

## **The Anthropic Thought-Form of Modernity Exposition and Critique**

Dongkuk Humanities Lectures at POSTECH, Pohang (Korea)  
Thursday, November 29, 2012

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honor and pleasure for me to be invited to this university and to have the opportunity to give two lectures and a seminar. Prof. Jin-Woo Lee encouraged me to present an outline of my current thinking. Since the year 2000, I have developed a critique of the modern way of thinking and offered a suggestion how to get beyond it. During the last two years, I have published four books on this subject. I want to communicate these new ideas of mine to you.

Today, in the first lecture, I will present my view and critique of the modern thought-form. Tomorrow, in the second lecture, I will try to show how we can get beyond its narrowness and errors by developing a consequently evolutionist view of the human and our relationship to the world.

### **I. Diderot's proclamation and Kant's justification of the anthropic principle of modernity**

#### **1. Diderot 1755: "Man is the unique concept from which one must start and to which one must refer everything back"**

The axiom of modern thinking was first formulated by Denis Diderot who, in 1755 (for us Europeans modernity begins at that time and lasts down to the present day), declared, "Man is the unique concept from which one must start and to which one must refer everything back."<sup>1</sup> Diderot stated this when considering what the fundamental principle for the organization of the *Encyclopedia* should be. Should one start out from an objective principle like the structure of the world? Or should one start out from a subjective principle like the human perspective on the world?

Diderot thinks that we can hardly base our considerations on the structure of the world itself – for this, our cognitive capacities are too limited. In addition, such approach would be wrong, because it would fail to realize that the world becomes meaningful only through human activity: "Absent the human [...], the sublime and moving drama of nature is nothing but a miserable dumb show. The cosmos falls mute, silence and darkness overwhelm it, all is transformed into a vast wasteland in which phenomena [...] occur murky and dull. Only the presence of the human makes the existence of things at all interesting."<sup>2</sup>

Therefore Diderot holds it necessary to make the human the "center" of everything.<sup>3</sup> This brings him to the statement that "man is the unique concept from which one must start and to which one

---

<sup>1</sup> Denis Diderot, Artikel "Enzyklopädie" [1755], in: Diderot, *Philosophische Schriften* (Berlin: Aufbau-Verlag 1961), Vol. 1, 149–234, here 187.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 186.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

must refer everything back." This is, in my view, the bedrock axiom of modernity from the eighteenth century to our days. I call it "the anthropic principle."<sup>4</sup>

Did Diderot provide a sufficient justification for his principle? Not quite, because he held on to the distinction between the *constitution* of the world as such (as recognizable only from a God's eye view) on the one hand and the *significance* of the world stemming from the human perspective on the other hand. For Diderot man produces only the meaningfulness of the world, whereas the existence and physical constitution of the world is independent from us. Our activity concerns so to speak only the software, not the hardware, just the semantics not the grammar, only the meaning, not the existence of the world. –

Therefore, in order to reach a really comprehensive justification of the anthropic principle, one would still have to demonstrate that reality is *altogether*, is from scratch a product of human constitution.

## 2. Kant 1781: Epistemological justification of the anthropic principle

It was Immanuel Kant who, in his *Critique of Pure Reason* from 1781, provided such a definitive justification of the anthropic principle. Kant's groundbreaking innovation consisted in stating that, contrary to previous and everyday thinking, our knowledge does not have to conform to objects but that first and foremost objects must "conform to our knowledge."<sup>5</sup> This is so because all objects are initially determined by the a priori forms of human cognition (forms of intuition plus categories). These forms have *constitutive* relevance for the objects. From this follows that the objects of experience are all minted by our cognitive patterns, by the "formal conditions of an experience in general."<sup>6</sup> Even all objects that transcend our experience (things-in-themselves, God, and so on) are imaginable only in accordance with our basic cognitive features. "We cannot proceed in any other way; we have to anthropomorphize."<sup>7</sup>

Kant's doctrine means that the human is the measure of the world. All objects reflect the human grip on the world. The world is humanworld.

Therefore, Diderot was right in proclaiming the anthropic principle. He was even more profoundly right than he knew. The human is not just the semantic but indeed already the object-constituting principle of the world. Kant gave the anthropic principle its perfect epistemological legitimation. He has made it obligatory.

Thus, two hundred fifty years after the *cosmic decentralization* effected by Copernicus, an *epistemological re-centering* of the human was established by Kant. Of course the position of humans in cosmos remained decentral. But this was now countered by an *epistemological recentering*. Everything in our cosmos is determined by the *conditio humana epistemica*. The human is the center of the world, all objects are a priori humanly shaped. – Kant has basically brought about an anti-Copernican revolution. Bertrand Russell was one of the few persons who lucidly noted this. He said that Kant, instead of speaking "of himself as having effected a 'Copernican revolution' ... would have been more accurate if he had spoken of a 'Ptolemaic

---

<sup>4</sup> I use this term in a sense different from its usage in cosmology. In my usage, it exclusively designates the modern manner of thinking according to which one must everywhere start from the human and refer everything back to him.

<sup>5</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* [1787], translated by Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's 1965), 22 [B XVI].

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 239 [A 220].

<sup>7</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* [1798], translated by Victor Lyle Dowdell, revised and edited by Hans H. Rudnick, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press 1978, 62 fn. [AB 76, § 30].

counter-revolution,' since he put Man back at the centre from which Copernicus had dethroned him."<sup>8</sup>

## II. The permanence of the anthropic principle up to the present day

In the following I want to outline how the anthropic principle *remained the guiding axiom of modernity* as time went on. We certainly find a great variety of philosophical positions in modernity. On the surface, they can strictly oppose each other. But at bottom, they all conform in unison to the anthropic principle. – I want to demonstrate this at random by reference to Feuerbach, historicism, Nietzsche, the contemporary humanities and cultural studies and finally to analytic philosophy.

### 1. Feuerbach: "The consciousness of the object is human self-consciousness"

Despite his very different tone, Ludwig Feuerbach in fact adopted the Kantian view that all objects reflect the human condition: "The consciousness of the object is human self-consciousness. The object allows you to recognize the human; it *shows you* the human's essence: The object is his *revealed* essence, his *true, objective* Ego."<sup>9</sup> From this follows Feuerbach's well-known criticism of religion: in religion, we falsely project the essence of the human onto an outside being ("God"), instead of recognizing the divine predicates as predicates of *our* being.<sup>10</sup> Hence Feuerbach's demand for a "transformation and dissipation of theology into anthropology."<sup>11</sup>

That anthropology is now becoming the fundamental type of philosophy is again Kantian heritage. Already Kant had declared that the basic questions of philosophy all come together in the question "What is man?"<sup>12</sup> Following this line, Feuerbach (in his *Principles of the philosophy of the future*) proclaims "anthropology" to be the new fundamental philosophy.<sup>13</sup>

### 2. Historicism: different historical-cultural a priori and worlds – diversification of the transcendental framework

Let us now look at a very different philosophical current, at historicism. At first glance, the difference to Kant seems immense. The historicists deny the Kantian assumption that the cognitive constitution of humans is the same everywhere and at all times, instead they claim that it varies considerably from one culture to another and between different historical epochs.

---

<sup>8</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Human Knowledge* (New York: Simon and Schuster 1948, XI).

<sup>9</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *Das Wesen des Christentums* [1841], in: *Werke in sechs Bänden*, Vol. 5 (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1976), 21.

<sup>10</sup> "God is the *manifest* inside, the pronounced self of man" (ibid., 31). "God is the most subjective nature of man – but segregated and set apart" (ibid., 45). "Man transfers his nature first *outside* of him before he finds it in himself" (ibid., 31). "Religion, at least the Christian, is the *behavior of man to himself*, or rather, to *his* (namely subjective) *nature*, but the behavior to his nature as *to another being*" (ibid., 32). "Religion is the [...] indirect self-knowledge of man" (ibid., 31).

<sup>11</sup> Ludwig Feuerbach, *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft* [1843], in: Feuerbach, *Kleine Schriften* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1966), 145 [§ 1].

<sup>12</sup> Immanuel Kant, cit. from Gottlob Benjamin Jäsche, "Immanuel Kant's Logic: A Manual for Lectures" [1800], in: *Immanuel Kant: Lectures on logic*, edited and translated by J. Michael Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1992, 519–640), here 538

<sup>13</sup> "The new philosophy is the complete, the absolute, the uncontradicted dissolution of theology into anthropology" (Feuerbach, *Grundsätze der Philosophie der Zukunft*, loc. cit., 214 [§ 52]). "[...] the new philosophy" is "the philosophy of man" (ibid., 218 [§ 65]).

Human experience and understanding depend not on an unvarying and universal structure but rather on historically and culturally specific features.

But this diversification does not cancel out the modernist view that we humans can experience and comprehend only in the light of human features, and that these determine all our reference to objects. In this sense, historicism continues the anthropic principle and even provides for a more extended and more radical application of it. Again, everything is to be comprehended from the human point of view and to be traced back to it. The only difference is that the human is now seen not as an ahistoric-abstract entity but as a historically and culturally situated and embossed being. The anthropic principle is now to be practiced in historical and cultural specification.

### 3. Nietzsche: Our Truth Is "Anthropomorphic Through and Through"

Let us turn to Friedrich Nietzsche (the great opponent of historicism). One might think that Nietzsche has overcome the anthropic way of thinking. For he obviously wanted to transcend the human – towards what he called "the overhuman." But in fact, Nietzsche is an extremely anthropic thinker. Already early on he declared, in the fairway of Kant, that it could be "*proven* that all constructions of the world are anthropomorphic."<sup>14</sup> And later on he still insisted, "We see all things by means of our human head, and cannot chop it off."<sup>15</sup> According to Nietzsche our truth is "anthropomorphic through and through"; it "contains not a single point which would be 'true in itself', really and universally valid apart from man."<sup>16</sup>

Even Nietzsche's "overhuman" is not someone who would transcend the *conditio humana* and leave behind the anthropic principle; he is, on the contrary, the one figure of the future that will finally live fully out the human potential for free creation of meanings and worlds. He has gotten rid of the old-metaphysical burden of a meta-world and therefore can eventually, without hindrance through any transcendental authority, realize the full potential of the human. His world will finally be a completely anthropic world.<sup>17</sup> Nietzsche is indeed – and particularly in his view of the future – an anthropic thinker par excellence.<sup>18</sup>

### 4. The Axiomatic Role of the Anthropic Principle in the Contemporary Human and Cultural Studies

Previously I referred to historicism and its diversificatory continuation of the anthropic principle. In the early twentieth century, the historicist view was carried on by anthropology and ethnology. The message was – from Benedict and Herskovits to Sapir and Whorf – that the members of

---

<sup>14</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "The Philosopher: Reflections on the Struggle between Art and Knowledge" [1872], in: *Philosophy and Truth. Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the Early 1870's*, edited and translated by Daniel Breazeale, New Jersey: Humanities Press 1979, 3–58, here 32.

<sup>15</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All-Too-Human. A Book for Free Spirits* [1878], translated by Marion Faber (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press 1984), 17 [9].

<sup>16</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Nonmoral Sense" [dictated in 1873], in: Nietzsche, *Philosophy and Truth*, loc. cit., 79–91, here 85. Cf. also: "If only one did not eternally have to hear the hyperbole of all hyperboles, the word: world, world, since, after all, if we remain honest, everyone ought only to speak of man, man, man!" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Advantage and Disadvantage of History for Life* [1874], trans. Peter Preuss, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1980, 49 [9].

<sup>17</sup> "[...] what ye have called the world shall but be created by you: your reason, your likeness, your will, your love, shall it itself become!" (Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* [1883–85], translated by Thomas Common [In the Happy Isles]).

<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche differs from Kant only through his radicalization of productionism. He holds that we can freely generate and reinvent the features of our experience and cognition (whereas Kant considered them invariant). Nietzsche developed an *artistic* version of anthropomorphism. His conception of the human as an *animal fingens* carries the on principle world-productionist view of modernity to extremes.

different cultures live in different worlds because their a priori features are different and therefore establish different worlds.<sup>19</sup>

This line of thinking is carried on in contemporary contextualism, relativism, and culturalism, i.e. in the mainstream of today's humanities and cultural studies. Their common credo is "that only one a priori exists, the historical a priori of culture"<sup>20</sup> – an obvious reprise of the historicist view.

The only difference is that the differentiation of the a priori (or the 'codes') is now being carried almost to the infinite. If with historicism the old Kantian transcendentalism had already become concrete, under culturalism it becomes entirely micrological. Within one culture, it is being said, by no means everything is homogeneous; on the contrary, there exist many microdifferences that are all worth being studied in detail. What is required is "an almost infinite internal differentiation and particularization of the collective singular 'culture'."<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the culturalist perspective wants to be not only internally differentiated but also comprehensive. It does not recognize any limit, it sees itself as all-inclusive. Even nature is to be integrated or squeezed into it: Nature, it is declared, is "no longer taken to be a pregiven reality but is recognized as culturally constructed."<sup>22</sup>

Thus the contemporary humanities and cultural studies – by understanding reality as a human construction through and through – float entirely in the current of the anthropic principle. The constructivist tint had been a companion of the anthropic thought-form from the start: Kant first spoke of 'constitution', but then more and more of 'production' – until he finally, in his *Opus postumum*, declared "We make everything ourselves."<sup>23</sup>

## 5. Analytic Philosophy

Let us finally look at a still different current: at analytic philosophy. In 1931, Otto Neurath had bluntly declared "the scientific world view" (the pet child of the Vienna circle) promotes "the proud [...] conviction that *man is the measure of all things*."<sup>24</sup> Thus he stated the anthropic principle in the most direct way.

In the meantime, however, analytic anthropocentrism has become more subtle. In the wake of the *linguistic turn*, it now bases itself on the role of language. Language is understood as the fundamental medium of all our reference to the world and to objects – philosophy of language is to replace the old-fashioned philosophy of consciousness.

It is however obvious: Language is something human. Only we humans speak, while the world is mute.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, the shift of the constitutive medium – from consciousness to language – does not alter the fact that the world we thus get to is still fundamentally a humanly shaped world. Consequently, main representatives like Davidson and Putnam assert that all we can ever get to is

---

<sup>19</sup> "The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached" (Edward Sapir, "The Status of Linguistics as a Science", in: Sapir, *Culture, Language and Personality*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1958, 65–77, here 69).

<sup>20</sup> Hartmut Böhme, Peter Matussek, Lothar Müller, *Orientierung Kulturwissenschaft* (Reinbek: Rowohlt 2000), 106.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Opus postumum*, edited by Eckart Förster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993), 189 [II:82; VIIth fascicle, sheet VII, page 2].

<sup>24</sup> Otto Neurath, "Wege der wissenschaftlichen Weltauffassung," in: *Erkenntnis* 1 (1930/31), 106–125, here 125.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Rorty: "The world does not speak. Only we do" (Richard Rorty, *Contingency, irony, and solidarity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989, 6).

just a *human* kind of truth, rationality, objectivity and so forth.<sup>26</sup> So the anthropic principle remains untouched, it remains in effect throughout the linguistic turn. All the newfangled terminology and posturing (turn to language, pathos of a fresh start) concerns only the surface not the deep structure.

\*

So indeed, from Kant through to the currently most advanced philosophical position, that of analytic philosophy, the same figure of thinking dominates: We make our world, and there is no other world besides it. – One could comment critically on this permanence of the anthropic worldview by citing Wittgenstein, "*A picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us innexorably."<sup>27</sup> Yes, it seems true: a picture holds us moderns captive.

### III. Vain Critiques of the Anthropic Mindset

But isn't it high time to correct the onesidedness of my exposition? Didn't modernity not only see apologists but also vigorous critics of the anthropic mindset? This is certainly true. But it is equally true that all the objections, in the end, came to nothing.

#### 1. Hegel's objection

Already Hegel had deplored that in the wake of Kant his contemporaries had begun to make themselves at home and to feel comfortable in the anthropic box of modernity. "Almighty time and its culture," he wrote, have secured a "fix standpoint": "the human." "Man and mankind are their absolute standpoint."<sup>28</sup>

Hegel wanted to overcome this anthropic stance – which his contemporaries regarded as liberation while he experienced it as self-confinement.<sup>29</sup> But Hegel's efforts were, as we know, no success. Who (except a few reasonable people) would be willing to follow Hegel?

#### 2. Logical Critique of the Anthropic Mindset (Frege and Husserl)

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Gottlob Frege developed a logical critique of the anthropic thought-form. He wanted to show that the validity of logical and mathematical truths is independent of anthropic conditions. He turned against the tendency to explain those truths through reference to our psychological constitution – which he called the "psychological contamination" of logic.<sup>30</sup> According to Frege, the opposite is true: The laws of logic dictate how

---

<sup>26</sup> Davidson: Truth exists only "relative to language," and "that is as objective as can be" (Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," in: Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1984, 183–198, here 198. Putnam: "objectivity and rationality humanly speaking are what we have"; they are – despite not being objectivity and rationality in the proper sense – "better than nothing" (Hilary Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press 1982, 55).

<sup>27</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* [1953], translated by G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan 1968), 48e [115].

<sup>28</sup> Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Glauben und Wissen* [1802], in: Hegel, *Werke*, Vol. 2 (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1986) 287–433, here 299.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. also: "The Kantian philosophy thus serves as a cushion for intellectual indolence which soothes itself with the conviction that everything is already proved and settled" (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Science of Logic*, 25 / *Wissenschaft der Logik I*, in: Hegel, *Werke*, Vol. 5, Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1986, 59 [Introduction, footnote]).

<sup>30</sup> Gottlob Frege, *The Basic Laws of Arithmetic* [1893], edited and translated by Montgomery Furth (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 1964), 12. He saw "the prevailing logic" as "infected through and

thinking has to be performed – no matter what the constitution of the thinking being is. The anthropic principle, however, inverts this order. This inversion, according to Frege, must be reverted. – But Frege's efforts were little success (probably because he was never quite able to present a convincing conceptualization of his idea of logic's absolute objectivity).

Following in Frege's footsteps, Edmund Husserl too advanced an energetic critique of psychologism. In the first volume of his *Logical Investigations* from 1900, he characterized psychologism as a variation of "anthropologism," i.e. the view that all human cognition is relative to "the human species and the human constitution."<sup>31</sup> Husserl saw "the modern and most recent philosophy" widely veined with anthropologism.<sup>32</sup> He considered it "quite rare to encounter a thinker free from the taint of such erroneous doctrines."<sup>33</sup>

Husserl's objections also focused on the concept of truth: truth has the status of ideal, not of empirical validity and cannot therefore be relative to an empirical given like the human condition. If something is true, it must be true for any creature – "for men or non-men, angels or gods"<sup>34</sup> – in the same way.<sup>35</sup>

But as impressive as Husserl's critique was – he himself was not able to sustain it. Instead, in his later years, he converted to a transcendental anthropological relativism: "*every existent*", he now declared, "is ultimately ... *relative to transcendental subjectivity*."<sup>36</sup> – The situation seems full of irony: Husserl, who had set out to banish anthropologism from modernist thought once and for all, came in the end to espouse anew the view that human consciousness is the ultimate horizon. The most prominent critic of the anthropic mindset rejoined the current he had formerly so harshly criticized.<sup>37</sup>

### 3. Heidegger: Onto-Anthropocentrism

Husserl's disciple Martin Heidegger again wanted to overcome the anthropic attitude of modernity. He criticized the fundamentalist claim of anthropology that "something is recognized and understood only when it has found an anthropological explanation."<sup>38</sup> Against this claim, Heidegger pointed out that in traditional anthropology the human – around which purportedly everything should revolve – remained essentially underdetermined. For it is impossible to understand the human, as traditional anthropology tried, on the basis of the human alone, one rather must understand the human on the ground of its relation with being – and in this

---

through with psychology" (ibid.). Already in 1884, in *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, he had stated as his first axiom "always to separate sharply the psychological from the logical" (Gottlob Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic. A logico-mathematical enquiry into the concept of number*, translated by J.L. Austin, Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2nd edition 1980, X).

<sup>31</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations, vol. 1* [1900], translated by John N. Findlay (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul 1970), 138 [§ 34].

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 139 [§ 36].

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 139 f.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>35</sup> Husserl was aware that the waywardness of anthropology had begun with Kant, who had fallen victim to a "fickle anthropologism" (Edmund Husserl, *Erste Philosophie, Erster Teil: Kritische Ideengeschichte*, edited by Rudolf Boehm, Husserliana vol. VII, Haag: Nijhoff 1956, 228).

<sup>36</sup> Edmund Husserl, *Formal and Transcendental Logic* [1929], translated by Dorion Cairns (The Hague: Nijhoff 1969), 273 [§ 103].

<sup>37</sup> The only difference is that Husserl locates the centrality of the human at a deeper – not psychological but transcendental – level.

<sup>38</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik* [1929], Frankfurt/Main: Klostermann <sup>3</sup>1965, 191.

relationship not the human but being has the lead. Exploring the "relation of being to the essence of man"<sup>39</sup> was Heidegger's chief concern throughout his life.

However, what is really altered if one determines the human no longer on its own grounds but through its relationship to being? Certainly much – but maybe still not enough. To be sure: It is an essential alteration that traditional anthropology, which considered the human just as an existing entity, is now replaced and surpassed by a deeper, onto-anthropological analysis. But on the other hand, the principal anthropic duct and the anthropic principle are not left behind and overcome but even more deeply consolidated.

That things are thus – that Heidegger's turn from traditional, human-centered anthropology to a being-accentuated type of anthropology does not leave the anthropic worldview behind but only roots it more deeply – is clearly confirmed by the fact that according to Heidegger the human is the exclusive addressee and partner of being – rocks are not, animals are not, neither is a work of art or a machine, an angel or God.<sup>40</sup> The human is the unique "neighbor of being,"<sup>41</sup> the only "shepherd of Being."<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, Heidegger does not really transcend the anthropic constellation but only gives it a deeper understanding and foundation. Despite all his critique of traditional anthropology, he only offers a modified version of anthropocentrism. Traditional, human-centered anthropology is replaced and surpassed by a being-accentuated onto-anthropology. That is all. Heidegger, too, remained a modernist thinker.

#### **4. Foucault: "Man will be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea"**

Let us now look at Michel Foucault who in *The Order of Things* from 1966 presented an impressive critique of the anthropic mindset of modernity. Foucault had recognized that the human as the central figure of epistemology (on Diderot's formula: "man from which one must start and to which one must refer everything back") was an invention of the eighteenth century.<sup>43</sup> Foucault considered this anthropic thought-form ruinous. According to Foucault, it has paralyzed us and lulled us to sleep – into a sleep "so deep that thought experiences it paradoxically as vigilance."<sup>44</sup>

Foucault pleaded for an awakening from this deep sleep of modernity. Only once we overcome the epistemic centrality of the human will it be possible to think anew<sup>45</sup>: "It is no longer possible to think in our day other than in the void left by man's disappearance."<sup>46</sup> Foucault was convinced a time would come where "man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea."<sup>47</sup> – Nobody else has exposed the anthropic mindset of modernity as powerfully as Foucault

---

<sup>39</sup> Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," loc. cit., 217.

<sup>40</sup> "Being is ... nearer to man than every being, be it a rock, a beast, a work of art, a machine, be it an angel or God" (ibid., 234).

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 245.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 234 and 245.

<sup>43</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things. An Archeology of the Human Sciences* [1966], (New York: Vintage 1973), 308.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 341.

<sup>45</sup> When Foucault speaks of the end of man, he has, of course, not physical man in mind but man as the central epistemic authority of modernity.

<sup>46</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, loc. cit., 342 [from chapter 9: "Man and his doubles", section VIII: "The anthropological sleep"].

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 387.



has. His attack attracted highest attention. For a couple of years, the "death of the human" was on everyone's lips.

However, even Foucault's attack was no lasting success. In the end, Foucault himself went back into the pathway of anthropic thinking. With *Discipline and Punish* from 1975, he became the great inspirator of the current scenery in the humanities and cultural studies. The fact that the old-modern thesis that everything is to be comprehended from and toward the human is so widespread and so meticulously elaborated today is largely due to Foucault's influence. It may again sound like irony but is the truth: Foucault who had started out as the most vigorous critic of the anthropic mindset became its renewer.

Finally, in the eighties, with *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, Foucault propagated "techniques of the self", "arts of existence" and "aesthetics of existence" and thus completely turned back to the human individual. How, he asked now, is a succeeding way of life possible within the contemporary constraints? In this late period of Foucault, it is over with the former pathos of transcending the modern constellation. The modern world has become a *hortus conclusus*, and Foucault's final recommendations amount to a "cultiver le jardin."

\*

The résumé of this inspection of attempts at transcending the modern way of thinking is disillusioning.<sup>48</sup> Some have seen the Holy Land, but no one has reached it. In the end, the critics themselves bent back into the anthropic duct. Husserl's statement that "the modern and most recent philosophy" inclines towards anthropologism to such an extent that it is "quite rare to encounter a thinker free from the taint of such erroneous doctrines" is still valid.

#### **IV. Reasons for Questioning the Modernist Mindset**

So the task of supplying an efficient critique of the anthropic mindset is still unfulfilled. Yet it remains more urgent than ever.

##### **1. Paralysis, Satiety, Complacency**

For the ongoing attachment to the modernist mindset paralyzes our thought. We long have known the answer to every question. It reads "it is the human." This triviality suffocates our thought instead of making it breathe.

In fact, the contemporary philosophical and intellectual scene appears peculiarly paralyzed. Certainly, the activity is immense and the differentiation impressive in its details. But everything bends around in the same tiresome circle. For everything that we do not yet understand and set out to investigate, we are certain in advance that all our discoveries, present and future, are humanly restricted and will result in nothing else but humanly bound and only humanly valid insights. This conviction penetrates even the everyday consciousness up to unconsciousness. If we still share anything in modernity, it is the belief that all our world access is humanly bound (bound by context, society, culture, etc.). This is the deepest *communis opinio* of modern man. If, on the contrary, someone does not share this opinion and begins to ask critical questions, we rub our eyes in astonishment: this guy does not seem to be from this world – apparently he is crazy.

---

<sup>48</sup> That this is so with respect to not only the positions discussed here, but everywhere, I try to show in *Homo mundanus* (Weilerswist Velbrück Wissenschaft 2012).

By looking at the popular usage of two terms, I would like to demonstrate the narrow-mindedness of today's habitus. What is implied today when we call someone a 'cosmopolitan'? And what do we have in mind when we raise 'universal claims'?

When the Stoics spoke of a 'cosmopolitan', of a 'citizen of the world' or when they said one should live one's life according to the cosmos, they really meant the entire world, the universe. A 'citizen of the world' was someone who took the *cosmos* as his measure. When people today speak of a 'citizen of the world', they mean only a competent citizen of the *earth*, an international earthling. – This person may then pick up a magazine such as *Cosmopolitan* and while reading it, be assured that he will not be disturbed in his shrinking of the cosmic measure to that of a life-style society.

And whoever says 'universal' today', performs automatically a similar limitation of the universe to just the earth and even to one single species on earth, to *Homo sapiens*. 'Universal' no longer means 'universally valid' (valid for all beings or spirits) but just 'generally valid for humans' – but the latter pretends to represent the former. What arrogance, even impudence! Just not bottomless impudence – I have shown where its bottom lies.

## 2. The Inconsistency of the Modernist Mindset

For those who are rather numb for such atmospheric diagnosis (narrowness, paralysis, suffocation), who instead insist on rational arguments, I would like to demonstrate that the modern thought-form is blatantly *inconsistent*.

Firstly, it is evidently *self-contradictory*. It maintains that all our cognition is determined by our physical, cultural, social, etc., parameters and contains nothing that reaches beyond them. But a determination and limitation of this kind could in any case be stated only from a position outside these parameters, from the perspective of a God's-eye view – otherwise the assertion would be itself subject to the same restrictions and thus could be at best a relatively valid guess and hence unable to serve as a binding principle. But according to the modernist position, precisely such overview is unavailable to us. So, according to the assumptions of this mindset itself, we have no way of really knowing that our cognition is in fact strictly limited. Yet this very claim is made over and over again.

The really amazing thing, however, is that pointing out this inconsistency has absolutely no effect. The argument remains unchallenged – but at the same time fruitless. The modernist axiom is taken as a self-evident truth by means of which one can retort any attempt to challenge it: one only has, when this axiom is questioned, to still presuppose it as a fundamental truth and then reply to the challenge that this one too is after all doubtlessly a human formulation and therefore can only bring forward a 'humanly valid' argument and thus not shake but only sustain the axiom. – To be sure, such immunity to questioning one's own assumptions is, according to modern standards, not a sign of rationality but rather of ideology. But in this case, nobody cares about it. When one's own manner of thinking comes under pressure, one ignores the self-proclaimed standards and adopts an attitude of self-indulgent satiety instead of rationality.

Secondly, the modern axiom is based on an unjustified equation of *access* conditions with *validity* conditions. Of course, certain access conditions must be met in order to be able to recognize something. The perception of color, for example, presupposes vision skills. But in no way does that imply that the matter thus recognized is *determined* by the means through which it is accessed – that it could not have an existence and validity apart from that. Access conditions have, it is true, an *initiating* function for the *discovery* of a matter – but because of that they do

not eo ipso have a *constitutive* function for the *character* of this matter as such; they do not simply *make* it. The equation of access conditions with validity conditions is, from the viewpoint of logic, an elementary error. Yet the anthropic axiom is founded on this very mistake: it concludes from the human disclosedness of things directly to the human *constitution* of these very same things. Only thus does it arrive at the thesis that all things that we experience must be humanly determined – whereas the correct statement would only be that experiencing these things must lie within the range of human capacities, while the mode of being of those things can very well be independent from that. So in this second respect, too, the modern axiom proves to be logically inconsistent.

Such inconsistencies and mistakes should make the advocates of the modern position wonder. But precisely that they don't is the sore point. Despite believing that one's own position is highly rational, one reacts to the demonstration of inconsistencies at most with a shrug – and unaffectedly continues to cherish the once adopted position. – How much longer?

## **V. Hints at the fundamental flaw and at the possibility to overcome the modernist frame of mind**

At the end of this critical exposition of the modern way of thinking, I want to sketch at least briefly how to find a way out of it. An efficient challenge of the anthropic principle – this is strongly suggested by the failure of all the efforts considered before – will be possible only if one succeeds in grasping and effectively criticizing the very bottom ground of this axiom's proclamation as well as failure. I see this deepest ground in the assumption that there exists a fundamental disparity between man and world and in the essential unworldliness of the human following from it.

### **1. Man-World-Dualism – Human Unworldliness qua Spiritual Nature?**

This view originated during the time of Renaissance. Man was now conceived as a being *sui generis*, completely autonomous and incongruent with the world. The prototypical document is Pico della Mirandola's speech *De hominis dignitate* from 1486, where Pico stated that humans are – unlike all other beings – not integrated into creation but freely opposed to it – so freely that humans can become, through their own decision, everything they want. Soon after followed the Copernican shock: we humans are not in the center of the world, but just somewhere in the universe - without any common measure with the world.

According to early modernity, it is especially our spiritual nature that is responsible for the lack of a common measure with the world. Earlier, during the times of objective idealism which had held that the world itself is, in its basic structure, determined by spirit (think of Plato or Aristotle or the Christian Middle Ages), our spiritual nature led to the opposite consequence: that we humans coincide with the world and hence are even able to properly recognize it. In early and fully-fledged modernity, however, the world is no longer seen as determined by spirit. Consequently, our intellectual nature now results not in a commonality with the world but in a fundamental distance to the world, in a principal unworldliness of the human. As a spiritual being, the human is an unworldly being. We know this topos from Descartes: *res extensa* (world) and *res cogitans* (human) are fundamentally different, they lack any commonality. The dualism of matter and spirit enacts a dualism between world and man.

In addition, the conviction that rationality is a unique characteristic of man – that exclusively we humans (and not say any animals, not even the ones closest to us) – possess rationality,

reinforced the belief in man's unworldliness. The fact that only we and no other animals possess rationality seemed to bear witness that rationality is not of mundane origin – otherwise it would be completely unintelligible why rationality should not have developed in other beings around us (especially in the animals closest to us) as well. This was another argument supporting the belief that our intellectual nature is strictly unworldly (not of worldly origin and not connected with the world) – which makes us appear sovereign and gives us *carte blanche* towards the world.

An unavoidable consequence of this view is, of course, that the application of our rationality to the world (with which it is essentially inconsistent) can in no way lead us to a cognition of the world *as such* but only to forms of constructing a world *according to our manner*. Thus, the fundamental constructivism of modern thought (which our previous considerations revealed as a common denominator of modernity) is a consequence of the man-world-dualism and the purported unworldliness of our intellectual nature. Dualism and unworldliness are the very source of the anthropic axiom of modernity.

## 2. The Worldliness of the Spirit

On the other hand this analysis makes already clear on how erroneous assumptions the modern thought-form was based.

Firstly: It is not true (as we know for sure today) that rationality exists only in humans and nowhere else in the animal kingdom. Vertebrates are capable of elementary categorizations, pigeons are downright experts in abstraction and generalization, mammals understand the permanence and aspectivity of objects, chimpanzees and bonobos manage causal relations and understand the intentionality of conspecifics, they are also capable to recognize themselves in mirrors, and sometimes they even do problem-solving through mere deliberation.<sup>49</sup>

So rationality is in fact something mundane that has developed long before the advent of humans.<sup>50</sup> Therefore, it is completely erroneous to derive from rationality a distance to or even incongruity with the world.<sup>51</sup> Our spiritual nature establishes exactly not, as was alleged in modernity, our unworldliness but, on the contrary, our commonality with the world.

Secondly: Current theories of self-organisation and emergence powerfully suggest that spirit is altogether a product of evolution, that our reflexive spirit is the most advanced descendant of a

---

<sup>49</sup> This has become evident already in 1917 when Wolfgang Köhler published the report on his later on famous experiments in Teneriffa: Wolfgang Köhler, *The Mentality of Apes* (London: Routledge 1925). Cf. also Konrad Lorenz, *Die Rückseite des Spiegels. Versuch einer Naturgeschichte menschlichen Erkennens* [1973] (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag 1977), 165–167.

<sup>50</sup> This was after all already Aristotle's view: "In the great majority of animals there are traces of psychical qualities which are more markedly differentiated in the case of human beings. For just as we pointed out resemblances in the physical organs, so in a number of animals we observe gentleness or fierceness, mildness or cross temper, courage or timidity, fear or confidence, high spirit or low cunning, and, with regard to intelligence, something equivalent to sagacity. Some of these qualities in man, as compared with the corresponding qualities in animals, differ only quantitatively: that is to say, a man has more of this quality, and an animal has more of some other; other qualities in man are represented by analogous qualities: for instance, just as in man we find knowledge, wisdom, and sagacity, so in certain animals there exists some other natural potentiality akin to these. (Aristotle, *Historia. animalium*, VIII 1, 588 a 18–31).

<sup>51</sup> By the way: Also all other attempts to detect something exclusively human (and thus to reestablish the ideology of human uniqueness after with rationality its traditional anchor had vanished) led to nothing. The usage and production of tools are widely spread in the animal kingdom. In addition, the aesthetic attitude originated already with animals. Upright walking, gripper hand, premature birth, neoteny and altruism (and even negative traits like bloodlust) exist already among animals, at least among our closest relatives. In short: None of human's traits is an absolute novelty that would have fallen from heaven with the advent of man; rather they are all advancements of traits developed already in other animals.

fundamental feature already of cosmological and later on of biological evolution. Spirit is potentiated self-organisation and self-referentiality.<sup>52</sup>

This means one more time: Spirit is not something alien and incongruent to the world but rather a product of the world's development and an enunciation of its innermost organizing principle. So our spiritual nature does not cause an unworldliness but on the contrary an elementary world-connectedness of the human. Spirit is inherently affine to the world – which might ultimately even foster the view that in our cognition the world turns back on itself, that in our cognition the world apprehends itself.

In any case: Today we see clearly that the premisses which the anthropic principle of modernity was based on are fundamentally false. We humans are precisely not incongruent to the world but deeply connected with it. The whole constructivist attitude of modernity collapses in the light of a realistic and this means in the first place an evolutionist view of the human and his relation to the world. This I will explain in more detail in tomorrow's lecture.

---

<sup>52</sup> Cf. on this in more detail: Wolfgang Welsch, *Homo mundanus*, loc. cit., 876–886.