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Authenticity and Critique. Remarks on Heidegger and Social

Theory

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Abstract:

The ambiguous relation of critical theory and existentialism is particularly obvious in the case of Martin Heidegger: On the one hand, there are comprehensive theoretical and political reasons to see him as an enemy of critical social theory. On the other hand, his work has been noted as providing valuable resources for a critique of alienated and reified social structures. In this contribution, those resources will be explored via a discussion of Heidegger's notion of *Eigentlichkeit*. In contrast to Steven Crowell's Kantian reading of *Being and Time*, *Eigentlichkeit* will be explicated as the ontological transparency of ungroundedness. The transparency of authentic or owned Dasein does not disclose a new or deeper ground, but rather the ungroundedness of existence, that is, the contingency of all possible grounds. As a consequence, an authentic or owned Dasein understands that it has to take responsibility for its existence despite the fact that none of its reasons will ever be sufficiently justified. This self-transparency of Dasein coincides with Dasein's awareness of the ungroundedness of all social structures, norms, rules, and practices. Such awareness of contingency and alterability can become a resource for social critique and motivate a request for social change.

Keywords: Authenticity, ownedness, practical identity, ungroundedness, social critique

The task of a critical social theory can be described as the identification and critique of alienated structures. A situation becomes alienated when it is reified in such a way that its rules are followed without knowledge of their creation and without awareness of the possibility of changing them. The identification of alienated and reified structures unfolds against the background of some ideal of non-alienated or authentic life. Authenticity, of

course, is a term best known for its role within the existentialist tradition. Despite the political distance between existentialism and critical theory, there appears to be some proximity regarding their uses of the term authenticity. The ambiguous relation of these traditions is particularly obvious in the case of Martin Heidegger: On the one hand, there are comprehensive theoretical and political reasons to see him as an enemy of critical social theory. On the other hand, not only his notion of authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*) but also his analyses of the anyone (*das Man*), falling (*Verfallen*), inauthenticity, etc. can be seen as contributions to a critique of alienation and reification.

In this chapter, I will offer a discussion of Heidegger's notion of *Eigentlichkeit* and explore the possible resources it provides for a critical social theory. I will approach this task by discussing Steven Crowell's Kantian reading of *Being and Time*. On the one hand, this interpretation offers certain systematic strengths in reading Heidegger's analytic of Dasein in terms of a constitutional model of agency. On the other hand, an interpretation which reads the being of Dasein in terms of practical identity falls short of capturing the full potential of Heidegger's account of *Eigentlichkeit*. I will proceed by scrutinizing Heidegger's use of the term *Eigentlichkeit*. The main focus will be on the methodological role *Eigentlichkeit* plays for Heidegger's ontological project.

Eigentlichkeit concerns a specific transparency of ontological structures. This complicates psychological accounts like Crowell's, which see authenticity as a resolute enactment of autonomy and agency in light of an encounter with meaninglessness experienced in anxiety.

I will propose an understanding of *Eigentlichkeit* as describing a specific kind of transparent 'self-knowledge' of Dasein: In *Eigentlichkeit* Dasein understands that it has

to take responsibility for its existence despite the fact that none of its reasons will ever be sufficiently justified. It is confronted with the task of grounding its existence in light of fundamental ungroundedness. This ‘self-knowledge’ coincides with an awareness of the contingency of all social structures, norms, rules, and practices. I will conclude by indicating that ungroundedness becoming transparent can be a resource for social critique and motivate a request for social change.

1 Alienation and Authenticity

In her book *Alienation* Rahel Jaeggi aims at reestablishing “alienation” as an analytic tool for identifying failures in one’s relations to the world, others, and oneself. She defines alienation as a “relation of relationlessness” (Jaeggi 2014, 1); a situation in which one does not resonate with one’s own life and its surrounding, where one feels that one’s projects and the context in which they are embedded do not really matter.

In a historical contextualization of her project, Jaeggi identifies Marx and Heidegger as “two versions of alienation critique” (Jaeggi 2014, 11). Regarding the latter, she appropriates the notion of being-in-the-world as a critique of reifying objectifications that fail to consider both the practical character of the world—the world is not a collection of entities, but a practical nexus of significance—and Dasein’s entanglement with the world—Dasein’s primary mode of comportment is practical engagement, not distanced perception. Moreover, she explains that the notion of inauthenticity leads to an understanding of alienated modes of relating to one’s own existence. In inauthenticity, Dasein fails to grasp its own being, by either making oneself into a thing or by aligning oneself to others. In the first case, one fails “to apprehend the fact that one has one’s own life to lead and that one is unavoidably always already leading it” (Jaeggi 2014, 19). In

the second case, one fails “to apprehend not only that one leads one’s own life but also that one leads it oneself or that one is called on to live it oneself” (Jaeggi 2014, 20).

When we judge a relation as alienated, Jaeggi points out, we assume “a criterion for true, authentic selfhood against which to diagnose various types of deviation from it” (Jaeggi 2014, 44). Hence, it is no surprise that the term authenticity (*Authentizität*) appears throughout Jaeggi’s book. In contrast to the important role that this concept plays for her project, Jaeggi is relatively quiet on how authenticity is to be conceived. Technically speaking, authenticity is the antithesis to alienation. But what does this mean? What does it mean to be in authentic relations to others and the world? When can we speak of a life as being authentically lived?

Jaeggi rejects romantic notions of authenticity. Authenticity is not linked to some inner or invariable core of the self which needs to be realized against alienating conditions. She considers such a notion of selfhood as conceptually implausible and politically problematic. Instead, she seeks a non-essentialist, non-expressivist concept of authenticity that grounds her critical theory of alienation. The formal requirement for a *non-alienated life*, according to Jaeggi, is to *lead one’s life oneself*. This can be developed further in contrast to the two dimensions of inauthenticity mentioned above. First, living an authentic life implies that one *leads* one’s life: There is no ontological prescription predetermining how to live one’s life; this is something each needs to decide for herself. Second, it can be stressed that one has to lead one’s life *oneself*: Seeking to be led by other’s is ultimately just a strategy to flee from the necessary task of leading one’s life.

This definition of an authentic life remains quiet abstract. Against this background, I suggest taking a fresh look at the existentialist tradition, and Heidegger in

particular, to explore whether his understanding of authenticity (*Eigentlichkeit*) provides additional resources for further developing a critical theory of alienation.

2 Authenticity and Practical Identity

One major problem for such an exploration is that Heidegger's concept of authenticity is notoriously ambiguous and has led to conflicting interpretations. I will narrow down the interpretative choices by focusing on one prominent interpretation, Steven Crowell's transcendental reading of *Being and Time* (see Crowell 2013). Crowell's interpretation has the strength of being clear and coherent and relating Heidegger's account to important contributions in current debate on selfhood and agency. Therefore, his interpretation seems like a promising candidate for providing a notion of authenticity that can direct the critique of alienated practices. However, I will show that Crowell's reading ultimately fails to adequately consider the most important element of a Heideggerian notion of authenticity for social critique: ungroundedness, which allows to emphasize the contingency and alterability of social structures.

The main thrust of Crowell's interpretation is that authenticity is Heidegger's version of autonomy and responsibility—it elaborates the conditions under which a reason can count as *my* reason. This puts Heidegger in proximity of a constitutional model of selfhood and agency, as it is currently advocated by Christine Korsgaard (1996). The constitutional view can be characterized as a Kantian reading of existentialism, or an existentialist reading of Kant. The main idea is that having autonomy and responsibility *is* what is to be an agent—or in more Heideggerian terms: it

is our facticity to be autonomous and responsible agents.^[1] Crowell's reading of Heidegger as an "existential Kantian" links authenticity as autonomy and responsibility with an Korsgaardian understanding of "practical identity". Korsgaard defines practical identity as a "description under which you value yourself and in terms of which you find life worth living" (Korsgaard 1996, 101). Crowell aligns this with Heidegger's understanding of ability-to-be (*Seinkönnen*), thereby embedding it in a theory of practical everyday comportment.

Crowell's argument can be summarized along the following lines. He begins with maybe the most influential finding from Division One of *Being and Time*: Entities are first and foremost not encountered as occurrent objects (*vorhandene Dinge*), but as available equipment (*zuhandenes Zeug*); moreover, the intelligibility of equipment depends on their being a competent user who uses them appropriately in line with (some of) her projects—in Heideggerian terms: the "for the sake of which" (Heidegger 1953,

[1] Crowell emphasizes the differences between his Heideggerian approach and

Korsgaard's account: Most importantly, Korsgaard builds her account on self-consciousness, understood along the lines of rationality and reflection. Heidegger does not support such a rational, reflective model of selfhood. Crowell suggest seeing his ontology of Dasein in terms of "care" (*Sorge*) as a counter-model to the model of self-consciousness (Crowell 2007). I agree with Crowell on this point, but I do not think that this distinction undermines my interpretation, which critically highlights the proximity of Crowell's Heidegger to constitutional theories of selfhood.

84)² of equipment always relates back to the being of Dasein. Crowell interprets the being of Dasein in terms of a practical identity: Dasein’s projecting itself towards some possibility means that it acts for the sake of some practical identity. When preparing my next class, for example, I do so for the sake of being a teacher. The term “practical identity” is meant to solve two major issues in the philosophy of agency. First, a practical identity is intrinsically motivational, because it establishes a certain way of life as worth living and certain projects as worth pursuing. My practical identity as a teacher implies that I consider being a teacher as valuable and giving my next lecture as important. Second, a practical identity is intrinsically normative, as it is constitutively related to normative measures. When I follow projects in light of being a teacher, I am—at least implicitly—living up to the standards of this role. “Thus the intelligibility of practices is grounded [...] in one’s concern about succeeding or failing at being what one is trying to be, one’s commitment to a certain kind of *measure*” (Crowell 2015, 217).

The central clue of Crowell’s interpretation is the claim that these measures always relate to publically accepted norms and practices. Crowell states that if I would not relate myself to a publicly available normative space of accepted measures, I could

² All citations of *Being and Time* refer to the page numbers of the German edition of *Sein und Zeit* published by Niemeyer. These page numbers can be found in all English translations of *Being and Time* as well as the German edition of *Sein und Zeit* which appeared in 1977 as part of the *Gesamtausgabe*, published by Klostermann. The English citations are based on the translation by Stambaugh (Heidegger 1996), but throughout modified by me.

not make intelligible what I am doing, not even to myself. Even if I critically reflect on a norm or act in its violation, I do so in terms of public parameters of normativity. Crowell bases this on a Kantian premise, namely that trying to follow (or violate) a norm presupposes that I not merely act in accordance (or discordance) with the norm, but in light of it—and this requires me to relate to some publically available standard of understanding the norm. This leads Crowell to his understanding of authenticity: Acting in light of a norm implies that I experience the measure of my actions as addressing me. This is based on another Kantian premise, namely that a normative force presupposes a being who takes responsibility for it. That a norm has force on me depends on me experiencing myself as addressed by the norm; it requires that I recognize myself as this addressed agent.

Understanding oneself in light of a practical identity and acting according to the normative force of that identity, however, also applies to inauthentic Dasein. The difference between authenticity and inauthenticity, for Crowell, is that authentic Dasein comports itself in light of a self-awareness or self-transparency as such an agent. When being transformed into an authentic self—through anxiety or the call of conscience—I can no longer ground my projects in the established norms of my surrounding. Instead, the authentic self has to “take over being-a-ground—that is, be responsibility for oneself” (Crowell 2015, 218). Heidegger labels this as “*choosing to make this choice*” (Heidegger 1953, 269) which has been interpreted “as the transparent self-ascription of responsibility” (Han-Pile 2013, 300). Crowell conceptualizes this in terms of me taking over responsibility for the normative force the measure has on me.

Heidegger's understanding of anxiety and conscience complicate this interpretation of authenticity. Crowell interprets anxiety as breakdown of all meaning—when anxiety takes hold of me, nothing matters to me anymore. Thereby, the possibility to comport myself with reference to a practical identity breaks down as well. “*Angst* reveals that my commitment [...] is itself at issue, capable of breaking down as a whole” (Crowell 2015, 226). As a consequence, authenticity cannot simply mean to commit to a practical identity. Accordingly, Crowell understands “being-a-ground”³ not as a commitment to a *specific* measure, but as “demand for measure” (Crowell 2015, 226) or “orientation toward measure as such” (Crowell 2015, 232). When becoming authentic, “I am disclosed as a being who, to be anything at all, must act in light of a distinction between better and worse, success or failure” (Crowell 2015, 226).

To sum up, Crowell's Kantian reading understands authenticity as transparently “being-a-ground”. I see two problems with this reading, both relating to matters of interpretation as well as systematic issues for an account of authenticity in the domain of social theory. First, Heidegger stresses that authentic Dasein is not simply “being-a-ground”, but rather the “*being-the-ground* of a nullity” (Heidegger 1953, 283). Dasein grounds only as “abyss of ground” (*Abgrund*) (Heidegger 1998, 134 f.). Thus, we need to take the interpretation of Heideggerian authenticity one step further than Crowell—a step that will take us beyond the Kantian framework of agency as the practice of grounding oneself as the addressee of normative force and reason. Authenticity is the becoming

³ Crowell understands Heidegger's notion of “ground” (the German “*Grund*” allows for several connotations) primarily as reason.

transparent of our ungroundedness, the disclosure of the contingency of all grounds.

Crowell sees this element of ungroundedness, but he restricts it to the temporary state of anxiety which is to be overcome by new grounds in authenticity's resolute commitments.

In contrast, I suggest that ungroundedness is at the heart of Heidegger's notion of authenticity. This leads to the second point: Authenticity, ontically understood in terms of a mode of existence of Dasein, is a state of exception, not a lifeform, as Crowell's interpretation suggests. Authenticity denotes an awareness of contingency which enables us to challenge established social structures and ways of life; it cannot itself be transformed into or implemented as another mode of existence.

3 Authenticity or Ownedness

Before I will address these issues directly by suggesting an understanding of authenticity as ontological transparency of ungroundedness, I will prepare such a reading through several interpretative comments. In the introduction of *Being and Time*, Heidegger states that *Eigentlichkeit* is "chosen terminologically in a strict sense" (Heidegger 1953, 5).

Thus, we need to narrow down the terminological meaning of *Eigentlichkeit*. I will approach this issue via several remarks on Heidegger's use of this term.

The first remark concerns questions of translation. To begin with, it should be noted that Heidegger uses the term *Eigentlichkeit*—and not the term *Authentizität*, which is also available in German. There are no obvious linguistic reasons that speak against the use of *Authentizität*. The term originates from the Greek *authentikós*, which means original, genuine, or primary, and is derived from noun *authéntes*, signifying an originator or executor. Thus, an *authéntes* is the true originator or author of one's actions. This appears to fit nicely with Crowell's Kantian reading of Dasein as a self-constituting

agent. Heidegger, however, neglects *Authentizität* and instead uses the Germanic term *Eigentlichkeit*. The adjective *eigentlich*, in everyday German, signifies a range of meanings along the lines of genuine, proper, or real. Moreover, it contains the word *eigen*, which means own (as opposite to foreign). Therefore, some interpreters suggested to translate *Eigentlichkeit* as “ownedness.”⁴ This allows to invoke connotations of the English term “ownedness”: Along these lines, interpreters have stressed that an owned self needs to “own up” to the character of one’s existence as Dasein (Carman 2003, 276). Moreover, some suggested that ownedness “points us to the possibility of owning oneself and one’s life in the sense of taking responsibility for oneself and one’s life” (McManus 2015, 5).

This leads to the second remark, which is on Heidegger’s use of the terms *eigentlich* and *Eigentlichkeit*. We can distinguish a colloquial from a substantial sense of these terms (see Käufer 2015, 104). The colloquial sense is mostly present in the use of *eigentlich* as adjective or adverb, for instance, when Heidegger speaks of “genuine entities” (*eigentliche Seiende*) (BT 26), “real being” (*eigentliche Sein*) (BT 30), “real meaning” (*eigentliche Bedeutung*) (BT 32) or the “proper meaning of being” (*eigentliche Sinn von Sein*) (BT 37). In contrast to this colloquial use of the term, *Eigentlichkeit*, in the substantial sense, signifies an *existence* that is authentic or owned.

In this context, we can highlight Heidegger’s often overlooked distinction between *Echtheit* (genuineness) and *Eigentlichkeit*. As Käufer (2015, 103) has shown,

⁴ In this chapter, I use “Eigentlichkeit”, “authenticity”, and “ownedness”, as well as the corresponding adjectives, interchangeably.

Echtheit applies to the interpretation of all entities, whereas *Eigentlichkeit* appear to be mostly restricted to Dasein. *Genuineness* addresses whether a description matches—is appropriate for—the underlying phenomenon. An interpretation is genuine if it is drawn from the interpreted phenomenon. Käufer points to a passage from the introduction of *Being and Time* in which Heidegger explains that according to Aristotle “in discourse, insofar as it is genuine [*echt*], what is said should be drawn from [*geschöpft*] that which is talked about” (Heidegger 1953, 32). In contrast to genuineness, which refers to the manner in which descriptions relate to the phenomena they describe, Käufer (2015, 104) claims that “*authenticity* denotes the appropriate phenomena themselves.” In a crucial passage of *Being and Time*, Heidegger states that “owned as well as unowned understanding can, in turn, be genuine or non-genuine” (Heidegger 1953, 146). In other words, there can be genuine (*echt*) understandings of inauthentic (*uneigentlich*) modes of existence.⁵ A passage from the lecture course *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology* supports this reading. Heidegger states that “inauthentic self-understanding of Dasein by no means signifies a non-genuine self-understanding. On the contrary, this everyday having of self [...] can surely be genuine, whereas all extravagant grubbing about in one’s soul can be in the highest degree non-genuine or even pathologically eccentric.

⁵ Similarly, there can be non-genuine (*unecht*) descriptions of authentic (*eigentlich*) phenomena. Käufer (2015, 105) suggests that Heidegger considers Karl Jaspers’ (1919) *Psychology of Worldviews* as an example for this. Jasper’s relates to the phenomena of authentic existence, but he does so in a non-genuine way, misrepresenting those phenomena.

Dasein's inauthentic understanding of itself via things is neither non-genuine nor illusionary, as though what is understood by it is not the self but something else, and the self only allegedly. Inauthentic self-understanding experiences authentic Dasein as such precisely in its peculiar 'actuality,' if we may so say, and in a genuine way" (Heidegger 1975, 228/Heidegger 1988, 160–161).⁶ Whereas the everyday self-understanding of Dasein is inauthentic insofar as it does not relate to Dasein's authentic make-up but instead understands itself via its daily concerns, this does not mean that this self-understanding is non-genuine. On the contrary, inauthentic self-understanding can offer a genuine description of everyday Dasein.

A closer look at Heidegger's lecture courses, however, complicates these distinctions. Heidegger's colloquial use of *eigentlich* relates to the genesis of his methodological understanding of *Eigentlichkeit*. This can be traced back to the early Freiburg lectures, where Heidegger begins to develop his own version of the phenomenological method. During that period, he explains that the results of an analysis of existence should be understood "as the authentic factor [*das Eigentliche*] that comes to light in the phenomenological articulation of the above-mentioned intentional characteristics" (Heidegger 1998, 19). In another text, he continues that *Eigentlichkeit* is "the determination of being, in which all above-mentioned characteristics are what they are" (Heidegger 2004, 115; my translation). In this methodological sense, *Eigentlichkeit*

⁶ The translation has been modified by me.

describes the status of achieving the goal of the phenomenological method: “to let what shows itself be seen from itself, just as it shows itself from itself”⁷ (Heidegger 1953, 34).

The notion of transparency (*Durchsichtigkeit*) plays a major role in this context. In the introduction of *Being and Time*, Heidegger states that the “question of the meaning of being [...] needs the suitable transparency” (Heidegger 1953, 5); a statement that is constantly reiterated throughout the introduction. He later explains that “to work out the question of being means to make an entity [...] transparent in its being” (*Durchsichtigmachen eines Seienden [...] in seinem Sein*) (Heidegger 1953, 7)—this entity, of course, is Dasein as the entity that is able to ask the question of being. The term is used throughout *Being and Time* to elaborate the mode of being of Dasein. For instance, Heidegger speaks of the transparency of concern (*Besorgen*) (Heidegger 1953, 111) and the transparency of solicitude (*Fürsorge*) (Heidegger 1953, 122). And he links the circumspection of concern (*Umsicht des Besorgens*) and the considerateness of solicitude (*Rücksicht der Fürsorge*) with the sight (*Sicht*) of Dasein which he defines as transparency (*Durchsichtigkeit*) (Heidegger 1953, 146). In Division Two, transparency is regularly used to describe the authentic mode of Dasein. For instance, Heidegger speaks

⁷ This methodological understanding of *Eigentlichkeit* appears to be prior to the distinction of *Eigentlichkeit* and *Echtheit*, as Heidegger in these passages does not distinguish the genuineness of a description from the *Eigentlichkeit* of the described phenomenon. As Heidegger rarely uses the term *Echtheit*, it might simple be the case that he is not terminologically stringent on this matter.

of the “*sich selbst durchsichtige Entschlossenheit*”, that is “resoluteness, transparent to itself” (Heidegger 1953, 308).

Transparency is explicitly defined in the section on understanding: “We shall call the sight which is primarily and as a whole related to existence *transparency*. We choose this term to designate correctly understood ‘self-knowledge’ in order to indicate that it’s not a matter here of perceptually finding and gazing at a point which is the self. but of grasping and understanding the full disclosedness of being-in-the-world *throughout all* its essential constitutive factors. Existent beings glimpse ‘themselves’ only when they have become transparent to themselves equiprimordially in their being with the world, in being together with others as the constitutive factors of their existence” (Heidegger 1953, 146). Transparency signifies the “correctly understood ‘self-knowledge’” of Dasein. Heidegger sets ‘self-knowledge’ in quotation marks, thereby indicating that he does not mean propositional statements about oneself, but the self-understanding that is enacted in one’s way of leading one’s life.

I suggest that this is the core of Heidegger’s methodological and substantial understanding of *Eigentlichkeit*: Transparent ‘self-knowledge’ of Dasein is owned and genuine; it addresses the right phenomena and offers a genuine understanding of them. This allows me to give the following provisional definition of Dasein’s *Eigentlichkeit*: Authentic Dasein gains an owned and genuine understanding of its own being; in other words, its own ontological make-up becomes transparent for it. It is important to notice that the transparency of the authentic self does not concern the particular entity that a Dasein is (e.g. its practical identity), but its mode of being as Dasein. An authentic self understands itself transparently as Dasein, that is in accordance with the ontological

structure of the kind of entity that Dasein is. To justify this claim, we need to consider the specific methodological purpose that *Eigentlichkeit* serves for Heidegger's ontological project.

The aim of the published parts of *Being and Time* (the first two divisions of part one) is an analysis of Dasein's ontological structure. Dasein is distinguished from other entities as the entity for which its own being, and being in general, is an issue. Therefore, Heidegger identifies the existential analysis of Dasein as fundamental ontology (Heidegger 1953, §4). Division One investigates Dasein in its "average everydayness",⁸ taking its point of departure in Dasein's pre-ontological understanding of being. Division Two starts with the question whether we can take the results of Division One as the primordial interpretation of Dasein's being (Heidegger 1953, §45). Heidegger's answer is in a nutshell: Although Division One provided a genuine interpretation of Dasein's average everydayness, it does not amount to a primordial interpretation of Dasein's ontological structure, because it did not take the whole of Dasein's being into account.⁹

⁸ Heidegger goes out of his way to underscore that this is not meant in a pejorative sense:

In average everydayness "the structure of existentiality lies *a priori*. [...] What is ontically in the way of being average can very well be understood ontologically in terms of pregnant structures which are not structurally different from the ontological determinations of an *authentic* being of Dasein." (SZ 44).

⁹ Heidegger bases this claim on Dasein's tendency of falling (*Verfallen*), which leads Dasein to misunderstand its own ontological structure. In the introduction of *Being and Time*, he explains: "Dasein is ontically not only what is near or even

The task of Division Two is to reach a hermeneutical situation that will guarantee a primordial ontological interpretation of Dasein. In other words, Division Two needs to bring the *eigentlich* structures of Dasein into view. The *Eigentlichkeit* of Dasein's serves the primary purpose of making Dasein's primordial ontological make-up transparent.

This methodological role of *Eigentlichkeit* has consequences for our understanding of authentic or owned Dasein: "Heidegger's emphasis on transparency as an ontological kind of sight significantly complicates psychological accounts (either of freedom or authenticity)" (Han-Pile 2013, 304). Being an authentic self does not mean to display a coherent standpoint or outlook on life—a unique perspective that enacts a person's freedom and autonomy—, but rather the ontological insight that no such standpoint can ever be sufficiently justified.

Heidegger's methodological self-assurance in the often overlooked § 63 of *Being and Time* underscores this point. He states that the analysis of Dasein has confirmed that

nearest – we ourselves *are* it, each of us. Nevertheless, or precisely for this reason, it is ontologically what is farthest removed." (SZ 15) Heidegger captures the hermeneutical situation from which the existential analysis departs in the following slogan: "Dasein is ontically 'nearest' to itself, ontologically farthest away; but pre-ontologically certainly not foreign to itself." (SZ 16) In a later methodological reflection, Heidegger emphasizes the consequences for the project of *Being and Time*: "Thus the kind of being of Dasein requires of an ontological interpretation that has set as its goal the primordially of the phenomenal demonstration that it conquers the being of this entity in spite of this entity's own tendency to cover things over." (SZ 311).

the everyday interpretation of Dasein covers over Dasein's primordial being. As a consequence, "freeing the primordial being of Dasein must be *wrested* from Dasein in *opposition* to its fallen, ontic-ontological tendency of interpretation" (Heidegger 1953, 311). But Heidegger wonders, "how are we to find out what constitutes the '*eigentliche*' existence of Dasein?" (Heidegger 1953, 312). An ontological investigation into Dasein's being is itself an ontic possibility of Dasein. Here, Heidegger reiterates his basic premise that if Dasein were not an entity for which being is an issue—if only pre-ontologically—, ontology would not be possible. Now, Heidegger expands this premise to the claim that an existential ontology is one possible project (*Entwurf*) of Dasein's ability-to-be (*Seinkönnen*); a possibility that is based on the fact that Dasein's ability-to-be is always embedded in a pre-ontological understanding of the matters at hand. However, if Heidegger's interpretation of Dasein is yet another ontic project, what guarantees that his account of *eigentlich* Dasein is more primordial than other interpretations of Dasein: "Does not an ontic conception of existence underlie our interpretation of the ownedness and wholeness of Dasein, an ontic interpretation that might be possible, but need not be binding for everyone?" (Heidegger 1953, 312). Heidegger responds to this challenge by emphasizing that a hermeneutical circle is unavoidable in the interpretation of Dasein. Thus, only the passage through the existential analysis can justify its results—and these results are always preliminary and open to revision.

4 Ownedness as Ungroundedness

The decisive question is: What does the transparent 'self-knowledge' of owned Dasein reveal? At this point, I want to come back to Crowell understanding of authentic Dasein as the entity that 'takes over being-a-ground'. The remarks in the previous section

prepared an interpretation of this statement according to which the necessity of Dasein taking over being-a-ground is based on its ungroundedness: Dasein cannot ground its ability-to-be in any given determination; it rather has to project its own ground, without ever being able to get hold of that ground. The main idea is that although we are not the ground of our existence, we must nevertheless take responsibility for that existence—or rather: precisely because no steady ground of existence is to be found, we are thrown into the situation of having to be the ground of our ungrounded existence. This does not mean that Dasein is without any ground, but that it is ungrounded in the sense of never being able to get hold of its ground. Dasein's ungroundedness implies the lack of a ground beyond the contingent grounds that it is giving to itself in concrete situations of its existence.

Dasein's existence is a double movement of grounding (cf. Marchart 2007): On the one hand, no ground is ever sufficient insofar as no ground is ever given as such. On the other hand, Dasein, in its existence, is the constant movement of grounding, in that it has to continuously find particular grounds for its specific projects. Owned Dasein understands itself as such a 'thrown projection'. It becomes transparent for it that its ability-to-be that is confronted with the fact of its "that-it-is-and-has-to-be" (Heidegger 1953, 284), requiring it to seek particular grounds while being aware of their contingency. In other words, becoming authentic means to understand the unique determination of being undetermined, which implies the task of continuously determining oneself without ever reaching a final determination. The anyone-self, in contrast, flees from this task by concealing the ontological structure of Dasein, instead understanding oneself on the basis of some alleged ontological foundation—and thus understanding

oneself in a thingly manner, as Sartre (2004) would call that—and/or in line with the views of others.

Part of the transparent ‘self-knowledge’ of owned Dasein is an understanding of the role of the anyone (*das Man*). At this point, we can come back to Crowell’s claim that every action is dependent upon publically accepted normative measures. The self-transparency of authentic Dasein does not disclose a new or deeper ground, but rather the ungroundedness of existence, that is, the contingency of all possible grounds. As a consequence, Dasein has no other resources for the task of being its own ground than the contingent grounds provided by the public understanding it is embedded into. In this sense, the owned self remains dependent upon the anyone. Dasein does not become authentic by dissociating itself from publicly available norms and practices, but by apprehending their contingent nature. The realization that the anyone is ungrounded does not change the fact that it remains the ground for the concrete possibilities of Dasein’s ability-to-be. It remains this ground, because there is no other ground beyond the contingent ground of the anyone.^[10]

This can be further elaborated by way of distinguishing the anyone (*das Man*) and the anyone-self (*das Man-selbst*) (cf. Boedecke 2001). Anyone and anyone-self are not of the same category. The anyone concerns the ‘contentual’ possibilities of existence; it

^[10] As a consequence, the obstacle for owned selfhood is not “absorption” in routine engagements with the world and others, but “lostness” in public modes of understanding which leads Dasein to lose sight of their contingency (cf. Käufer 2015, 107).

constitutes and restricts the possibilities of *what* can be done within an established socio-culture setting. The anyone-self concerns the way of enacting or performing the ‘contentual’ possibilities of existence. It is thus similar to the authentic self; both describe *how* one relates oneself to a particular socio-culture setting. In short, authentic self and anyone-self are different ways of relating to the inherited space of possibility constituted by the anyone. Hence, the antithesis to the authentic self is not the anyone, but the anyone-self.

To sum up, authenticity or ownedness does not denote a mode of existence that can be stabilized into a coherent and steadfast outlook, it rather describes the becoming transparent of the contingent nature of all grounds. On the one hand, it reveals the necessary task of being-the-ground of one’s existence, a ground that is necessarily contingent. On the other hand, *Eigentlichkeit* serves a specific methodological function for Heidegger’s ontological project: I suggest that the lesson from ungroundedness applies to Heidegger’s ontological project as well. The existential analysis does not end with a definite description of the invariant structures of Dasein, but rather with a preliminary account of Dasein’s modes of existence which is bound to its everyday pre-ontological self-understanding.

5 Ownedness as Critique

In this final section, I will come back to the nexus of authenticity and social critique. In the context of Jaeggi’s alienation critique, we were directed towards seeking a concept of authentic being-in-the-world which can serve as the antithesis to alienated structures. The close examination of Heidegger’s notion of *Eigentlichkeit* in this chapter revealed the difference to an ordinary understanding of *Authentizität*. Being authentic or owned means

neither to follow a self-chosen life-project which one wholeheartedly endorses—it is not some post-Cartesian version of autonomy (cf. Taylor 1992 and Guignon 2004)—nor the embeddedness into rich and meaningful relations—it does not consist in an affirmative notion of resonance (cf. Rosa 2016). In contrast to these understandings of *Authentizität*, *Eigentlichkeit* concerns the transparency of ungroundedness.

Becoming aware of the contingency of social structures can lead to a request for social change—especially if those structures also turn out to unpractical, painful, or unlivable (cf. Butler 2004). However, actual social change is a complex process and Heidegger’s possible role for understanding this crucial issue of social theory requires detailed analysis (cf. Thonhauser/Schmid 2017). Not least because ungroundedness becoming transparent to us is not a matter of theoretical understanding or practical engagement, but rather of affective disclosure. It is Heidegger’s important claim that certain basic attunements fulfill the ontological function of disclosing the ungroundedness of existence, thereby modifying one’s basic mode of being-in-the-world (cf. Slaby/Thonhauser forthcoming). Moreover, social change is not a task a solitary Dasein can achieve, but rather a plural process that requires some form of social ownedness (cf. Thonhauser 2017).

I cannot follow these paths here, but need to conclude this chapter with a final remark. Heidegger and Jaeggi both advance ontological projects. Heidegger’s aim is to develop a fundamental ontology by identifying the primordial structures of Dasein. Jaeggi goal is a critical social theory that allows to identify alienated social structures. Despite the very different perspectives of fundamental ontology and critical social theory, both critical theoretical interventions aim at debunking everyday misconceptions. I

suggest that these modes of critical ontological theorizing correspond with Heidegger's notion of *Eigentlichkeit*. *Eigentlichkeit* does not mean that we follow an ideal of how things should be, but rather implies an awareness that such an ideal is unfeasible in light of the fundamental ungroundedness of all possible ideals. In short: Ownedness or authenticity is not about the particular way in which we lead our lives (*what* we do), but about the way in which we relate to our way of life (*how* we do it). As a consequence, one can hypothesize the following: An owned life as well as owned social settings are square circles. *Eigentlichkeit* cannot be transformed into a lifeform—neither for the individual nor for a community. Authenticity functions as a critical category, enabling us to identify ontological misconceptions and ontologically misguided practices (e.g. alienated social settings). As such a methodological tool, *Eigentlichkeit* serves its purpose for a critical social ontology.

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