Claudia Drucker[1]

# Heidegger on the Enlightenment[2]

Heidegger's reluctance to embrace the goals of the Enlightenment has been taken as a sign that he is an enemy of reason and human dignity. However, what passes for irrationalism or anti-humanism is an inquiry on reason and man which springs from the suspicion that we have not yet grasped the full import of the Enlightenment. We cannot define the Enlightenment in the same terms used by Kant; even less can we espouse the Enlightenment today without first asking how it is possible that it did not prevent the Nazi hurricane.

Heidegger's 1935-6 course on Kant may be also his most extensive inquiry into the Enlightenment and man's place in it.[3] The Enlightenment is the moment when the drive to self-assertion which is proper to the modern age is taken to be the drive of reason itself.

The subject does not stand by itself; the transformation of man into the subject is a demand of the dominance of a certain program. The modern project, as will to self-grounding, grounds man accordingly as the *subiectum*, *i.e.*, as that which underlies all propositions as the source of their principles. Kant did not describe reason as it is, but as it is redefined by modernity; Kant inquires about the rights of reason at a moment when it is demanded from reason that it have *a priori* principles.

Looking back from the perspective 20 years after Heidegger's death and 50 years after the liberation of Auschwitz, we should also ask ourselves what has been happening in the last three centuries. Kant could never have foreseen the dehumanization of man as we know it today;

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3 Published as *Die Frage nach dem Ding — Zu Kants Lehre von den transzendentalen Grundsätzen*, Max Niemeyer Publishers, Tübingen, 1962. From now on FD.

however, it is worth noticing that he had already pointed out the ambiguous status of mankind from an enlightened point of view. When knowledge is defined as search of universally valid laws, man cannot help but consider himself as a case of the same laws (otherwise the law would not be an universal one). Kant is the first one to be disturbed by a legitimate, if undesired, possibility of his own thought: the leveling-off of the distinction between man and nature. Since the Enlightenment, the quest for universal laws supersedes any concerns with safeguarding mankind's special status. The Enlightenment was meant to assert the special status of man over nature; however, it also bound us by laws that are more confining than ever. The possibility to which Kant merely alluded has turned into an overwhelming reality; the mass-production of corpses in death camps was its most obvious manifestation. In 1936, Heidegger had not yet defined National-Socialism as an organized form of dehumanization grounded on Western rationality; however, his inquiry on the Enlightenment is a step in that direction.

## 1. Proper History As Change in *Dasein*

Before inquiring into the meaning of the modern age, we ought to make some preliminary remarks on Heidegger's notion of history in 1936. Primordially, history is not the record of events but the changes in our stance towards ourselves and towards other beings. History is a function of choices that we make concerning our own existence.

Each age has been handed down a certain way to understanding beings whatsoever; each age has a way of seeing, inquiring, acting, *etc.* *Dasein* (human existence) may or may not ask itself about its own way of seeing; most of the time, we take our own form of existence to be the best one; we cannot understand why other communities stubbornly refuse to be like our own. However, our freedom and dignity lie precisely in questioning ("deciding") about this heritage:

> ... decisions which may or may not be made happen...when a historical *Dasein* decides its ground and how it decides it.... A historical people establishes the dignity of its existence through the freely chosen, respective degree of freedom to know; *i.e.*, through the inescapability of the questioning (*FD*, pp. 31-2).

When we decide ourselves to inquire about our position towards beings, there is a "ground-shaking change in *Dasein*" (*FD*, p. 82). A change in *Dasein* always entails a change in our understanding of all beings, and consequently to a change in the very outlook of all beings. When we decide ourselves for self-examination we are already transforming both our own existence and the aspect of all things that we see, inquire on, and evaluate. The answer to the question "what is a thing?"

> ... is a transformed basic position, or the incipient change in the prior position towards things, a change of questioning and evaluating, of seeing and deciding, in short: of *Da-sein* in the midst of beings.(*FD*, p. 38)

Proper history arises from our willingness to question ourselves and our understanding of beings. What Heidegger defines as proper (*eigentlich*) history is not the record of events but the changes in *Dasein* and its "basic position" towards beings. This is so because the outlook of all beings is a function of our own basic position towards them. Consequently, reportable historical events are only possible on the basis on an event that is "hidden from the familiar way of looking" (*FD*, p. 82).

Thus, such existential decisions can never be made by individuals, even if they take shape in the course of a debate among individuals. The decision to reground the aspect of all appearances is an act reserved for turning-points in the history of a people; decision is the turning-point itself. Inquiring "what is a thing?" is a task for a whole age to raise (*FD*, 38). Nothing compels us to ask what a thing is but the willingness to transform our existence. If we renounce asking what is our own position towards beings, i.e., if we take our own way of thinking to be self-evident and universal, no harm will necessarily follow (*FD*, p. 41). However, the centuries will pass on in a state of "quiet", because nothing will have happened from the point of view of proper history (*FD*, p. 33).

The only two examples of a proper event mentioned by Heidegger are ancient Greece and the modern age (*FD*, pp. 38, 50). It is not the case that modern age is a revival of ancient Greece. The comparison is meant to emphasize that in both periods we can find a rare cohesion within all aspects of existence —religion, politics, art, knowledge. What is common to both periods is the willingness to put human existence as a whole in question.

However, there is something peculiar to modern age: the principles of natural science have established themselves as the principles of all forms

thinking. Today, we even tend to forget that there was a time when we did not conceive the thing as the "material" or the mass-point that moves itself within spatio-temporal coordinates —a notion that is the measuring stick for our state, our works of art, our gods, and our philosophy (*FD*, p. 38). How is it possible that natural science has turned into the model for all thinking, since it has been said earlier that it is always a basic position of *Dasein* that defines an universal outlook? On Heidegger's view, this is possible because the principles of modern natural science are metaphysical ones themselves. The modern conception of the thing has been dictated by a metaphysical approach; modern natural science has done nothing but elucidate it.

Now, common-sense would retort that the reason why the laws of natural science are universal is that natural science searches for constant relations and expresses them quantitatively. The laws of nature themselves are marked by exactness and universal validity for all material beings. Man, insofar as he has a body, falls under the same laws valid for all bodies. On Heidegger's view, however, it is the other way around. The discovery that appearances let themselves be described in terms of constant relations, strictly speaking, is not a discovery, but a demand of the new outlook. The discovery that mathematics is a language fit to describe appearances is not a cause, but a consequence of certain demands posed by the modern basic position of *Dasein*. The mathematical approach is a feature of modern natural science only because it is the approach that modern *Dasein* employs regarding all beings. To clarify in which sense the mathematical character of modern science is a sign of a broader position in regard to all beings, a brief reflection on mathematics is in order.

## 2. The Mathematical Position As Impulse of Modern Age

What Heidegger calls "the mathematical" is broader than the actual discipline of mathematics and precedes it. The mathematical is that which we do not find in things but that which we know in advance about them — *i.e.*, that which we bring with ourselves. The "mathematical" in a broad sense is a "fundamental position that we take towards things by which we take up things as already given to us as they must and should be given" (*FD*, p. 58). In a broad sense, the mathematical is what can be learned in the way indicated (*i.e.*, *a priori*). In a narrow sense, it means the manner of

learning *a priori*; *i.e.*, the process of reckoning with things in advance and acting on such reckoning.

The notions of set and number are not "empirical" ones. The act of counting is not made possible because I am given a set of things. It is the other way around: discovering things as part of a set and counting them is an act that already involves the assumption that things are uniform. The consideration of any particular set of four things, or the comparison between many sets of four things will never explain the origin of the concept of foursome. It is the other way around: I can only circumscribe sets of four chairs, four cats or four apples because I know in advance what a foursome is, and that a threesome can have infinite concrete "instances." What makes things uniform and ready to be counted is the way we approach them; namely, a previous standardization of them based on the assumption that they are instances of something that we already know.

The mathematical is a way to approach things which defines them beforehand as homogeneous to one another; this is the reason why mathematics has anything to do with numbers. Counting things is assigning to each thing a place in a series; but we would not be able to add things to one another in a series, had not a process of standardization and set-circumscription taken place already. Counting is, first of all, a way to assess things in advance. This is the reason why the grasp of a foursome whatsoever precedes not only the grasp of any particular foursome, but also the very concept of a number four. The concept of number is not an empirical one; the concept of a number three is by definition the concept of something which has infinite instances and which is not exhausted by any particular series of three things. However, the concept of number would never be learned by us if not through an approach to concrete things as lending themselves to being counted.

The particular mathematical character of modern science (in the narrow sense of "the mathematical") is dictated by the basic position of modern *Dasein* as a mathematical one (in the broad sense of the mathematical). Modern science derives its peculiar character from the fact that we teach ourselves in advance that which we will find in nature (*FD*, p. 71). All things are in principle accessible and knowable through an *a priori* perspective, and only through this perspective; whatever reality they contain is revealed in advance by the project itself. The mathematical is "a project of thingness that skips over things," that is, a project that allows things to show themselves on the basis of a previous definition of them (*FD*, p. 71).

Galileo's demonstration of the laws of falling bodies provides an excellent illustration of such a mathematical or axiomatic way of thinking. Galileo dropped different weights from the tower of Pisa in order to demonstrate that motion is uniform and does not depend on intrinsic qualities of bodies. Bodies of different weights did not arrive precisely at the same time, but the difference was slight. Because even small differences in the times of fall seemed to contradict Galileo's predictions, the experiment was deemed a big flop and Galileo had to leave Pisa. However, Galileo himself saw in this experiment a confirmation of his own conception that there are no inner qualities to bodies —all difference between bodies being due to differences of mass and temporal-spatial position. How is that possible? A passage of Galileo's *Dialogues Concerning Two New Sciences* gives us insight into his way of thinking. Galileo writes: "I think of a body thrown on a horizontal plane and every obstacle excluded. The motion of this body over this plane would be uniform and perpetual if the plane were extended infinitely." (*FD*, p. 70) We establish motion in advance as rectilinear and uniform; we think of all bodies in advance as being equal, and of space and time as being uniform and infinite, and we then ask nature to report itself under these presuppositions. All bodies fall equally fast, and the differences in the time of fall derive only from the resistance of the air. In the experiment of Pisa, the conception that Galileo had prior to the actual experiment is that not only the motion of any body is uniform and rectilinear, but also that it changes uniformly when an equal force affects it. The reasoning goes: if the motion of all bodies is uniform, but heavier bodies fall faster than light ones, then we must infer the action of another force that makes heavy bodies fall faster —namely, the wind-resistance. Newton names the basic propositions that describe the properties of moving bodies "axioms." In our context, "mathematical" and "axiomatic" knowledge mean the same; namely, that things show themselves only in what manner we inquire about them in advance (*FD*, pp. 69-70).

The universalizing way of thought has found in modern science its most impressive accomplishment; however, the project at the origin of modern science is not a scientific one. The modern project has not been dictated by modern science itself; on the contrary, the conception that modern science has of a thing derives from the axiomatic outlook of modern *Dasein*. To borrow Kant's famous words to describe the grounding of natural science on the metaphysical mathematical position of *Dasein*: "hu-

man reason has insight only into that which it produces after a project of its own." (*Critique of Pure Reason*, B xiii). The mathematical point of view defines the criteria for thingness in advance: a thing is that which is accessible by means of criteria of thingness set in advance. The "actual" thing is that which lends itself eminently to an *a priori* mode of thinking: whatever lends itself to be treated as a generic mass-point that moves itself within a generic spatio-temporal frame is eminently actual.

Nature is everything that lends itself to the axiomatic outlook; conversely, everything that lends itself to an axiomatic outlook is part of nature. To varying degrees, all actual things are part of nature, because that which does not lend itself to an axiomatic outlook is not anything actual. Of course, after the modern age we still speak of "immaterial" or "spiritual" things; *i.e.*, things that do not lend themselves to measurement and prediction, such as the soul or freedom. However, the criterion of thought is a universal one; even that which is not to be captured by an axiomatic outlook is thought of as some kind of thing —a thing "in itself" that we cannot perceive.

The Greeks had already discovered the particular character of mathematical knowledge. More specifically, Plato turned the mathematical approach into an approach to all beings; *i.e.*, into a metaphysical position. Plato had already defined learning as "recollecting" what we already know. Cognition is possible only as recognition, *i.e.* as confirming what I already know; *e.g.*, I can only recognize something (a person, a course of action) as virtuous because I already have a notion of what virtue is. Knowing something about things in advance, and using this previous knowledge as measuring stick for all relation to things is what characterizes a mathematical approach to things. However, only in the modern age has the mathematical approach been elevated as a criterion to the relation to all beings. Even if it is the case that Platonism anticipated aspects of the modern age, there is something in the modern basic position of *Dasein* which is not to be found in any previous age. There is a "new basic position of *Dasein* that shows itself in the wake of the dominion of the mathematical;" *i.e.*, subjectivity, that is the main tool to enforce the mathematical outlook (*FD*, p. 74). There is a "mathematical project" at the origin of modern age: "a specific will to reshape the form of knowledge and to the self-grounding of such a form of knowledge" (*FD*, p. 75). The mathematical project needs a certain configuration of the relation between man and beings to accomplish itself.

### 3. The Mathematical Position As Origin of the Subject

Descartes earned the title of "father of modern philosophy" when he doubted everything until he had found something that he could not doubt —namely that one must exist in order to doubt. The existence of the thinking subject turns into the first certainty on which all knowledge must be founded. We must ask: why did the Cartesian doubt and the demand of a first certainty suddenly seem necessary? On Heidegger's view, the doubt is to be understood as a consequence of the axiomatic project; the doubt expresses the need to reject all forms of knowledge which are not founded on evident, self-grounded propositions:

> because the mathematical now sets itself up as the principle of all knowledge, all knowledge up to now must necessarily be put into question, regardless of whether it is tenable or not (*FD*, p. 80).

The source of Descartes' thought is neither doubt nor the reflection on the subject, but the quest for axioms for all knowledge. The choice of the subject as cornerstone of Descartes' philosophy is the result of a long quest for axioms. In Descartes' early writing on the *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, nothing is said either about doubt or about the subject; yet this writing is most relevant, insofar as it establishes the ideal of a new foundation for all knowledge in the form of a "method" or a "universal science." The ideal of a method is the idea of having axioms (and rules for correct deduction of other propositions out of the axioms) that are self-grounded, *i.e.*, independent from the matter to be investigated, and consequently valid for all objects. The method sets up the criteria that all sciences must fulfill to be regarded as sciences, without regard for their object. The method defines knowledge as such; any particular discipline is only reliable as a result of following the method. Descartes never abandons the notion that knowledge results from our having solid, self-evident criteria of thinking; what changes after the writing of the *Rules* is the way to justify such criteria.

For a basically mathematical position, there can be nothing pregiven to the act of making a proposition. A basic proposition must be grounded on thinking alone: "only where thinking thinks itself is it absolutely mathematical, *i.e.*, taking cognizance of that which we already have" (*FD*, p. 80). The basic proposition of the method can only be self-evident if it does not receive its object or content from the outside but posits that about which it asserts

something. The object of the proposition cannot be given from the outside but by the proposition itself. The proposition "I think, I am" is the cornerstone of all solid, self-grounded knowledge, because it posits that which it asserts; the act of making an assertion ensures the existence of the object about which something is asserted. It is not thinking in general that posits something solid and certain, but the "I am" that goes together with the "I think" that posits a substrate, a reliable ground which underlies all other propositions "the sum is not a consequence of thinking; on the contrary, it is the ground of thinking" (*FD*, p. 80). With the proposition "I think, I am" Descartes attained the standpoint that he had sought from the beginning of his search for certain grounds of knowledge. The subject is what is always posited, what underlies all propositions (*subiectum*). The human subject turns into the ground or substrate, because the subject of propositions is what is posited in advance in any proposition. Through the proposition "I think, I am," thinking mankind is posited as that which is at once existent and certain, and consequently turned into "subjectivity" The modern project needs the subject as its cornerstone; and, conversely, it redefines human nature, so that human nature can be elevated to the privileged status of a subject or substrate.

### 4. Kant's Redefinition of Man Based on the Mathematical Position

Descartes provided the mathematical project with a special being that could enforce it. Kant, however, provided the mathematical with a thorough definition of this special being; he brought the mathematical into reason itself. Kant realized the subject can only be the first reality and the first certainty if it asserts itself as the source of universally valid principles. For Kant, reason has a "project" (*Critique of Pure Reason*), a "need" ("What Is Orientation in Thinking?"); a "natural inclination and vocation," ("What Is Enlightenment?"); and an "interest" (*Critique of Practical Reason*). The project, the need, the vocation, and the interest of reason are one and the same: reason itself. Under the dominance of the mathematical, reason turns into pure reason: a reason that wants to assert its own principles of legislation and exclude heterogeneous principle of legislation. Reason wants to preserve its own nature; it wants to assert itself as the only standard to all claims.

"Critique" comes from the Greek *krinein*: "to pick out," "to isolate" (*FD*, p.

93). The negative meaning of "critique" —as "pointing out flaws in something"— is a derivative one: it is the exclusion of that which is not in accordance with that which we have isolated. Thus, there is a positive and original meaning of a "critique of pure reason": the isolation of that which is proper to reason and its elevation to a higher, legislating rank. Reason, when it it is understood as pure reason, demands a critique that separates its principles from the principles which are strange to itself —and which cannot legislate. Thus, the task of philosophy involves two steps, which corresponds to the two senses of "critique": firstly, reason's self-examination in order to find its own principles, and secondly, the exclusion of the principles that do not conform to the imperative of self-assertion. Pronouncing all forms of authority as valid only within the constraints of reason is a necessary consequence of the critique. When this process is carried out publicly, it is also called the enlightenment (clarification) of reason out of reason itself. Thus, what is usually seen as the positive content of the Enlightenment —the detachment from revelation as the first source of truth and the rejection of tradition as the authoritative conveyer of knowledge— are only its negative consequences (*FD*, p. 75).

Kant's famous definition of the Enlightenment would befit Heidegger's definition of a historical event. Also Kant sees the Enlightenment as a change in man. Becoming enlightened is ceasing to defer the authority over one's life to another, and adopting one's own reason as guidance:

> Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is . . lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another.[4]

In this definition is implied the concept that Kantian thought promotes the most: autonomy, i.e., self-legislation. Self-legislation means that reason has a natural impulse to assert itself as the first reality, and asserts its own laws as standards for all claims. The unity in Kant's thought lies in asserting what he calls the plan of reason in all fields of thought and action. Since the critique or Enlightenment are demanded by reason itself, its scope extends *a priori* to all things that reason can consider. No realm

4 "An Answer to the Question: 'What is Enlightenment?'" in: *Kant — Political Writings*, trans. H. B. Nisbet, ed. H. Reiss, Cambridge University Press, p. 54.

of human action and thought is outside the scope of reason's self-examination and assertion: in religion and politics, the external element which must be examined by reason is authority. In morality, what threatens my autonomy (what makes me ruled by another) are pleasure and the desire to happiness. In knowledge, the external element is sensation. When we establish reason in advance as the only judge for all claims, we can exclude the heterogeneous element as that which cannot rule.

Kant sees the project of the Enlightenment, as well as his own project, as the emancipation of mankind. How can the age of self-assertion of reason be an age of emancipation? Because freedom itself is redefined by the notion of autonomy. Being rational and being free are the same thing; being free means "giving oneself the law."[5] "I am free" means: "I am bound only by laws that I dictate myself;" "I take my guidance from my own reason and not from somebody else's." Becoming enlightened does not mean refusing any kind of constraint, but accepting as valid only those constraints that are dictated by reason alone. The Enlightenment is a movement of liberation from external constraints alone; reason asserts itself only when it yields to itself.

Self-assertion is not the supra-historical vocation of human reason. It is the other way around; the mathematical position is one that redefines man: "The mathematical drives, in accordance with its own march, to its own crowning as a metaphysical determination of *Dasein*" (*FD*, p. 74). Autonomy is not necessarily a feature of human reason; autonomy turns into a maxim when *Dasein* is taken over by the mathematical project. Likewise, the axiomatic way of thinking is that which gives rise to the modern notion of freedom:

> In the mathematical project there is not only a liberation, but also a new experience of freedom itself, i.e., a binding with obligations which are self-imposed. (*FD*, p. 75)

The positing of a self-grounded standard, which excludes any previous standards that are not self-grounded, is actually a feature of the mathematical project. It is the mathematical that is driven by the exclusion of all

5 Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, Paragraph 8, Theorem IV: "autonomy, i.e., freedom.", Macmillan, New York, 1956, p. 34. From now on *CPrR*.

heterogeneous elements, as a necessary condition of its particular form of self-justification. The drive to self-assertion is an essential feature of a mathematical position; a mathematical position is defined by excluding any other principles that are not its own. On Heidegger's view, the Enlightenment is the moment when the modern project is projected into man. With Kant's thought, the mathematical position accomplishes itself. It drags man along with itself; it places man at its own service.

Kant mistook for an original event (reason's need to self-assertion) what is a derivative one; he ascribed to reason an interest in autonomy which is not proper to reason at all. This is not, however, a mistake. As we have suggested, historical ages have the tendency to consider their own outlook on things as universal and not as relative, historical positions. We can have a more detached view of the modern age, not because our viewpoint is the correct and universal one, but because we have come much later.

From the contemporary point of view, an indication that modern rationality is derived from the modern project —and even when it upholds its own autonomy most resolutely— is that we see ourselves since the modern age as no different than nature. the Enlightenment did not make man free, if we understand by freedom the ability to break free from natural processes. the Enlightenment did not mean the assertion of human dignity, if we understand by human dignity our special status in regard to natural beings. Rather, the opposite is true; the status of mankind after the Enlightenment is an ambiguous one, since the price that we pay for knowing nature is seeing ourselves as a mere borderline case of natural laws. We must expand Heidegger's exposition of Kant's thought, if we want to clarify it.

## 5. An Indication of the Derived Character of the Enlightenment: Empiricism and the Leveling-off of the Distinction between Man and Nature

Kant is fully aware that there were puzzling consequences to his project; namely, that it also legitimated an outlook that we would call today a physicalistic one —one that handles man as just another case of natural laws. After Kant released reason to pursue its thirst for knowledge without being limited by the extra-scientific constraints of tradition and authority, he realized that

this emancipation might give rise to what he called "dogmatic empiricism," —a universal naturalistic outlook that would turn human beings into a part of nature and deprive them of their dignity (*CPR*, A 466, B 494; A 471, B 499). Nobody could ever have anticipated the extent of the threat posed by this outlook. However, Kant acknowledges that the universalization of empiricism is a concrete possibility that he himself helped bring into existence when he established the legitimacy of an *a priori* outlook on things, including man himself. A discussion of Kant's stance towards empiricism in the *Critique of Pure Reason* will clarify this point.

On Kant's view, Hume is not a skeptic; empiricism and skepticism are not the same (*CPrR*, "Preface"). It is true that Humean empiricism refrains from asserting discover strictly universal, or even objective, laws of nature, so much so that Hume refrains from using a strict notion of cause and uses instead the more watered-down notion of probability Yet, this does not prevent him from having a coherent picture of nature as a mechanism: nature is understood as a series of causes and effects without beginning and without end, and shielded from extraordinary forces, such as divine providence. As a matter of fact, empiricism is a much less modest viewpoint than it claims itself to be (*CPR*, A 472, B 500). Empiricism offers a satisfying, self-referential viewpoint on events: empiricism establishes that a phenomenon is that which happens according to the principles of natural laws; and, conversely, that the principles of natural laws are valid *a priori* for all phenomena. The fact that empiricism refuses "transcendent" principles and sticks to "immanent principles" betrays a very definite conception of the principles that rule over phenomena. A miracle can only be defined as "a violation of the laws of nature" after we have defined what the form of a natural law is.[6] Empiricism excludes in advance certain possibilities altogether —revelation, miracles, divine providence, *etc.*— because it embraces an implicit definition of what is immanent and what is transcendent. It is only after we have established that an immaterial thing cannot be a cause of a visible effect that we can rule out certain forms of causality.

Empiricism makes use of that which Kant defines as the basic assumption of all exact natural knowledge. When we make "subjective" conditions of the possibility of experience the conditions of possibility of the *objects* of experi-

6 Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, section X: "Of Miracles."

ence, the criteria that we have established become "objectively valid" (*CPR*, A 158, B 197). We define phenomena beforehand in such a manner that sense-perception cannot contradict our definition; what contradicts the general laws of experience does not exist. Kant's concept of experience is basically the same as Hume's; transcendental philosophy clarifies assumptions that are implicit in the empiricist standpoint.

The homogeneity among natural events required by empiricism does not result in any representation of simplicity, harmony, or systematicity in nature. The empiricist outlook on things may appear unappealing and simplistic; yet, this simplicity is precisely what makes it homogeneous, *i.e.*, complete in itself. However, there is an even more serious problem with empiricism than its lack of concern with the aesthetic dimension of the universe. Empiricism displays a marked tendency to assert itself as the only valid form of discourse —which Kant calls "dogmatic empiricism" (*CPR*, A 471, B 499). Empiricism feels entitled to pronounce the universal validity of the laws that have allowed human reason to find the path to success in natural science, treating all other perspectives as nonsensical. Only what can be "verified by sense-perception" can even be talked about —where sense-perception is defined in advance as perception of a mass-point within time and space and subject to certain principles. From a purely mechanistic point of view, the talk about freedom, or the soul, is, strictly speaking, nonsensical. A thing in itself is a thing that can only be called a thing by analogy with a material thing. Strictly speaking, the thing in itself is a non-thing. There is no access to metaphysical questions, let alone to the answers to them. From the empiricist point of view, questions about the immortal soul, God, and freedom are less than inappropriate; they are "nothing" (*CPR*, A 478, B 507, note).

For Kant, however, human dignity lies precisely in its not being subject to causal processes, but by the human ability to start causal processes spontaneously, *i.e.*, moved by oneself ("freedom"). Human dignity lies also in the concern with the possibility of punishment and reward after death. In short, what gives human beings a special status is precisely their concern with things which existence natural knowledge does not acknowledge: the power to start new causal processes on one's own, or the immortality of the soul. Reason has an interest in the existence of things that do not submit themselves to the laws that make prediction possible, so that not only knowledge, but also freedom and faith, be possible. Since the speculative and the practical interests are equally noble and congenial

to reason, neither the empiricist nor the transcendent, metaphysical viewpoints are fit to be embraced exclusively by reason. Such opposite but equally justified interests give rise to a conflict within reason ("antinomy"). Reason wants to ground the possibility of regularity in experience; but it also wants to make sure that men can break free from mechanism, guided by their assertion of a moral aspect of human existence. There are things which existence is not verifiable by empiricist criteria; however, they must be thought of as if they existed in fact in view of reason's practical interest. We must be able to make the concepts of God, immortality and so on, and use them to guide our action in fields where knowledge does not provide an answer to our questions.

Is there a solution for the conflict within reason? Sometimes, Kant claims that empiricism is too bare a world view to be tenable. Kant attempts to overcome the antinomy between the practical and theoretical interests of reason, claiming that empiricism must be supplemented by extra-cognitive (aesthetic and teleological) maxims that should provide guidelines for the cognitive activity (for instance, in "Appendix" to the "Transcendental Dialectic" of the *Critique of Pure Reason* and in the *Critique of Judgment*). We will not discuss such attempts here. However, one cannot help but suspect that, from a strictly Kantian point of view, the attempt to limit the theoretical interest of reason from a moral point of view is an spurious one. If reason had only a theoretical interest in finding regularity in events, there would be no conflict within it, and empiricism would be a completely satisfying point of view. If men had only an interest in knowledge, they would not find the empiricist view of the universe as a blind mechanism so bare and threatening. Any attempt to make experience more significant and more beautiful than it really is only adds heterogeneous principles to it; it is, in a sense, cheating in favor of our moral interest. Kant is not fond of concealing difficulties; he is the first to point out that his philosophy legitimated the empiricist outlook; he acknowledges that it is in view of another interest of reason (the practical interest) that one might criticize empiricism. Kant refuses the naturalized view of man on moral grounds adamantly; however, he never denies that this viewpoint is a valid consequence of his own conception of knowledge. All attempts to supplement empiricism come "too late," insofar as they do not challenge its legitimate rights.

The impossibility to eradicate empiricism lies in that it is a form of the self-assertion of reason. Reason can only actualize its own free and ra-

tional vocation to know by subjecting itself to its own laws. Man can only know nature —in the modern sense of "knowing" as "dictating a universally valid law"— by becoming a part of nature himself —otherwise the law would not be universally valid. If we want to know something about all beings in advance, we must consider even ourselves as beings subject to such *a priori* laws (more specifically, mechanistic causality). From this point of view, the act by means of which man is defined as an appearance among appearances, with no special status, is a free and rational one. Using reason publicly in the absence from outside constraints is no more of a free act than using reason to banish human dignity from the realm of appearances. Does the naturalization of man contradict the program of reason? By no means; the plan of reason is accomplished equally through the naturalization of man and through the humanization of nature.

## 6. After 1936: "The Mathematical" and the Turning

Already in 1936, Heidegger does not believe that modern age unshackled human rationality, as if it had been repressed before by superstition. There is no supra-historical human essence to be repressed. There are only transformations in man's position regarding beings. However, it remains undecided who has the upper hand in the modern transformation of man. Despite all references to decision as the origin of changes in the historical existence of man, the specific, axiomatic position of modern man seems to drag modern man along with itself. It remains undecided whether the new basic position of *Dasein* that shows itself in the wake of the dominion of the mathematical has its origins in *Dasein* itself or in the modern project. Does modern age have a project of its own which redefines man in its own terms, or is modern age a project that springs from *Dasein*'s decision?

This hesitation is conspicuous in Heidegger's stance regarding Kant. Kant is said to be the most gifted spokesperson for modern thought; the *Critique of Pure Reason* leads us into the "historico-spiritual position which supports and defines us" (*FD*, p. 43). Kant's thought is said to have brought "modern thought and existence into the clarity of a foundation for the first time" (*FD*, p. 42). However, Heidegger does not understand "foundation" here in a strong sense; "foundation" is understood here as "justification" or "clarification" of something which is already in place. Kant's thought is part of the foundation of modern age; but this founda-

tion is a derivative one: "the projecting one stands on a ground that has been projected by the project as the very earliest" (*FD*, p. 75). The mathematical, aprioristic character of the modern age leads Heidegger to suspect that historical basic positions of *Dasein* are grounded on another historical force.

One way to explain Heidegger's hesitations is noticing that *What Is a Thing?* is a pre-turning writing. After the turning of the late thirties, Heidegger will radicalize the perspective on the modern age as a will to self-grounding that has been introduced here. What Heidegger called in 1936 "the mathematical" will be called later the "will to power," or "will to will," or "the essence of technology." The turning in Heidegger's thought in the late thirties is the discovery of the "will to power" or "the essence of technology" as a power that man does not control.

In the *Letter on Humanism* (1947), Heidegger writes that every human project is a "counterproject."[7] Every human project is elicited by the twofold movement of address and retreat on Being's part. When we approach the history of Western mankind as the history of the encounter of man and Being, the Enlightenment is seen neither as Kant's project, nor even as a human project, but as a human counterproject. The Enlightenment was the prelude to the now long history of the assertion of the essence of technology. Had the Enlightenment not preceded us, the organization of prejudice in terms of party-machines and the organization of murder in terms of death-machines would never have been conceivable.

We have suggested that the ideal of autonomy has unwelcome consequences. Heidegger avoids such consequences by stating that human dignity does not lie in autonomy after all. Human dignity lies precisely in its lack of autonomy; *i.e.*, in responding to the call of Being. The renunciation of autonomy should not be felt as a loss but as a release. Man will never be just another case of universal laws; man will never be the same as other beings. Even if man's self-understanding would tell him so, that would not be the case, because man is at each time the "shepherd of Being" (*BH*, pp. 331, 342).

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7 "Brief uber den Humanismus" (1947) in *Wegmarken*, Vittorio Klostermann Publishers, Frankfurt a. M., 1976, p. 342. From now on *BH*.

"Martin Heidegger est
mort ce matin. Le soleil qui
l'a couché lui a laissé ses
outils et n'a retenu que
l'ouvrage. Ce seuil est
constant. La nuit qui s'est
ouverte aime de préference.
Mercredi, 26 mai 1976"

René Char