

As such the analytic of Dasein often proceeds through contrast, beginning with the kind of being that belongs to entities which are not in the way of being-in-the-world. To begin, Heidegger draws on two ways one might understand the preposition *in*. On the one hand, it can connote the inside-ness of one entity within another. In this case, an entity occupies a space within another entity, in the way that a chair is in a room or a fish is in a bowl. But for Dasein, whose being is not that of an ordinary entity, *in* refers to an existential that *grounds* the kind of spatial relations described above. As part of its being, *in* describes the way that

Dasein is *involved* in its world. Dasein is the being *for which* other entities matter. The condition of being-in, with the sense of being involved in the world, is that which allows for entities with which Dasein relates to be intelligible in this or that way.

The notion of being involved is not to be understood as a specific description of one of Dasein's activities. Rather, it is part of the general way of Dasein's being that opens possibilities for ontic Dasein to comport itself in particular ways. Ultimately Heidegger will ground involvement in Dasein's being as what he calls circumspective concern and care, which refer back to the notion that Dasein is first and foremost a being that is caught up in pre-reflective activities within a world that *matters*. Understood in this way, concern and care are not to be taken as synonymous with 'worrying' or 'feeling empathy for;' they are the a priori structures that must be the case when Dasein enacts its possibilities.

As part of the being of Dasein, so too will world be exhibited to have a similar existential constitution. It refers not to the totality of entities that can be encountered by Dasein, nor to the 'world' of an environment in the sense that there is a 'public world,' or a 'world' of a doctor, athlete or professor. It is an existential disclosed in advance of any of these other senses; it is that which allows them to be meaningful (*BT* §14, 93/64). Dasein's concerned engagement with entities, in whatever form it may take, is founded upon the prior disclosure of a world in which Dasein can be involved. In contrast to other entities, like rocks or tables or chairs, Dasein's being is distinctive in that it allows for a meaningful

encounter. When Heidegger writes that a chair cannot touch a wall, he means that a chair is not a thing for which a wall can matter (*BT* §12, 81/55), even if there were no spatial distance between those two objects. In other words, even the notion of two things having no spatial separation can only be meaningful to Dasein. Therefore, Dasein is no mere entity that exists 'in' a 'world' alongside other entities. Dasein and world are not entities at all:

As an *existential*, 'Being alongside' the world never means anything like the Being-present-at-hand-together of Things that occur. There is no such thing as the 'side-by-side-ness' of an entity called 'Dasein' with another entity called 'world.' (*BT* §12, 81/55)

Another way of putting this is that entities which are not Dasein are world-less. Only the entity that has Dasein as its way can experience another entity *as for touching*.

If being involved in the world reveals the existential structure founded upon being-in, then the intelligibility of an entity within the world is dependent upon a Dasein that has being-in as its way of being. In order for an entity to matter to Dasein in this or that way, the world must already be revealed such that an entity can appear as something for touching. To lay any kind of claim about an entity within the world therefore requires first that the entity be understood in its being *by Dasein*. In other words, being able to state that chalk is for writing or that a ruler is for measuring or that matter is composed of small particles called atoms presupposes their disclosure *to* and *through* Dasein. Intelligibility is

grounded in Dasein's ability to understand the being of other entities. Taking things in this way is a seamless activity; in hammering "an entity of this kind is not *grasped* thematically as an occurring Thing." (BT §15, 98/69) No conceptual understanding is required in order to make use of entities within the world, or better yet to *live* in an everyday manner. In other words, we do not come before ourselves and other objects as pure things that require explicit reflection in order to be dealt with. The orientation we take toward the world is a possibility latent in the understanding we always have in advance. Our pre-reflective dealings are already dispersed into concrete forms of concern. The dealing that is closest to us is not "bare perceptual cognition" but instead "the kind of concern which manipulates things and puts them to use" (BT §15, 95/67).

The implicit connection between the understanding of entities and the understanding of Dasein's own being is for Heidegger also the root of the (mis)interpretation of Dasein as a thing alongside any other thing. The understanding of a thing in its thing-ness Heidegger calls presence-at-hand, that is, the being of an entity which is merely there. The notion of being-in-the-world is meant to demonstrate that Dasein first understands itself ontologically out of those entities that it itself is not, but that it encounters within the world and from the being they possess. The attempt to understand things as present-at-hand is for Heidegger one of the definitive projects of Western philosophy, concretized in the desire to understand Nature as a thing or the Object in its object-ness. What is missed, however, is the way in which Dasein first understands beings as ready-to-

hand, and that the possibility of understanding things as present-at-hand is made possible by way of it:

If knowing is to be possible as a way of determining the nature of the present-at-hand by observing it, then there must first be a *deficiency* in our having-to-do with the world concernfully. When concern holds back [Sichenthalten] from any kind of producing, manipulating, and the like, it puts itself into what is now the sole remaining mode of Being-in, the mode of just tarrying alongside [...] This kind of Being towards the world is one which lets us encounter entities within-the-world purely in the *way they look* (eidos). (BT §13, 88/61)

The deficiency Heidegger describes here is meant to illustrate the way in which the understanding of an entity or of Dasein itself as present-at-hand is conditioned upon a rupture in the pre-reflective understanding of entities as ready-to-hand. One only thematizes the hammer, or looks at it in its thing-ness, once it has broken. It is only on the basis of this rupture that problems of objectivity and epistemology more generally are opened up.¹² While it isn't *wrong* to understand entities as presence-at-hand, the understanding of Dasein's *own being* as presence-at-hand, in its connection to the understanding of entities, is ontologically inadequate. Why? Because the being of Dasein as present-at-hand, while possible, is still distinct from the being of entities as presence-at-hand which are not themselves Dasein:

¹² The idea of possibilities being opened by a breakdown will be re-visited in Chapter Four.

for even entities which are not worldless – Dasein itself, for example – are present-at-hand ‘in’ the world, or, more exactly, *can* with some right and within certain limits be *taken* as merely present-at-hand. To do this, one must completely disregard or just not see the existential state of Being-in. But the fact that ‘Dasein’ can be taken as something which is present-at-hand and just present-at-hand, is not to be confused with a certain way of ‘presence-at-hand’ which is Dasein’s *own*. This latter kind of presence-at-hand becomes accessible not by dis-regarding Dasein’s specific structures but only by understanding them in advance. Dasein understands its ownmost Being in the sense of a certain ‘factual Being-present-at-hand’. And yet the ‘factuality’ of the fact [Tatsache] of one’s own Dasein is at bottom quite different ontologically from the factual occurrence of some kind of mineral, for example. Whenever Dasein is, it is as a Fact; and the factuality of such a Fact is what we shall call Dasein’s “*facticity*”. This is a definite way of Being [Seinsbestimmtheit], and it has a complicated structure which cannot even be grasped *as a problem* until Dasein’s basic existential states have been worked out. The concept of “*facticity*” implies that an entity ‘within-the-world’ has Being-in-the-world in such a way that it can understand itself as bound up in its ‘destiny’ with the Being of those entities which it encounters within the world. (*BT* §12, 82/55-56)

The facticity that Heidegger describes is concretized in different ways of being-in, which include but are not exhausted by having to do with something, producing something, attending to something and looking after it, making use of something, etc. (*BT* §12, 83/56). It is closest in that it is not a way of being that requires a re-positioning on the part of Dasein in order to be accomplished. On the other hand, theoretical abstraction *would* require such a modification (*BT* §15, 96/67). In general, these different ways of being-in have concern as their way of being. This will lead to Heidegger's characterization of the being of Dasein as that of care, which as mentioned, is not a programmatic ethics but rather the being of an entity for which things can matter. 'Caring for' and 'neglecting' are both ontic possibilities made possible by the ontological structure of care, which gives no preference as to the form it takes. "Taking up relationships towards the world is possible only *because* Dasein, as Being-in-the-world, is as it is." (*BT* §12, 84/57) Importantly, knowing oneself will therefore have to be a mode of being of Dasein's being-in-the-world (*BT* §13, 88/61). It is in this regard that *Being and Time* should be understood as a critique that demonstrates how the project of epistemology and the subject-object model presuppose being-in-the-world. It is only through a breakdown in the more basic way of understanding entities as ready-to-hand that opens up the possibility of ontologically (mis)interpreting Dasein as having presence-at-hand as its primary way of being. This (mis)interpretation conceals the existential structures of being-in-the-world. But the traditional epistemological model that Heidegger works positions himself in distinction to can be revealed as derivative if it has been convincingly

demonstrated to be founded upon pre-reflective practices through which a domain of entities – including *reflective* subjects – is made intelligible in advance of the posited cognitive subject who understands being as presence-at-hand. Knowing the world is thus shown to be a mode of being-in-the-world, and importantly not the pre-eminent one. Acquiring *knowledge of entities* must therefore be thought in its relation to the prior *disclosure of a field of entities* about which claims of knowledge are subsequently made:

And even though Being-in-the-world is something of which one has pre-phenomenological experience and acquaintance [erfahren und gekannt], it becomes *invisible* if one interprets it in a way which is ontologically inappropriate. This state of Dasein's Being is now one with which one is just barely acquainted (and indeed as something obvious), with the stamp of inappropriate interpretation. So in this way it becomes the 'evident' point of departure for problems of epistemology or the 'metaphysics of knowledge.' For what is more obvious than that a 'subject' is related to an 'Object' and *vice versa*? This 'subject-Object-relationship' must be presupposed. But while this presupposition is unimpeachable in its facticity, this makes it indeed a baleful one, if its ontological necessity and especially its ontological meaning are to be left in the dark. (*BT* §12, 86/59).

In this chapter I have attempted to make clear how cognitivism, as a false picture of human anthropology, is derivative of Dasein's being as being-in-the-

world. In doing so, a few of the existential structures of Dasein have been gestured at, yet still in a provisional fashion. Nevertheless, we should have at least partially in view the way that Dasein's activity, including its cognitive activity, is made possible by the prior disclosure of a world through understanding. For the third chapter, I leave myself the task of bringing these existentials into full view. Finally, I will attempt to meet Raymond Geuss' challenge of bridging anthropological insights with a form of social criticism, by demonstrating how the first division of *Being and Time* can be interpreted as a rich account of human agency that grounds the possibility of transformative action.

Chapter 3

--The Potential for Change--

Where Chapter 2 began to explore the fundamental structures of Dasein's being Heidegger calls existentials, it is the purpose of this chapter to provide a more thorough account of how some of those structures pertain both to the Honneth/Geuss debate and to an account of human agency I wish to advance as a major component of this thesis. Starting from the provisional sketch of Dasein's understanding, I seek to deepen the explanation given in the previous chapter and link it with the equally important characterization of Dasein's being as a) thrown, b) fallen and c) projecting. This task also requires a sustained reflection on Dasein's being as potentiality *in addition* to its being as actuality. Through the initial emphasis on existential understanding I will eventually round out the notion of the care structure to which Honneth made recourse, keeping in mind the considerations of Geuss regarding its purported usefulness as a tool for critical theory. Finally, I will briefly outline the notion of disclosure, and gesture at the possible distinction between activities that disclose their status as possibilities and those that conceal their emergence. This will serve as the introduction to Chapter Four, which deals with the potential consequences of that difference in greater detail.

Understanding and the Mode of the Actual

Here again it should be stressed that as a fundamental existential, understanding is *basic* to Dasein's being. The more common meaning of

‘understanding’ in the sense of ‘understanding that I have to eat in order to meet certain biological needs’ or ‘understanding that you acted a certain way because you were angry’ are for Heidegger only derivative possibilities that have their foundation in the more general sense of understanding that is constitutive to Dasein (*BT* §31, 182/142). In this derivative character, ‘understanding’ is alongside other acts of cognition such as explaining or judging in that they are *made possible* by the more primordial understanding in its existential form. That I ‘understand’ how a motorcycle works and therefore am competent to use it is the ontical manifestation of the ontological structure of my existence. Where traditionally we might have taken this competence to be a function of our knowledge of the car – that we know the car needs gas to move and that we know which pedal *makes* it move, for instance – it is for Heidegger an experience enabled by the a priori (existential) understanding that each of us *are*. That we *are* understanding or that we exist understandingly indicates that existential structures are not to be interpreted as a kind of static attribute that one possesses, in the way that colour is a property of extended substances. Instead, understanding exhibits itself in *possible* ways that Dasein can be. Therefore, whatever Dasein *is* can only be interpreted as a possibility of Dasein’s existence, moving Heidegger to claim that “As understanding, Dasein projects its Being upon possibilities” (*BT* §32, 188/148). The notion of existing as possibility is explicated and distinguished from existing as actuality further on in this chapter.

Chapter Two indicated how *Being and Time*, through a rumination that begins from the everyday experiences of human life and extends toward the

existentials revealed by those experiences, demonstrated that Dasein is a being that always finds itself in a mood. Those analyses gave way to the insight that via moods, Dasein is brought before itself as that entity which is always-already thrown into the world. That is, via a reflection upon one's mood, Dasein is disclosed to itself as disposed in this or that way without being the volitional source of that disposition. As such, Dasein is said to be in a state-of-mind; the existential condition of being disposed toward its worldly circumstances. Dasein comes before itself as disposed toward the referential totality of the world in order that entities *within that world* can matter accordingly. Our example was of finding oneself disposed in such a way that entities could then be disclosed as fearful. At the most basic level, being in a mood reveals the existential state-of-mind that in turn reveals Dasein as thrown. The way in which Dasein discloses itself and entities through its disposed comportment reveal these existentials as that which must be the case. Dasein discloses itself as being-in-the-world: the being for which other entities are intelligible, the being for which things matter. To be absorbed or fascinated with entities Heidegger gives the name "fallenness" and like thrownness it designates a basic existential revealed by Dasein's activity (*BT* §38, 224/180).

The fallenness that is constitutive of Dasein should not be mis-understood as a kind of pathology. Instead, it explains the way Dasein *is* with entities in its everyday activities. It is the exhibition of the understanding of entities in their being. As was discussed in Chapter Two, the understanding of objects out of a referential totality that constitutes what it is they *are*, or, what it is we take them

as, is the understanding of objects *in their being* as ready-to-hand. What objects are for, or better put the way in which they appear *as something* with a purpose, is made possible by the totality in which they get their reference. Therefore, objects don't appear to Dasein's everyday understanding as *mere* things (things in their thing-hood), but as equipment, or, as '*something in-order-to*' (*BT* §15, 97/68, emphasis added). The subject-object model of epistemology has difficulty explaining why things that are given are impossible to access as that which they *actually* are, and this is because those things aren't given to us in isolation. When we interpret an object as the thing it is, we are interpreting our pre-ontological understanding: the conditions of intelligibility whereby any *thing that is* has already been understood out of its context of meaning. It is this pre-understanding that Heidegger wants to render explicit by examining the most common way in which we're involved in our world – making use of it. This mode of involvement is basic to our existence in the sense that we don't require an act of will in order to achieve it. In average everydayness we don't encounter objects in their substantiality, but instead in their *usability*. Those entities we encounter are thus designated as equipment. But more specifically, to equipment there always belongs a totality. The in-order-to of equipment is the relation it takes within its equipmental context, the assignment it receives as a *something*. The referential totality of equipment is disclosed *before* any individual tools. The hammer isn't a pure entity we behold and then designate as-hammer. The workshop is that out of which the hammer appears, and that which the hammer is to produce is the towards-which that assigns the hammer in its usability.

In a pointed allusion to Descartes,¹ Heidegger writes that:

Equipment – in accordance with its equipmentality – always is *in terms of* its belonging to other equipment: ink-stand, pen, ink, paper, blotting pad, table, lamp, furniture, windows, doors, room. These ‘Things’ never show themselves proximally as they are for themselves, so as to add up to a sum of *realia* and fill up a room. What we encounter as closest to us (though not as something taken as a theme) is the room; and we encounter it not as something ‘between four walls’ in a geometrical spatial sense, but as equipment for residing. Out of this the ‘arrangement’ emerges, and it is in this that any ‘individual’ item of equipment shows itself. *Before* it does so, a totality of equipment has already been discovered. (*BT* §15, 98/68-69)

That which a thing is for, previously referred to as the as-structure of a thing, appears to the everyday understanding of Dasein (as ready-to-hand) out of its equipmentality. The inexplicit understanding of objects as ready-to-hand we exhibit in everyday activity is, however inexplicit, not without its own kind of sight. Where we might say that the analysis of things in their thing-hood, or of objects as purely present-at-hand, employs a kind of *theoretical* sight, Heidegger urges that our use and manipulation of equipment “subordinate themselves to the

¹ Jean-Luc Marion notes that Heidegger’s persistent engagement with Cartesian philosophy has been somewhat under theorized. Descartes’ importance is of little doubt, but Marion reads Heidegger as consistently charging that “Establishing the epistemological priority of the ego and of consciousness constitutes an advance but it does not dispense with the need to determine the mode of being of this term.” See Jean-Luc Marion, “Heidegger and Descartes,” in *Critical Heidegger*, (ed.) Christopher Macann (New York, NY: Routledge, 1996), 71.

manifold assignments of the ‘in-order-to’” and “the sight with which they thus accommodate themselves is *circumspection*” (BT §15, 98/69). Necessarily, in our circumscribed dealings with equipment, the understanding of objects as ready-to-hand *must* recede into the background (remain inexplicit) such that we can make use *of those objects* in a seamless, functional and uninterrupted manner. Finding oneself disposed toward the totality of entities in a world in which we are thrown is both the state Dasein finds itself in and the condition upon which Dasein can be disclosed to itself in the first place. In short, as disclosed to itself as a) thrown, b) disposed, and c) in a mood, Dasein discovers itself as what it *is*. Each of them characterizes how Dasein exists in the mode of the actual. However, since we know already that Dasein is not an entity that has presence-at-hand as its mode of being, we should see that the meaning of Dasein cannot be exhausted by this particular mode. Dasein is that being who *in its being* can relate to other entities; Dasein is that being for which other entities matter. That we can even disclose ourselves as entities whose being is distinct from *other* entities is the basic insight into why it *must* be the case that Dasein exceeds the mode of the actual. This distinctiveness was highlighted in Chapter Two through an examination of Heidegger’s use of the term facticity, where the factuality of a Dasein that exists as present-at-hand is known *only* by Dasein. In each case Dasein is the entity that can know itself as a factually existing thing, where the rock or cup cannot. Therefore Dasein cannot be actual or present-at-hand in the same way a rock or a cup is.

Understanding and the mode of the possible

This brings us to the other mode in which Dasein exists: the mode of the possible. We can begin to sketch the importance of this mode through an analysis of what Heidegger idiosyncratically calls interpretation. Delving into interpretation will also show us how elements of the background understanding of an object can in fact be fore-grounded. This interpreting is not a transformation of one's existence as understanding, but rather that through which "understanding appropriates understandingly that which is understood by it" (*BT* §32, 188/148). It is a disclosure of the world *already* understood in our circumspection.

Interpretation is then the meticulous analysis of the in-order-to by which something appears *as something*. In it, we can see that which is ready-to-hand *as* what it is for. We can see the thing in its as-structure by "taking as our clue something as *something*" (*BT* §32, 190/149, emphasis added). This is of course not to say that in interpreting a table as a table we designate or discover it *as what it is* for the first time. Rather, we simply articulate it, and this articulation is made possible because said table has *already* been disclosed to our everyday understanding *as* that which it is (*BT* §32, 190/150). Equipment *qua equipment* is already understood and interpreted in our circumspective activity, albeit inexplicitly. Echoing what was said in Chapter Two, this gestures at the way in which Heidegger can be read as challenging the cognitive model of epistemology. The table is not first discovered as a pure thing (purely present-at-hand) and then interpreted *as* a table. On the contrary, the being of the table (as ready-to-hand) is disclosed to our understanding in and through our circumspective involvement with it. Therefore, it is the disclosure of the table *as a table* to our understanding

that makes possible the analysis of it both as a table and subsequently as a pure thing. Pre-reflective everyday activity is the condition of possibility for the cognitive, theoretical interpretation of objects in their objectivity.

At this juncture the inter-connection between the disposed stance called thrownness and the interpretive act of understanding has come better into view. This ultimately will lead us to a discussion of the final piece in the tripartite structure of Dasein's being alongside thrownness and falling – *projection*. But in order to get there, and to an even deeper comprehension of possibility, it is worth returning to the fore-structure that was initially brought up in the previous chapter. There is a provisional sense given to the disposed/thrown and understanding/projecting relation when Heidegger writes “When something is understood but is still veiled, it becomes unveiled by an act of appropriation, *and this is always done under the guidance of a point of view*, which fixes that with regard to which what is understood is to be interpreted” (*BT* §32, 191/150, emphasis added). At the same time, interpretation is always grounded by something we understand in *advance*: this is of course the fore-structure of understanding. That structure is defined by three elements. First, the inexplicit understanding of the totality of referents that makes it possible for individual objects to appear as what they are. The context that ‘back-grounds,’ or, what Heidegger calls fore-having (*BT* §32, 191/150). Second, the interpretation of entities *as the things they are*. The “first cut” made into the background, or, what Heidegger calls fore-sight (*BT* §32, 191/150). Third, the explicit conceptual interpretation of entities, where the interpreting can proceed from the entity itself,

or “can force the entity into concepts to which it is opposed in its manner of Being” (*BT* §32, 191/150). This final piece Heidegger calls fore-conception, and together they form the a priori structure of Dasein’s understanding, along with the as-structure explicated above. In the previous chapter I gestured at how the fore-structure can be understood as a kind of background horizon out of which the as-structure of a thing appears. This however is troubling, since it lends a kind of deterministic sensibility to the background understanding out of which we foreground through interpretation. If we understand an entity *in advance*, and out of a referential totality into which we are thrown, how is it that we could be free to interpret an entity as one thing or another? It should be at least somewhat clear from the mention of fore-conception that Heidegger does not hold to such a strong deterministic view. If it’s at least possible to interpret an entity “from the entity itself” or by forcing it “into concepts to which it is opposed in its manner of Being” then surely some leeway must be involved (*BT* §32, 191/150).² This question is partially answered in what follows and given full attention in Chapter Four.

We have finally arrived at the question of agency as it pertains to the existential analytic of *Being and Time*, and simultaneously are able to bring forward the mode of being of Dasein called potentiality. The final sections of Chapter Three address how it is that Heidegger grounds Dasein’s potentiality and its ability to project possibilities through its understanding. We are concerned

² At the same time, we can also see how the possibility of interpreting an entity, for example a human entity, in a fashion that is “opposed to its manner of Being” would be of interest to the critical goals of Axel Honneth’s “Reification.”

with the way possibilities are both freed and constrained by an ontological context. The present goal is to unpack understanding and projection as the foundation for Dasein's potentiality, and to establish minimally the way that the existential analytic implicitly offers a theory of agency. This must of course meet the challenge of determinism as it was initially posed above, and eventually show how Dasein is in fact a human agent capable of critically modifying its present conditions.

Dasein's Potentiality

In the appropriation of understanding that is interpretation, Heidegger writes that in interpreting, one is not "acquiring information about what is understood; it is rather the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding" (*BT* §32, 189/149). Dasein is *toward* possibilities understandingly, toward *disclosed* possibilities that "exert their counter-thrust upon Dasein" (*BT* §32, 188/148). This towards-which Heidegger calls Dasein's potentiality-for-Being (*BT* §32, 188/148). But what exactly is a disclosed possibility? Taking as an example Dasein's circumspective relation with the world, Heidegger writes that in the projection of the understanding, "*entities* are disclosed in their possibility" (*BT* §32, 192/151, emphasis added). Is an interpretation of an entity therefore an act of absolute unconditioned volition, in a sort of inversion of the determinacy problem put forward earlier? Not according to Heidegger. The character of the interpretive possibilities disclosed with an entity correspond "on each occasion, with the kind of Being of the entity which is understood" (*BT* §32, 192/151). And that entity, as we should now know, is disclosed out of its

relational totality. That is, through the fore-structure of understanding, Dasein can with increasing specificity reveal three things: a) the relational totality of entities (fore-having), b) fore-grounded entities apart from this totality (fore-seeing) and c) isolated entities in their conceptual distinctiveness (fore-conceiving). In Dasein's everyday dealings with the ready-to-hand, it circumspectively interprets a world it already understands. When interpretation explicitly lays out the in-order-to of an entity, that is, when it reveals something as *something*, that *as* has already been disclosed *to the understanding*:

The ready-to-hand comes *explicitly* into the sight which understands. All preparing, putting to rights, repairing, improving, rounding-out, are accomplished in the following way: we take apart in its "in-order-to" that which is circumspectively ready-to-hand, and we concern ourselves with it in accordance with what becomes visible through this process. (*BT* §32, 189/149)

Entities that have come to be understood in their in-order-to, whether explicitly interpreted or not, are entities that have *meaning [Sinn]* for Dasein (*BT* §32, 192/151). Meaning is the wherein that the understandability that interpretation appropriates maintains itself. In Heidegger's words: "Meaning is the "upon-which" of a projection in terms of which something becomes intelligible *as something*; it gets its structure from a fore-having, a fore-sight, and a fore-conception" (*BT* §32, 193/151, emphasis added). As part of the structure of understanding, meaning is not intrinsic to entities, it is an existential of Dasein.

If we recall what Raymond Geuss had to say about Axel Honneth's use of Heidegger in "Reification," we should see now where he gets the thrust of his criticism. What we have already called the thrown-fallen-projection that is Dasein's being is actually the structure of care itself. It is the existential makeup of the being that, through its constitution, can disclose meaning. As was alluded to, care is the unity of the existential a priori that makes up Dasein as being-in-the-world. And as an existential, care is therefore *before* any positive content; in the same manner that understanding was before any specific instances of cognition. Care is not 'feeling empathy toward' in the same way that understanding is not 'being competent.' Instead, care and understanding are that which is revealed in Dasein's concrete experiences of emotion or cognition. In what could be read as a rather damning blow to Honneth's project, Heidegger writes that:

Care, as a primordial structural totality, lies 'before' every factual 'attitude' and 'situation' of Dasein, and it does so existentially *a priori*; this means that it always lies *in* them. So this phenomenon by no means expresses a priority of the 'practical' attitude over the theoretical. When we ascertain something present-at-hand by merely beholding it, this activity has the character of care just as much as does a 'political action' or taking a rest and enjoying oneself. 'Theory' and 'practice' are possibilities of Being for an entity whose Being must be defined as "care." (BT §41, 238/193)

For this reason, care is said to be “ontologically earlier” than any instantiations it is revealed by (*BT* §41, 238/194). However, these insights should equally unsettle Geuss’ understanding of the existential analytic of *Being and Time* as being void of any critical merit. In tandem with the obviously correct notion that Heidegger offers no positive account of what it is that one *should be*, he nevertheless provides a rich account of how it is that one can be more than what they currently are, or similarly, how it is that one could have been otherwise. A clearer explanation of how we might read Heidegger this way will follow.

It is worth taking a moment to summarize what the analyses of the last two chapters have told us so far. We know that in the mode of actuality, Dasein is disclosed to itself as what it is through the experience of disposedness. This disposedness toward the relational totality of entities, made concrete in a mood, reveals through deepened reflection that Dasein is a being whose being is being-in-the-world. That Dasein *is* in this way is evidence of its facticity; evidence that it is not a being that only exists as present-at-hand, but instead is that being-in-the-world for which other beings matter, and that it is *aware* of this being-in-the-world. This fundamental condition of actuality is expressed as Dasein’s thrownness: that it is a being who always-already finds itself in circumstances that are not of its own making, and that it is disclosed to itself as such. In the mode of potentiality the totality of the world is disclosed as a for-the-sake-of-which where through the fore-structure of understanding individual entities are interpreted in their as-structure and thus rendered intelligible (meaningful). The experience of understanding the for-the-sake-of-which is concretized in the interpretation of the

as-structure *as always a pressing into possibilities*. More specifically, interpretation is both set free and limited by the for-the-sake-of-which because it is made possible by the understanding of Dasein *in advance*. Therefore, that which an entity is revealed intelligible *as* is achieved on the basis of Dasein's understanding.

These analyses of thrownness and projection have revealed Dasein as the being who exists in *both modes* as thrown-projection (*BT* §31, 183/144). The ontological circularity of one's existence is now evident: thrownness and projecting don't stand in a logical or chronological position to one another, they are equiprimordial: "A state-of-mind always has its understanding, even if it merely keeps it suppressed. Understanding always has its mood" (*BT* §31, 182/143). The context of meaningful relations in Dasein's world both makes possible *and* is disclosed through the interpretation of an entity's as-structure. Similarly, it is the disclosure of the as-structure that grounds the possibility of revealing the context (the for-the-sake-of-which) that Dasein understands. That something can be meaningful for an individual is conditioned by the world into which one is thrown, and, the revealing of the world is conditioned by the fact that something matters:

In the "for-the-sake-of-which," existing Being-in-the-world is disclosed as such, and this disclosedness we have called "understanding." In the understanding of the "for-the-sake-of-which," the significance which is grounded therein is disclosed along with it. The disclosedness of understanding, as the

disclosedness of the “for-the-sake-of-which” and of significance equiprimordially, pertains to the entirety of Being-in-the-world. Significance is that on the basis of which the world is disclosed as such. To say that the “for the sake-of-which” *and* significance are both disclosed in Dasein, means that Dasein is that entity which, as Being-in-the-world, is an issue for itself” (BT §31, 182/143).

What one *is* in the ontological sense therefore includes potentiality-for-being. We find ourselves within a set of definite possibilities out of which we can projectively disclose the significance of our world and with it the possible meaning of that which is *within* that world. Heidegger describes this as a kind of freeing, which is important to the analyses of Chapter Four:

Not only is the world, *qua* world, disclosed as possible significance, but when that which is within-the-world is itself freed, this entity is freed for *its own* possibilities. That which is ready-to-hand is discovered as such in its *serviceability*, its *usability*, and its *detrimentality*. The totality of involvements is revealed as the categorical whole of a *possible* interconnection of the ready-to-hand. But even the ‘unity’ of the manifold present-at-hand, of Nature, can be discovered only if a *possibility* of it has been disclosed. (BT §31, 184/144-145)

Heidegger discusses a number of ways in which, as a potentiality-for-being, Dasein can exist. He characterizes them as possibilities disclosed to understanding

within a “range” (*BT* §31, 186/146), all of which makeup a certain way that Dasein *sees*. This seeing, or form of sight, is not a pure perceiving, but the existential basis revealed in the way Dasein “lets entities which are accessible to it be encountered unconcealedly in themselves” (*BT* §31, 187/147). One of these ways we have already discussed: in circumscribed relations with the world, Dasein can understand itself out of the beings which it deals (*BT* §31, 185/145). The shape of the understanding as circumspection Heidegger calls “common sense” (*BT* §31, 186/146). Though *Being and Time* is often read as having a rather derisive disposition toward that which is common, I believe that criticism to be worthy of further reflection. Heidegger writes that:

As something factual, Dasein’s projection of itself understandingly is in each case already alongside a world that has been discovered. From this world it takes its possibilities, and it does so first in accordance with the way things have been interpreted by the “they.” This interpretation has already restricted the possible options of choice to what lies within the range of the familiar, the attainable, the respectable – that which is fitting and proper. This levelling off of Dasein’s possibilities to what is proximally at its everyday disposal also results in a dimming down of the possible as such. The average everydayness of concern

becomes blind to its possibilities, and tranquilizes itself *with that which is merely 'actual.'* (BT §41, 239/194-195, emphasis added)³

If we take as our clue the previous explanation of care as offering no valuation on how it is that Dasein *should be*, we should consider the previous passage under similar premises. A Dasein that understands its possibilities in terms of the world into which it is thrown is not a Dasein that exists in error. As has been noted, thrownness belongs to the basic existential constitution of our being.

Understanding the world out of the “they” is not to say something as frivolous as “anything that’s popular (or worse yet, democratic) is ingenuine.” Instead, Heidegger is pointing us back to the way in which we arrive in circumstances that are not of our own making. The world of possibilities is a shared world handed down to us. If anything, what Heidegger is urging for in the quoted passage is that we not over emphasize our situatedness in *actuality*, that Dasein not be defined by its current context, and that it understand itself as a being to which potentiality pertains a priori.

This is further clarified by another example Heidegger gives of a way in which Dasein can be – and it is perhaps the most difficult and debated one. It is described as a situation where the understanding “throws itself primarily into the

³ This passage and others like it have met their fair share of scrutiny. Much of the debate surrounding Heidegger’s affiliation with the National Socialist Party have centered on his discussion of ‘others’ in *Being and Time* and the mode of ‘being-with’ [mitsein]. See, for example, Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, (trans.) Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1969), Frederick A. Olafson, *Heidegger and the Ground of Ethics: A Study of Mitsein*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Charles Bambach, *Heidegger’s Roots: Nietzsche, National Socialism, and the Greeks*, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), Jack Reynolds, “Merleau-Ponty, Levinas, and the Alterity of the Other,” in *Symposium* 6:1 (2002).

“for-the-sake-of-which;” that is, exists *as itself*” (BT §31, 186/146, emphasis added). Though the exploration of Dasein existing authentically as itself is not the primary purpose of this paper⁴, it needs to be minimally established that the circle that is the ontological structure of Dasein is always latent with possibilities. In a sense, this possibility is no different than what has been rehearsed here previously. In throwing oneself into the for-the-sake-of-which, we can enter the fore-ground/back-ground loop, interpretively unveiling the meaning of the world into which we are thrown. The circle, as such, is not so vicious:

This circle of understanding is not an orbit in which any random kind of knowledge may move; it is the expression of the existential fore-structure of Dasein itself. It is not to be reduced to the level of a vicious circle, or even of a circle which is merely tolerated. In the circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing. To be sure, we genuinely take hold of this possibility only when, in our interpretation, we have understood that our first, last, and constant task is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves. Because understanding, in accordance with its existential meaning, is Dasein’s own potentiality-for-Being, the ontological

⁴ For an extended discussion of authenticity and its relation to freedom, see Robert Nichols, *The World of Freedom: Heidegger, Foucault, and the Politics of Historical Ontology*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), [Manuscript on file with author].

presuppositions of historiological knowledge transcend in principle the idea of rigour held in the most exact sciences. (*BT* §32, 195/153)

Seizing possibilities isn't a one-time deal; one doesn't choose to understand in this or that way once and for all. As existentially constituted by thrown-projection, or, in existing as both the actual and the possible, Dasein is "*constantly* 'more' than it factually 'is'" (*BT* §31, 185/145). Dasein is always possibly in this or that way, and therefore any seizing-upon is done on the basis of what one is existentially: "Because understanding, in every case, pertains rather to Dasein's full disclosedness as Being-in-the-world, this diversion of the understanding is an existential modification of projection as a whole" (*BT* §31, 186/146). By the same token, what one *can be* is contained by the definite possibilities it is thrown into. At the extreme, Dasein's being is toward its non-being, toward its nullity in death.⁵ Analogously, the goal of fundamental ontology, the inquiry into the meaning of being in general, is constrained by the possibility of absolute non-being, or nothingness. The significance of the question "why is there something and not nothing?" is not lost on Heidegger. Dasein is that being which is aware of the immanent possibility of being otherwise, and that are current worldly conditions are always more than what they currently are. That *excess* is the range within which present circumstances are loaded with the potential for their own reconfiguration; the range of possibility.

⁵ For a discussion of death in *Being and Time* see William J. Richardson, *Heidegger Through Phenomenology to Thought*, (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2003), 74-77.

What I have attempted to do in this chapter is give an account of Dasein's being as potentiality. The hope is that these insights furnish a reading of *Being and Time* that highlights its latent theory of agency. As I understand things, Dasein is limited but nevertheless enabled by its ontological conditions. Furthermore, it was demonstrated how cognitive acts presuppose the understanding of a world disclosed through practical activity, that they find their orientation out of that world disclosed to Dasein and through its pre-reflective action. Cognitive action was therefore said to be founded on pre-reflective action, and not the other way around. This helps us mediate the claims made by Honneth about cognitivism. The epistemological model of subjectivity is revealed as one possible way of disposing oneself toward entities, and the pathologies reproduced by this model that Honneth diagnosed would hence be de-naturalized. All of this was accomplished without recourse to an anthropological account of the human being, which Geuss correctly identified as a path fraught with obstacles.

Generally speaking, Dasein's being is not exhausted by its *actuality* – the fact that it is thrown into factual conditions. Rather, Dasein exists as *potentiality* – the fact that it can work out possibilities for itself that are projected in its understanding. Though the meaningful possibilities projected in Dasein's understanding are confined to a range, choices nevertheless present themselves. Through these decisions Dasein's world is re-disclosed dependent upon the possibility actualized. As a rather casual example, one might comport themselves toward a chandelier as an efficient mechanism for lighting a room, while another might see it simply as a work of great artistic achievement. The more serious

question is whether or not there are modes of comportment that work to *conceal* themselves as disclosed possibilities. In other words, could there be historically specific practical activities that mask their own historically specific emergence, naturalizing themselves and in a sense posing as objective features of reality. For Honneth, and I believe for Heidegger, this was the case for the subject-object model of epistemology. Heidegger's challenge, contra figures like Descartes and Husserl, was to make lived experience both the methodological starting point *and the subject matter* of ontology:

But for Husserl phenomenological making-present takes place within reflective objectification. In contrast to that, for Heidegger the making-present takes place in hermeneutic understanding. The hermeneutic making-present remains – in contrast to reflective making present – within the living enactment of the lived experience. (Von Hermann 30)

This speaks directly to Honneth's characterization of cognitive philosophy, his potentially implicit understanding of Habermasian critical theory,⁶ and to the Lukácsian concern over the worldless rationalisation of universal 'laws.'⁷ We need only remember how Habermas argued that with disclosure Heidegger missed the fact that validity claims were unconditioned. The question of world-*disclosing*

⁶ See Chapter Two.

⁷ Lukács' primary point of reference here is Kant. See "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat," in *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, (tr.) R. Livingstone (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 132-140.

activities versus world-*concealing* activities is left for Chapter Four, but a provisional framing of the issue will be necessary.

Disclosure and Truth

In order to provide a provisional account of truth and disclosure as they appear in *Being and Time*, it is best to re-articulate how it is that Heidegger can say that Dasein, in its everyday existence with entities, can disclose to itself its ontological structure as potentiality-for-being. When Dasein exists in the mode of average everydayness, does it not understand itself ontically and not ontologically? For this task we will have to re-pose the question as to how it is that “Dasein *is* in such a way as to be something which understands something like Being” (*BT* §5, 39/17).

Through the analysis of Dasein’s experience as taken by a mood and pressing into possibilities we have revealed the fundamental existential structure of thrown-projection. Everyday activity is enabled by a disposed comportment toward a totality of meaning-relations that can be made explicit through the interpretation of what Heidegger calls the for-the-sake-of-which, in other words through a laying out of Dasein’s understanding. Dasein is *thrown* into a circumstance (world) that it is not the source of, and that it must project its possibilities out of. As thrown, Dasein exists within a “definite world alongside a definite range of definite entities within-the-world” (*BT* §44, 264/221). Dasein uncovers beings out of this meaningful context which is always-already present in its understanding. Understanding is the way in which Dasein relates to entities as

something to be taken-as, to be understood in this or that manner according to their being. For these reasons we say that Dasein's structure of understanding is *projective*. Finally, as existing factually, Dasein is not just the being for whom things have meaning, but the being that is *aware* of itself as existing in that way.

That the disclosure of the meaning of entities would lead Heidegger to a discussion of truth might initially seem strange. We have, on the one hand, the being that uncovers other beings in their *meaning*, and on the other a description of Dasein as "in the truth," or better yet as that being that has truth as part of its ontological structure (*BT* §44, 264/221). Heidegger re-iterates much of what I've sought to explain in four important considerations that follow this somewhat befuddling account. First, disclosure belongs essentially to Dasein, and with it both the ontological structure of being-in-the-world and its ontic counterpart in being amidst entities within the world, therefore making "the uncoveredness of such entities equiprimordial with the Being of Dasein and disclosedness" (*BT* §44, 264/221). Second, thrownness belongs to Dasein's way of being and is constitutive of Dasein's disclosedness. Disclosedness is therefore factual; it takes place in factual existence. Third, along with thrownness, projection also belongs to Dasein's being. In comporting itself to the for-the-sake-of-which, Dasein can understand *itself* in terms of the 'world' (that is, the 'world' of entities, not the world that is Dasein's way of being), in terms of others, or in terms of its "ownmost potentiality-for-Being" (*BT* §44, 264/221). Fourth, to Dasein's being also belongs fallenness, where Dasein is "proximally and for the most part lost in its 'world'" (*BT* §44, 264/222).

Here again we have reference to the way in which Dasein can take its possibilities from others, an often famously misunderstood point about the way Dasein is thrown into a *shared world* out of which it can take its possibilities, possibilities that are handed down. I make reference to it only to highlight the way in which we should understand Dasein as thrown into a shared world that it accordingly takes its possibilities from. This is how the understanding-projection of possibilities is, in a sense, diverted and absorbed into the understanding of the 'they,' where "that which has been uncovered and disclosed stands in a mode in which it has been disguised and closed off by idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity" (*BT* §44, 264/222). Through the current language of the day, possibilities are passed along without any inquiry into the background context that lends them their meaning. This is just another way in which Dasein exists in an average everyday manner: where it understands itself not in terms of its own possibilities but out of the possibilities of others, out of what 'one' typically and for the most part does. Considering the notion of agency again, one provisional thesis we can begin to tease out is that the idea of a binary opposition between the reproduction of social conditions and the modification *of those* conditions is no longer tenable, as is the notion of an agent that is either purely active or purely passive. There cannot be an either/or relationship between reproduction and resistance because of the way in which they occur simultaneously. One is both the product of their circumstances (actuality) and the latent possibility of modifying them (potentiality), but one is never strictly a product nor capable of acting without drawing from their situated conditions.

When we say that Dasein exists factually in this fallen way, we are required to amend the earlier statement that Dasein is in truth to also include the fact that Dasein is in untruth, insofar as “Dasein has been disclosed [and] closed off; and only in so far as entities within-the-world have been uncovered along with Dasein, have such entities, as possibly encounterable within-the-world, been covered up (hidden) or disguised” (*BT* §44, 265/222). Heidegger’s understanding of truth as *aletheia* entails that entities remain hidden until they are taken *out of that hiddenness*. Like most things Heideggerian, *aletheia* should be understood as privative in the sense that it contains a positive possibility (unhiddenness) and a negative one (hiddenness). On this basis Heidegger is able to say that Dasein exists both in truth and in untruth, and that together they make up “an essential characteristic of Being-in-the-world” (*BT* §44, 265/222), or as we now understand it, as thrown-projection. Truth and untruth are part of the disclosedness of Dasein to which the uncovering *and* covering of entities belongs.

But as we now know, it isn’t just individual entities whose meaning Dasein can unveil, but the totality or background out of which those entities arise as well. And as being-in-the-world, Dasein is disposed in its understanding *of that totality*. This disclosive character of Dasein should not be misinterpreted as designating specific entities in the way of fore-conceiving; that would be to mistake a part for the whole. Disclosure is not folding entities under concepts. What Dasein can disclose is not just entities but the for-the-sake-of-which out of which those entities get their meaning. In other words Dasein discloses meaning. This is no different from anything that’s been said earlier. Dasein is the possibility

of disclosing not just that which is ready-to-hand for circumspection, but the understanding it has in advance that makes circumspection meaningful. A major observation made in “On the Essence of Truth” is that the way in which the prevailing notion of propositional truth is preceded by contextual factors that allow that those propositions to be meaningful possibilities. It therefore sets the priority of meaning higher than the priority of truth. Further still, if that meaning-context can be convincingly shown to have arisen out of historical circumstances, a number of possible questions present themselves. What happens if we start by asking what it *means* for something to count as true within a certain historical framework? We might follow by asking: How are possibilities constrained by our current worldly situation? How are we limited in the way we imagine what the world could be? Do certain (reifying) practices reinforce a prevailing world formation? How have we contributing to what counts as true or false? What does it mean to live in a world where X is true and Y isn’t? How does what we count as true limit what we understand ourselves to be?

The “need” that gives rise to philosophy also instructs philosophy about its own need – about what philosophy is itself in need of, if it is properly to respond to the need that gives rise to its own activity ... Philosophy is called upon to speak without knowing in advance what can answer the need that calls upon it to address, to intervene in, its own time. In this respect, philosophy receives its concept of itself from its time, and it is from this stance of receptivity that it is then able to recognize its obligations to its time, able to recognize its own concerns in the concerns that bedevil its own time.¹

Chapter 4

-Revealing and Concealing-

For the final chapter of this thesis I aim to narrow in on the critical potential in the work of Martin Heidegger, shifting from but not abandoning the existential analytic of *Being and Time* to “On the Essence of Truth,” a piece originally composed in the 1930s but left unpublished until 1943.² I will briefly discuss the continuity between the two works, eventually turning to a close exegetical analysis. The goal I leave myself is to creatively combine Heidegger’s critique of epistemology and implicit theory of agency with the critical ethos of “On the Essence of Truth,” paying particular attention to the notion of *disclosure*. Taking reification as an example, I hope to show how social pathologies diagnosed by figures like Honneth and Lukács can be aided and re-imagined on ontological grounds. Along the way I will consider objections to understanding Heidegger in this particular fashion, specifically those of Jürgen Habermas, one of Heidegger’s most strident critics. I will attempt to aid my claims with contemporary arguments by Robert Nichols and Nikolas Kompridis, both of

¹Nikolas Kompridis, *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory Between Past and Future* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006), 18. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as *CD*.

²The issue of the development of Heidegger’s thought is one of, if not *the* most contentious issue in Heidegger scholarship. For a famous example, see William J. Richardson, *Heidegger Through Phenomenology to Thought*, (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2003).

whom have written on the possibility of fusing ontology and critique. The success of the overall project will hinge on how Heidegger can mediate the demands of a social theory that seeks to displace pathological modes of human activity. This chapter will assess how it is that certain forms of activity could be disclosive of their status as projected possibilities or instead be self-concealing. The relevance of this distinction lies in the ability of an activity to see itself as situated and emerging out of a specific context versus seeing itself as a natural and objective feature of existence. Pathological human behaviour that *fails* to know itself as one possibility among many is one of the chief concerns of the tradition of Western Marxism that Honneth falls in line with. If, for instance, a historically specific set of actions worked to conceal their own disclosure to Dasein *as historically specific*, building from the idea that Dasein is a mode of being that can appropriate and modify its worldly conditions, one could seemingly be critical of those activities from an ontological standpoint. In the example of reification, one could argue that Lukács implicitly criticizes capitalism and the commodity form in this way. To Honneth's point, it would be possible that a certain form of philosophy has worked to disguise its own emergence and yet effectively privilege reified forms of social interaction, whether or not it reinforced tendencies that were actually rooted in capitalism. This however would require us to consider the current status of philosophy as an activity, given that the understanding of Dasein is first and foremost expressed in practical relations.

The Shadow of *Being and Time*

Many of Heidegger's most famous detractors locate "On the Essence of Truth" and other essays written during this time as the point at which the great philosopher's thought tips toward the unavailing, crypto-normative themes of later works like "The Question Concerning Technology"³ and "Building, Dwelling, Thinking."⁴ The method of Heideggerian philosophy when the essay is published is of great controversy, either emblematic of a figure who is of profound importance to (at least) the German metaphysical tradition or of an obfuscating, normatively hollow mystic that has, at least on Habermas' characterization, lead a generation of prominent intellectuals astray.⁵ Although enumerated, the ten sections of the essay are unlike a sequence of propositional claims. Rather, what these steps constitute are purported transformations in thinking and questioning as such. And though it proceeds from the specificity of the most ordinary and self-evident theory of truth to what is most general and arguably inscrutable, it is not a logical refutation *of those theories*. Over its course the reader will be asked how it is that the understanding of truth has transformed, noting along the way the various modes in which its essence has been conceptualized historically.⁶ The emphasis on history, specifically in relation to

³ The original German text appeared in 1954. See Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, (ed.) David Krill (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1977).

⁴ The original German text appeared in 1954. See Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, (ed.) David Krell (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1977).

⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, (tr.) F. Lawrence (Maldon, MA: Polity Press, 1987), 131-161. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as *PDM*. See also Note 1 of this chapter.

⁶ The history of the metaphysics of truth is a major theme for Heidegger, within *Being and Time* itself and perhaps more prominently in a lecture course given the year that treatise was

the philosophical tradition and its transformations, is one of the essay's major themes. While it would be wildly inaccurate to say that the history of Western philosophy is not already an important feature of *Being and Time*,⁷ the tenor is significantly more ominous in "On the Essence of Truth." Where the earlier work went to great lengths to destroy the history of ontology in order for fundamental questions to be posed properly, the essay is less optimistic about the possibility of such an overcoming. However, other lessons from *Being and Time* must be kept in mind in order to approach this analysis appropriately. Discussed briefly in Chapter Three was the idea that any dealing with an entity presupposes a prior disclosure of a field, whereby an individual and an object can interact. Dasein is disclosed to itself as thrown and from out of its factual situation it can uncover entities and project possibilities for dealing with them. The antecedent understanding of the beings Dasein encounters is the result of its disposed comportment to the pre-predicative referential totality out of which those possibilities can be drawn. This runs counter to the idea that different 'understandings' of truth are merely propositions made by a subject about an actually existing fact. Whether or not those propositions correspond correctly to the reality of that fact is both the traditional and common sense depiction of truth's proper subject matter. If we believe that as moderns we are closer to the *objectivity* of a state of affairs, we've done the better job of getting things right. On this view, the inaccuracy of propositions that came before the modern age is

published, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Mark Wrathall neatly unpacks Heidegger's oft repeated history in "Nietzsche and the Metaphysics of Truth." (Cambridge, 2011, 212-243)

⁷ See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (tr.) J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1962), §6, 41/19.

rooted in erroneous conceptual schemes; they are inadequate explanations of reality. Heidegger often anticipates this objection and is clear in his conviction that the modern notion of propositional truth and with it the idea of a conceptual scheme are a second order phenomenon to the more basic everyday understanding Dasein exhibits as being-in-the-world:

In speaking about something, the Dasein *speaks itself out*, *expresses itself, as existent being-in-the-world, dwelling with and occupying itself with beings*. Only a being that exists, that *is* in the manner of being-in-the-world, understands that which is, beings. Insofar as what is is understood, something of the nature of significance-contextures is articulated by means of this understanding. These contextures are potentially expressible in words. It is not the case that first there are the words, which are coined as signs for meanings, but just the reverse – it is from the Dasein which understands itself and the world, from a significance-contexture already unveiled, that a word accrues to each of these meanings. (*Basic Problems of Phenomenology* 209)

As a methodological point, it was said that one can't ask about that which they don't already understand in some fashion, just as in *The Republic* one couldn't ask about justice if they weren't already acquainted with it in some imprecise way. In *Being and Time*, the question of the meaning of being must first run through the questioner that is already familiar *with being* – Dasein. In asking after the essence of truth, the essay must presuppose a questioner who is already related to the

essence in some imprecise way. The method is once again a laying out of the understanding one exhibits in advance.

Nevertheless, at first blush, an inquiry into the historical modifications of an essence could appear as something of an oxymoron. By mapping these different conceptions onto the history of philosophy, we can say provisionally that the undertaking of “On the Essence of Truth” is a questioning of questioning – an interrogation of the history of metaphysics and with it the history of being. Even in this cursory description we appear once again to have run up on certain themes consonant with *Being and Time*: the methodology of moving from what is proximal to what is general, Dasein, understanding. One other way of thematically aligning *Being and Time* and “On the Essence of Truth” is by noting how a procession through historical variations of the philosophical tradition would have to implicate Heidegger *within that history*. As a survey of truth-relations, the essay is itself part of the subject matter. If we know now from *Being and Time* that we explicitly ask what the hammer is only once it has broken, it must therefore be the case that something about our notion of truth has gone awry. Something in our ordinary understanding requires clarification. Heidegger then is acknowledging the actuality of the ruling conception of truth and by *clarifying* how it is already latent within our understanding he is not taking us somewhere entirely unforeseen. On the contrary, by once again moving through the hermeneutic circle he is turning us toward where we already are and how it is that we stand with truth today. Beginning with what we are most familiar with – truth as correspondence – we in a sense recall something we already know. That we

would require such a turning speaks to the suspicion that something about our current state of affairs is concealed to us, that we don't *really* know how it is we stand. An appeal to everyday activity must not assume that such activity is something we *know* even given its familiarity to us (*CD* 113). But the act of recollection as clarification will not merely remind us of something we forgot, it will instead transform that which is recalled in the process. Bringing forward our current notion of truth will not leave it unchanged. The interrogation into the tradition that asks 'what is truth?' is designed to make more precise how it is we comport ourselves given the predominant notion of the current era. The ordinary conception of truth today is at once a kind of pre-philosophical understanding *and* the current manifestation of a tradition. As it was in *Being and Time*, where our everyday experiences opened up the possibility of an existential analysis that in turn cleared the way for questions of fundamental ontology, the everyday experience of human lives remain inextricable from the history of philosophy. As mentioned, literature on the commensurability of the existential analytic with Heidegger's later works is prolific and greatly varied, and though it is not the express purpose of this project to unpack those debates, I hope it is clear that a minimal consistency is present. This of course will have to be corroborated with what is actually contained in the text.

Still, an early objection to the approach of "On the Essence of Truth" on the basis of what came before it might point out that Heidegger has already told us that we find ourselves thrown into a particular ontic factual world, and that there is no foreseeable way of thinking of ourselves as outside of those current

conditions. The character of our disposition only allows us to see our facticity; that we exist in our particular state of affairs and accordingly can only act from within them. But even as physically and empirically thrown, Dasein was shown to be in such a way that is not completely determined by circumstance. On the contrary, we are thrown in a fashion such that the world we encounter hangs together with a certain a texture that we can interpretively engage. Dasein's being is *not* strictly determined by its actuality in that it mobilizes the possibilities projected in its understanding. Though Dasein comes before itself as disposed toward entities in this or that way, its potentiality is only limited and never eradicated. Chapter Three demonstrated that Dasein isn't exhausted by the mode of the actual, and is defined largely by what it *can be*. In other words, Dasein *actually is* a working out of meaningful possibilities, or, we cannot *not* interpret what is possible without recourse to our circumscribed facticity. Being thrown is both a restriction *and* the basis from which it is possible to be more than we currently are. We don't willfully assign significance to things we encounter in our everyday activity. Rather, that significance is revealed by grasping the entity's as-structure out of the referential totality within which Dasein endures. Cognitive acts were therefore derivative in the sense that their meaning required a pre-cognitive context (the understanding of objects as ready-to-hand). Conversely, the use and manipulation of equipment did not require a cognitive grasping. It is important to distinguish between being incapable of understanding a state of affairs other than our own and only being able to understand a state of affairs *from* the circumstances we are currently situated in. As David Kolb puts it "We are able

to talk or act only because we are within and relying upon the texture of the revealed world and the possibilities it holds open” (133).

Following this, in asking after the various reconfigurations in which the essence of truth is and has been realized throughout history, it is important to keep in mind that in whatever mode the essence appears (correctness, correspondence, disclosure, *aletheia*, freedom, etc.), it is not more or less correct with respect to the mode that precedes or follows it. Whatever the essence of truth was for Plato, for Descartes or for Hegel, was *actually what truth meant* for those respective figures; their theories are not posthumously proven wrong but instead disclosed historically. Truth was as it was in each of their respective significance-contextures. But by clarifying *our* understanding we are asking after the hermeneutic situation that we find ourselves in today. And since something has been problematized we can't simply take it for granted; we want to understand our situation transformatively. We get this sense of what it means to question in the seemingly trivial example of the broken hammer, the impetus for the task of fundamental ontology at the beginning of *Being and Time*,⁸ and in the rather sardonic tone taken at the outset of “On the Essence of Truth:”

Common sense has its own necessity; it asserts its rights with the weapon peculiarly suitable to it, namely, appeal to the “obviousness” of its claims and considerations. However, philosophy can never refute common sense, for the latter is deaf to

⁸ “This question has today been forgotten ... Yet the question we are touching upon is not just any question.” See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (tr.) J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1962), §1, 2/2.

the language of philosophy. Nor may it even wish to do so, since common sense is blind to what philosophy sets before its essential vision.

Moreover, we ourselves remain with the sensibleness of common sense to the extent that we suppose ourselves to be secure in those multiform “truths” of practical experience and action, of research, composition, and belief. We ourselves intensify that resistance which the “obvious” has to every demand made by what is questionable.

Therefore even if some questioning concerning truth is necessary, what we then demand is an answer to the question as to where we stand today. We want to know what our situation is today. We call for the goal that should be posited for human beings in and for their history.⁹

Heidegger is quite clear on the point that asking after truth is no mere intellectual enterprise. Something specific to our time has demanded our *critical* attention. This gives the project the character of a kind of address, and is therefore particularly relevant to the aims of this thesis and the status of Heidegger’s critical potential. In order to root these themes and enrich their meaning I will now turn to the essay itself.

⁹ Martin Heidegger, “On the Essence of Truth,” in *Pathmarks*, (ed.) W. McNeill, (tr.) John Sallis, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 137. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as “OET.”

Truth and Disclosure

Working out from our everyday experience of truth and essence, Heidegger begins with examples of how the terms would ordinarily be deployed: essence as the property that is common to the many, and truth as the common quality between things that are said to be true. These understandings are for Heidegger, both common-sense and typifying of the metaphysical tradition. In its practical application, the notion of truth is generally meant to help us distinguish between that which is actual and that which is false, for instance between real gold and fake gold (“OET” 137). This however only defers the issue of the *essence* of truth to the question of actuality. What is it that distinguishes that which we call actual? If pressed, one would likely concede that fake gold *is as actual* as real gold; they both have the character of reality. How then is the distinction between the true and the counterfeit to be made? Genuine gold must be “that actual gold the actuality of which is in accordance with what, always and in advance, we “properly” mean by “gold”” (“OET” 137). The essence of truth is founded on the accordance between the actuality of the thing and what we understand that thing is supposed to be: “A statement is true if what it means and says is in accordance with the matter about which the statement is made” (“OET” 138). However, Heidegger finds something altogether strange in the attempt to discover a consonance between two things which seemingly have very different essences – entities and propositions about those entities. What would it take for there to be something in common between matter and intellect? In other words, on what basis can we comport ourselves toward objects? The tentative answer will be

that what propositions actually achieve is a kind of presentation. The statement lets the entity be what it is in order for it to “traverse an open field of opposedness” and “stand opposed as object” (Heidegger, “OET” 141). Comportment is therefore made possible by an opening to that which appears as present, and by a transcending across that opening. Although a cognitive stance toward the world is often fixated on entities in their being as presence-at-hand, Heidegger is again interested in showing the way that comportment precedes the possibility of correspondence between the factuality of an object and a statement made about that object. Statements presuppose a relation between the thing in question and the individual who will make the statement. It is through Dasein that the prior disclosure of the opening where a speaker can project possibilities of speaking takes place, and this is what moves Heidegger to say that what Dasein actually speaks is *itself*. This opening refers us back to the idea of a referential totality that constitutes the possibilities projected in Dasein’s understanding. In order to comport oneself in some manner or another, beings must be disclosed to our understanding in advance.

We have again run up against the analyses of *Being and Time*.

Propositional truths require the presence of something *as something* which itself depends on understanding as an existential. Being disposed to comport oneself with entities in any particular way is achieved through the projection of possibilities already latent in understanding, for instance, the possibility of taking an entity as an objects of science, of practical use, artistic endeavour etc.

Heidegger’s seemingly curious re-direction at this juncture of the essay is to say

that the “openness of comportment as the inner condition of the possibility of correctness is grounded in freedom. *The essence of truth, as the correctness of a statement, is freedom.*” (“OET” 142). Idiosyncratically characterized, Heidegger writes that freedom is the “freedom for what is opened up in an open region [that] lets beings be the beings they are” (“OET” 144). But “letting beings be” does not entail leaving them alone. Heidegger intends the opposite. The freedom to let beings be is a freedom to turn toward those beings as that which they are. In Richardson’s words, comportment with entities is possible given Dasein’s freedom “toward the Open as to accept any open being it may encounter within the Open for what it is, sc. to permit this being to be itself as open and thus constrain or direct There-being [Dasein] in the formation of its judgments” (*TPT* 215). So understood freedom is not the property of a subject. Rather it pertains to the possibility of engagement with the disclosure and the disclosedness of beings within an open region of the unconcealed (“OET” 144). Truth as unconcealment therefore “manifests itself as exposure to the disclosedness of beings” (“OET” 145). It is always Dasein that preserves this “exposure to the disclosedness of beings as such” (“OET” 145). Freedom is thus understood as “letting beings be, [which] is the fulfillment and consummation of the essence of truth in the sense of the disclosure of beings” (“OET” 146).

The letting be that characterizes the engagement with the disclosedness of beings resonates with the disposed comportment described in Chapter Three. However, increasingly emphasized in “On the Essence of Truth” is that this is not just a relation to “this or that being” but also to the disclosure of beings as such

("OET" 147). This attunement is not an ontic 'feeling' or 'experience' according to Heidegger, both here and in *Being and Time* ("OET" 147). Being-attuned or being-disposed precedes and makes possible the human who 'feels' because one is "always engaged in being attuned in a way that discloses beings as a whole," despite the fact that we are typically unaware of this essence of attunement ("OET" 147). Here Heidegger re-introduces the notion of the essence of truth as it has to do with accordance, in this instance as the accordance of human comportment with entities through the openedness of beings as a whole ("OET" 147). The whole of beings cannot be equivalent to the sum of particular entities opened up for human comportment, understood in the familiar philosophical notions of history or nature, for it would seem that *those* beings presuppose this wholeness in order to be intelligible. Instead, we have again the familiar idea that it is the disclosure of a world to and through Dasein that precedes the foregrounding of particular entities in their as-structure: "from the point of view of everyday calculations and preoccupations this "as a whole" appears to be incalculable and incomprehensible. It cannot be understood on the basis of the beings opened up in any given case, whether they belong to nature or to history" ("OET" 147). More precisely, the "wholeness" of beings conceals itself out of a kind of necessity. No interpretive foregrounding can make explicit a complete background horizon out of which both entities and Dasein emerge. The essence of truth is now the essence of freedom, or, a "letting beings be." ("OET" 147) This wholeness is not the sum or totality of beings; it is the latent meaning of a context

that perpetually recedes into the background such that particular beings can be interpreted as what they are.

How are we to understand Heidegger's strange theses on freedom here? For one, his characterization is one of an openness to a significance-context out of which both a subject that makes propositions and the objects about which propositions are made *first arise*. The correspondence between a proposition and the thing which the proposition is about presupposes a space, out of which the possibility of speaking about the thing as it appears is first made meaningful. The notion of a cognitive correspondence between the intellect of the subject and the object *as such* is untenable because both emerge as the things they are out of their particular context. The horizon within which an action can be meaningful *and* an entity can be the entity it is, the entity about which propositions will be made and not an entity as such, is the condition for a propositional statement in the first place. The notion that a proposition could correspond to a pure thing-in-itself generates difficulties because said thing can only appear *as what it is* within its particular horizon. Through *Being and Time* it was shown how the world is first disclosed through Dasein's practical activity. We said that the methodology proceeded from the everyday pre-reflective behaviour of Dasein and revealed a deeper understanding of the fundamental ways in which Dasein can be (as projective, as fallen, as understanding) and with it the world into which we are thrown. The pre-reflective activity in which we are engaged and by which we come to understand ourselves was simultaneously limited and made meaningful by the understanding of our particular circumstance which had been disclosed in

advance. Freedom as a letting be is thus intimately related to Dasein's very being as disclosing, as being-in-the-world. Freedom as openness to a significance-context is thus the condition under which meaningful possibilities can come before Dasein. The disclosure of the world to Dasein makes propositions possible, but 'the world' thought as a complete object could never be fore-grounded such that those propositions could be verified over and above the particular meaning-context within which they were made. It is the context that establishes potentially meaningful actions which Dasein can actualize in interpretation, but interpretations are not strictly determined by the factual conditions Dasein finds itself in. As potentiality Dasein is always more than it currently is.

Acknowledging that possibilities are both constrained and opened up in a particular significance-context is one of the key critical insights that contemporary work on Heidegger's notion of freedom has stressed. Robert Nichols summarizes this difficult and important point as follows:

This field must be a determinant field, in the sense of providing finite, limited, concrete possibilities which are not all equally available. Moreover, actualization of choice within this field alters the range of possibilities. The field of possibilities is thus disclosed *to* the agent, but also through them and their activities. The world is thus engaged not as a determinant 'thing' over against the

subject, but rather as a cluster of probabilities and possibilities that permit us to think and act in a multiplicity of ways.¹⁰

Recapitulating some of the general themes of the essay, we can say that for Heidegger the disclosure of beings as beings is prior to propositional truth. Those beings are disclosed and their possibilities are projected within a significance-context. We are attuned to this context of meaning, but it isn't something we can wholly bring forward or objectify. Instead, the actualization of possibilities modifies the field within which those possibilities appear.

On the (Im)possibility of Critical Ontology

Now that we have a better grasp on the idea of disclosure, it would be worthwhile to take on objections to some of its potential consequences. Once considered, these objections will help shed light on how it is that Heidegger could be re-imagined as a critical resource. One of the most persistent opponents of re-thinking Heidegger this way is Jürgen Habermas. In praise of *Being and Time*, Habermas helpfully re-articulates some of the major points from this and earlier chapters of the thesis:

instead of the subject who in knowing or acting confronts the objective world as the totality of existing states of affairs, the acts

¹⁰ Robert Nichols, *The World of Freedom: Heidegger, Foucault, and the Politics of Historical Ontology*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), [Manuscript on file with author]. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as *WOF*.

of knowing and doing performed in the objectifying attitude can now be conceived as derivatives from basic modes of standing within a lifeworld, within a world intuitively understood as context and background. (*PDM* 147)

The interrogation of the conditions under which a ‘subject’ could come to know and act upon the ‘objective world’ moved Heidegger beyond conventional epistemology and subject-centred reason. According to Habermas, Heidegger and his hermeneutical phenomenology arrived at an important moment and gave philosophy an in-road against the prevailing theories of the Young Hegelians and their deterministic view of “the objective as against the subjective” (*PDM* 131). Heidegger provided an account of an agent who acts within its *particular* historical hermeneutical situation, but who nevertheless *acts* in excess of strict determination.¹¹ But for Habermas a middle-ground between absolute volitional freedom and rigid determination does not entail a strong critical foundation. In the move from the subject-object relation and the theory of truth as correspondence, to the idea of the open and the disclosure of a meaning-context, correspondence, correctness, and the capacity for critical thinking have, on Habermas’ reading, been left out of the equation:

the historical destiny of a culture or society is determined by a collectively binding pre-understanding of the things and events that can appear in the world at all... The epochal changes in the

¹¹ Jürgen Habermas, *Philosophical-Political Profiles*. (tr.) Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 55. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as *PPP*.

understanding of Being are reflected in the history of metaphysics.” (*PDM* 132)

There are two shifts in the Heideggerian project that Habermas places at the root of this problem, shifts I believe he would attribute, however accurately, to the methodology of “On the Essence of Truth.” First, fundamental ontology and the existential analytic are set aside for a Dasein delivered over to a contingent occurrence of being of which it has no control (*PDM* 152). Second, in his rethinking of freedom, Heidegger displaces Dasein as the creative-projective locus of meaning and “the *productivity* of the creation of meaning that is disclosive of world passes over to *Being* itself.” (*PDM* 153) Instead of directing his inquiry toward the experiences of concrete historical situations, toward the life-worlds or contexts of meaning he so rigorously elucidated, Heidegger turns toward “the history of the formally existential components [*Existenzialen*] themselves, toward the History of Being” (*PPP* 57). Heidegger thus fails in a somewhat bewildering manner to place “philosophy in relation to the history of this situation” (*PPP* 57). A critique of modernity presented as a delineated History of Being/History of Metaphysics tells us little of what we should expect in its wake, and worse yet, the “propositionally contentless speech about Being has, nevertheless, the illocutionary sense of demanding resignation to fate” (*PDM* 140). The sending of being and its understanding remain beyond the realm of philosophical speculation, it is only our own understanding that we can reconcile with and attempt to overcome.

This rather cryptic interpretation of Heidegger has recently been challenged with great rigor and clarity in the work of Nikolas Kompridis. It is his contention that the wide net Habermas casts around any theories that attempt to track broad changes in how things come to be intelligible, what counts as truth or falsehood, or how it makes sense to behave, is the result of his absolutization of the world-disclosure argument (*CD* 126). Habermas under-emphasizes the capacity for agency in investigations that outline the “ontological presuppositions and historical preconditions that constitute different historical epochs, cultural paradigms, understandings of being, and forms of life” (*CD* 126). On the one hand, Habermas wants to hold fast to the ontological insight that significance-contextures limit and constrain the range of possible human action, while on the other, he wants to ignore the equally important point that human practice is constitutive of those limitations, and thus enabling of *possible action* at the same time. The ontological pre-understanding of the world that each of us inherits, the fact that *Dasein* is thrown into its factual situation, *makes possible* rather than rules out meaningful human activity. As mentioned earlier, *Dasein* is always more than it currently is. Though Heidegger is at pains to emphasize the limits of the individual will in its ability to effect large scale changes in the ontological understanding of the world, it is difficult to see how it could be the case that this understanding is the result of something other than human activity, when according to *Being and Time*, that activity revealed it in the first place:

[Heidegger] is far from asserting the self-refuting view that ontologies determine in advance our self-understanding, our

practices, and our possibilities *independently* of what we may say or do. To say that we cannot make fully explicit, fully transparent, our ontological pre-understanding of the world, to say that we cannot objectify and master it, because our theoretical and practical activities depend on it, is *not* the same as saying that we are at the mercy of metahistorical transformations of worldviews that we can only undergo but not resist or criticize. (CD 127)

Both Nichols and Kompridis underscore that a meaning context is simultaneously disclosed *to* Dasein and *through* Dasein, or, it is only insofar as Dasein *is* that entities can be uncovered as what they are (CD 34). It is along these lines that Kompridis believes he can introduce a major distinction between *kinds* of disclosure:

What is disclosed may concern the background structures or conditions of intelligibility necessary to any world- or self-understanding, which I'll refer to as *pre-reflective* disclosure (Heidegger called them *Existenzialen*); or it may concern the ways in which these background structures of intelligibility are reopened and transformed through novel interpretations and cultural practices, which I'll refer to as *reflective disclosure* (or redisclosure). (CD 34)

This distinction is not meant to suggest that pre-reflective and reflective disclosures are analogous to non-cognitive and cognitive actions, but instead that

both are instances of “practical cognition occurring at different levels of awareness.” (*CD* 34) This should resonate with the analysis of being-attuned and how it constrains and enables concrete experience. In Heidegger’s words one is “always engaged in being attuned in a way that discloses beings as a whole. Every mode of comportment on the part of historical human beings – is attuned, and by this attunement is drawn up into beings as a whole” (“OET” 147). Kompridis’ distinction hinges on the way in which the two kinds of disclosures can interact, which he characterizes as both a feedback loop and an oppositional relation (*CD* 34). This kind of circularity should not be foreign to followers of Heideggerian philosophy: “It is only because our understanding of the world is first disclosed to us that we can disclose the world again, and again” (*CD* 34). From this vantage the critical potential of Heidegger’s thought comes closer into view:

we *can* normatively distinguish “good” from “bad” disclosure by distinguishing between disclosures of the world that more fully and generously create the conditions for reflective disclosure from those that create conditions that obscure their own status *as* disclosures. Put negatively, we can say that a new disclosure of the world ... can bring about a change in the conditions of intelligibility upon which those asymmetrical relations [of power and domination] depend, giving them much less “ontological” support. Put positively, given our permanent dependence on the conditions of intelligibility supplied by our pre-reflective understanding of the world, the reflective disclosure of world

presents itself as unending challenge and task, for what is in need of redisclosure cannot be known in advance of the particular historical contexts in which that need arises. (CD 35)

This not only gives the notion of disclosure a critical weight, but also an explanatory value at the level of historical change. Through his historicization of disclosure, Heidegger makes possible “accounts of the formation and transformation of historical epochs by tracking changes in ontologies (changes in the “understanding of being”)” (CD 37).

Stepping back for a moment, I would like to summarize some of the broader points of this chapter. We started by reiterating the fact that Dasein is thrown into a world where it receives or inherits its understanding and with it a range of possibilities it can activate. This receiving is therefore not a mindless passivity (CD 203). The ontological understanding of the world Dasein inherits is that out of which it projects its meaningful activity. Dasein is disposed by the mood of its world to comport itself in some manner, but that manner is not strictly determined. Working out possibilities is achieved through the appropriation of the understanding Dasein inherits. By the same token, the question of truth as the accordance of an object with the intellect is subordinate to the disclosure of concrete possibilities *to* Dasein and *through* its activity. Pre-reflective action shapes how we come to understand ourselves, and this action is simultaneously limited and made meaningful by the understanding of our particular circumstance disclosed to us in advance. Understanding is therefore first and foremost expressed in a set of practical relations as opposed to an act of the intellect.

Finally, pace Kompridis, a historically specific field of practical activities can either act to conceal the fact of its own disclosure in Dasein's understanding, or can emphasize the capacity for transformative human activity within one's own significance-contexture.

“On the Essence of Truth” holds a special place between *Being and Time* and other essays like “The Question Concerning Technology” given the increasing role that the historical direction of the West plays in the forgetting of the conditions that make the meaningful presence of a world possible. *Being and Time* largely attributes the covering over of the question of being to the fallenness that is constitutive of Dasein. That one is primarily concerned with entities and not being itself is the appropriate consequence of a mode of activity that reveals the world as equipment for use and manipulation. However, that Dasein is often *unaware* that it engages the world on a practical level as its ordinary and most basic way of being is undoubtedly a prominent theme of the first division. This lack of awareness is *also* the consequence of a metaphysical tradition that has devoted its efforts to prioritizing the understanding of beings as presence-at-hand, when in fact that mode is derivative, that is, presupposes the practical activity in order to be made meaningful. From *Being and Time* onward Heidegger begins to emphasize more and more the role that tradition plays in concealing Dasein's involved relation with its disclosed practical world. It were as if the epistemological model that Heidegger sought to displace returned with increasing ascendancy and troubled the thinker to a greater and greater degree as time wore on. “On the Essence of Truth” concludes with two possibilities given by the

thinking of being that Western philosophy set on its course. First, the common sense philosophy that operates under the ruling theory of truth, one that takes as its standard the givenness of *beings* and not that which makes the meaningful presence of those beings possible – their disclosure. Heidegger calls this enterprise “entirely justified,” although unable to “touch on the essence of philosophy, which can be determined only on the basis of relatedness to the original truth of beings as such as a whole” (“OET” 152). It is the second possibility, a questioning of *being*, that Heidegger appears to privilege. The *full* essence of truth “holds sway as concealing” and “philosophy as a questioning into this truth is intrinsically discordant,” invoking again the idea that the essence of truth is superordinate to the accordance and *non*accordance of propositions to states of affairs (“OET” 152). As such, philosophical thinking is bound more originally not to beings as a whole but to the *concealment* of beings as a whole. It is proper to philosophical thinking to “not disrupt the concealing” and to ask earnestly after its “unbroken essence” (“OET” 152).

The latent conclusion in this kind of diagnosis of the philosophical situation is that Heidegger is troubled by the ability for a certain kind of activity to produce a self-understanding that masks how it is we come to understand ourselves in the first place. In other words, he is troubled by a philosophy that fails to ask after the ontological conditions of intelligibility and possibility, and that therefore fails to understand its own origins. This also speaks to the idea that philosophy itself *is a mode of human activity*, not a purely theoretical endeavour abstracted from everyday life. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger attempted to effect a

change in the self-understanding of the tradition of metaphysics and epistemology along these lines. Though their understanding of the world as presence-at-hand is not problematic in itself, it is something entirely different for that stance to fail to see itself *as a stance*, and to obscure the basic fact that the world is first disclosed through practical activity. It is interesting that where *Being and Time* attributed the concealing of the basic conditions of world-disclosure to the ontological composition of Dasein (fallenness), “On the Essence of Truth” begins to push harder against the *activities* that conceal, in this particular case the tradition of Western philosophy. The possibility of combining the ontological analyses of a work like *Being and Time* with a critical analysis of modes of engagement that conceal their own becoming is a profound one, yet it remains a possibility that has only been provisionally explored. Nichols is helpful in narrowing in on this potential:

It is one thing to state that Dasein is the kind of being who conceals its own involvement in a world (an ontological thesis). It is another thing to move beyond this and demonstrate how and why this concealing occurs in its particular historical manifestations (an historical inquiry). Furthermore, this second order inquiry is demanded by and internally related to the first insofar as the ontological thesis includes the notion that Dasein is conditioned as well by its historicity. Since Dasein only comes to an awareness of itself and its world through modes of practical involvement which precede it and these modes are historically

constituted, Dasein is in its very ontology a historical being. Hence, the challenge posed by Heidegger's own early work: outline the very historicity of Dasein's (ontological) self-concealment and the corresponding forms of engagement that not only reveal the truth of our involvement but also, in so doing, are liberating. (*WOF*)

This kind of analysis would again involve the experiential level of human existence and would ask after the conditions under which the meaningful interaction between an individual and a particular world can take place, guided now by the insight that basic practices "make up the prevailing modes of revealing in a given epoch" (Nichols, *WOF*) If we quote again a passage from Anita Chari, it appears that it's not so difficult to re-think Lukács along these ontological lines:

Lukács makes explicit an unconscious link between subjects' everyday practices and the dynamic of the capitalist economy. The concept of reification there describes the ways in which individuals in capitalist society fail to recognize that the economy is constituted by human practices, even as it appears to be an autonomous and self-perpetuating dynamic. ("TPCR" 589)

In Conclusion: Reification Reconsidered

One of the major arguments put forward in *History and Class Consciousness* is that a social relation is prior to and yet concealed by the

detached contemplative stance a world structured by market relations fosters. The objectified labour constitutive of value is hidden from sight and the interaction of individuals is mediated and ultimately transformed by the capitalist mode of production. That this set of circumstances produces social pathologies within individuals is the kernel from which Axel Honneth begins his project in “Reification.” His argument, however, is much different. It is not specifically the capitalist mode of production he takes issue with. Instead, Honneth is concerned with how a *model of epistemology* that privileges cognitive activity (the formation and evaluation of beliefs) produces pathological social behaviour that is characterized by an instrumental quality. This pathology he calls reification, and it can take hold in the relation of self to other, self to world, and self to self. To uproot such pathologies, Honneth invokes Hegel, Heidegger, and Dewey in an attempt to demonstrate that reifying practices result from a false anthropological picture of what the human being actually is. The cognizing agent mirrors the contemplative agent in that it fails to see itself as embedded in a historically contingent *activity*. It instead derives its self-understanding from a model of epistemology that has concealed itself *as a model* and transformed into a full-fledged account of human subjectivity. Chapter Two argued that this false picture of the abstracted, cognizing agent fails to see how it has actualized *one possibility* of human action, one that presupposes a more basic way of behaving and understanding oneself. Honneth hoped to ground cognition in a more primordial form of recognition or existential engagement. Not only should this re-inform us as to our empathetic (non-cognitive) involvement with other human beings, it also

shows us how objectifying acts we actually prefer are an expression of our basic human essence and not its negation. Perhaps most importantly, it provides us with the potential to modify our current social conditions given that we are never actually dis-engaged from our world. The detachment Lukács spoke of turns out to be just another form of involvement. We simply needed to be reminded of it.

As Raymond Geuss and the analyses of Chapters Two and Three of this thesis made clear, Honneth's project goes awry in that it attempts to reframe the ontology of *Being and Time* as offering an ideal or normatively preferred anthropology, when in fact Heidegger does no such thing. That our epistemic involvement is preceded by the fundamental existential Heidegger calls care does not entail that the world and other individuals are disclosed in an emotionally saturated, normatively preferable way. It is only the condition under which those things can be disclosed at all. That care allows another person to be meaningful to me does not entail that I will actually 'care for them' in the ordinary sense of the word. Even though I may recognize the particular human qualities of another individual, it does not follow that I will treat them accordingly.

It is interesting that Honneth seemingly wants to affirm an act of cognition to overcome the pathological practices initially diagnosed. To *remember* that we are always-already existentially involved in our world is the keystone of his theory, and yet it is difficult to get a sense of how a commitment to that act of remembering could be guaranteed. Even then, some account would need to be given of how the conscious acceptance of our fundamental way of being would produce non-pathological activity. On the other hand, it was precisely an *activity*

or form of social organization that Lukács, following Marx, thought would reveal the antecedent sociality which we had come to forget. This requires a transformation on the level of human activity, not via the achievement of a persistent mental state. It is intriguing to think that a specific human activity could disclose or conceal the way in which we are ontologically thrown into an intersubjective world not of our creation; a world that *restricts* what possibilities are meaningful but nevertheless *opens* them as well. Normatively privileged intersubjective relations, on this view, would not be the condition for meaningful involvement but rather the outgrowth of the behaviour that discloses our interrelatedness. Couched in ontological terms, one could ask whether a certain set of interpretive acts achieved on the basis of our understanding could in turn reform that understanding in a non-pathological way. While it is clear that Heidegger believed interpretation fed back into understanding, it is less obvious what kinds of activities could transform it in such a way in order for it to run counter to the metaphysical and epistemological traditions of the West.

In Chapter Three the question was posed as to whether or not a mode of comportment could work to conceal itself as a historically disclosed possibility. It is my hope that the analyses of this thesis will have the reader answering with a resounding “yes.” It will therefore be necessary to begin asking how it is the ontological and the historical can affect one another. Are we of the age, as Christian Lotz believes, where both ontological and historical analysis is not only possible, but necessary?

Thus, nothing (no tradition, no entity, no relation) can be conceived in principle outside of this form; it is the true transcendental structure, but – and this is the philosophical problem – this structure is real and existing. In fact, we are currently in the process of observing the truly global expansion of this principle, not only in a spatial sense but also in an ontological sense: ideas, rights, planets, air, blood, organs, etc., are turning “upside down” by taking on the commodity form. (“RCFT” 191)

Lotz correctly notes that Heidegger himself appears to have something of this sort in mind when in the “Letter on Humanism” he writes that:

But since neither Husserl nor – so far as I have seen till now – Sartre recognizes the essential importance of the historical in Being, neither phenomenology nor existentialism enters that dimension within which a productive dialogue with Marxism first becomes possible. [...] The essence of materialism does not consist in the assertion that everything is simply matter but rather in a metaphysical determination according to which every being appears as the material of labor. The modern metaphysical essence of labor is anticipated in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* as the self-establishing process of unconditioned production, which is the objectification of the actual through man experienced as subjectivity. The essence of materialism is *concealed* in the

essence of technology, about which much has been written but little has been thought. (“Letter on Humanism” 243-44)

If the *activity* of commodity exchange as it appears in *History and Class Consciousness* could alter the ontological background, in this case such that entities appear as a value form *and* in such a way that human labor is concealed, a productive dialogue between the Heideggerian and critical traditions could show itself as a potentially viable option. I believe it is clear that within the range of possibilities open to human activity, some could be conceived of as concealing their own historical disclosure. If thought to be pathological, said activities would be open to criticism on ontological grounds. Re-reading Anita Chari from this perspective, it is Lukács himself who appears able to mediate these ontological and critical intuitions: “*From the activity of philosophy to industrial labor, Lukács shows that the defining feature of reification, the pervasive aspect of capitalist subjectivity, is the misrecognition of the practical basis of human activity*” (“TPCR” 590, emphasis added).

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