

The Humanization of Being

Introduction

What horizon of questioning allows us to make sense of the broad theme or question of the Post/Human condition? It is suggested that the present constitutes a post-humanism, which may or may not at all be related to a question of the human. Clearly though, the horizon offered here suggests that we are yet or still caught in a fundamental questioning of anthropology and philosophy, as if philosophy's fundamental question was the 'human.' We may note that from the 1960s at least this question has been recurrent for continental philosophy. We might say it has marked a crisis of thinking for philosophy since Nietzsche's engagement with nihilism and that from the end of the eighteenth century enlightenment thinking is constituted on the crux of anthropology and philosophy. We note two key references from the 1960s in Michel Foucault's 1966 *Les Mots et les Choses, The Order of Things*, to which we will return in a moment, and the 1968 conference in New York on "Philosophy and Anthropology," the occasion for Jacques Derrida's "The Ends of Man," a text that addresses initially a particularly humanist reading of Heidegger in France and then a deconstruction of 'belonging' and the 'proper' in Heidegger's own thinking that for Derrida insinuates an essential humanism for Heidegger even as anthropocentrism is eschewed, and what Derrida would encounter as an aspect of Nietzsche non-assimilable to Heidegger's thinking. I want to begin by making reference to Foucault's conclusion to *The Order of Things*, by way of introducing aspects of Nietzsche's *Will to Power* and Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche's Eternal Return of the Same, before returning to Foucault's work of the late 1970s as an encounter with the crisis of humanism and nihilism that takes a path neither strictly Nietzschean nor Heideggerian.

We are probably all familiar with that concluding paragraph of Foucault's *Order of Things*. However, I will quote from it, if only for the startling and simple expression of its prose, and the ease with which it presents the possibility of erasure of what since the end of the eighteenth century has constituted a ground to our being:

One thing in any case is certain: man is neither the oldest nor the most constant problem that has been posed for human knowledge. Taking a relatively short chronological sample within a restricted geographical area — European culture since the sixteenth century — one can be certain that man is a recent invention within it. ... As the archaeology of our thought easily shows, man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.

If those arrangements were to disappear as they appeared, if some event of which we can at the moment do no more than sense the possibility — without knowing either what its form will be or what it promises — were to cause them to crumble, as the ground of Classical thought did, at the end of the eighteenth century, then one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea. (386-387.)

Of course, the question that goes begging here, and the question that in many respect prompts a conference of this type is of what would that new mutation of being human be composed? Would technology or animality, for example, constitute another ground to the question of being human? This end would pose the question of what new beginning, what other form of the human would or could emerge. Yet we would see in such a consequential questioning precisely the continuation of the anthropology of humanism, precisely the prolonging of the figure of man, the restating of an anthropocentrism at the heart of a philosophical location of the human. And we would have overlooked, perhaps, what Nietzsche was asking of thinking and the human with respect to the surpassing of nihilism. And in this overlooking we would have perhaps missed the difficulty of Heidegger's confrontation with Nietzsche on the humanization of Being that goes to the heart of the struggle with Nietzsche's 'thought of thoughts.'

Will-to-Power

Thus we look to Nietzsche's *Will to Power* as an encounter with a crisis of humanism that does not simply become a site of philosophical avant-gardism, precisely as the prolongation of the humanism of the human. We know how it starts, with a Preface:

What I relate is the history of the next two centuries. I describe what is coming, what can no longer come differently: the advent of nihilism. This history can be related now; for necessity itself is at work here. This future speaks even now in a hundred signs, this destiny announces itself everywhere; for this music of the future all ears are cocked even now. For some time now, our whole European culture has been moving as toward a catastrophe, with a tortured tension that is growing from decade to decade: restlessly, violently, headlong, like a river that wants to reach its end, that no longer reflects, that is afraid to reflect. (#2 p. 3.)

Nietzsche, the one who has passed through nihilism, 'leaving it behind, outside himself,' presents a 'gospel of the future' in *The Will to Power* as a countermovement to nihilism yet a countermovement that necessitates a perfect nihilism. The antimony for Nietzsche was Christian Morality and its consequent truthfulness: appeal to the highest values as an antidote to nihilism, and the abrasive and abusive work of truth dissolving that knowledge of the absolute in the adequate knowing of things: "Now that the shabby origin of these values is becoming clear, the universe seems to have lost value, seems "meaningless" — but that is only a *transitional stage*." (10-11). Nietzsche's "highest man" abolishes the will, abolishes any notion of knowledge in itself. The highest man, the overman, is composed of "the greatest multiplicity of drives,": "Indeed, where the plant 'man' shows himself strongest one finds instincts that conflict powerfully." (506-507), and the most powerful instinct is life itself, "the lust to rule, affirmed." Thus Nietzsche will oppose Dionysus and "The Crucified." At stake will be, in a quest for the greatest suffering, a Christian redemption from life, for a spiritual after-life, or in the dismemberment of Dionysus, the promise of life (542-543). Eternal recurrence abolishes all teleology, goal, progress, in the sense that if the world had a goal, it would have been reached: "If there were for it some unintended final state, this must also have been reached. If it were in any way capable of pausing and becoming fixed, of "being," if in the whole course of its becoming it possessed even for a moment this capability of "being," then all becoming would long since have come to an end, along with all thinking, all "spirit." (546). Without will, there is only will to power, perhaps most concretely summated by Nietzsche in a new world conception: "its excrements are its food." (548).

Going up and over man

Martin Heidegger undertook an extended lecture series on Nietzsche over four years 1936-1940, interrupted at times by the commencement of war. The lectures were published in German in 1961 in four sections and translated to English in four volumes between 1979 and 1984: *The Will to Power as Art*; *The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*; *The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*; and *Nihilism*. Heidegger will always be guided in his reading of Nietzsche by Nietzsche's overturning of Platonism undertaken in *Twilight of the Idols*, and discussed by Derrida in *Spurs: Nietzsche's Styles*. Heidegger emphasises that Nietzsche inverts Platonism without twisting free from Platonic metaphysics, without escaping Platonism. In his discussion of Nietzsche's *overman*, his emphasis is on inversion, in this case inversion of reason and animality. Heidegger suggests:

The over in the name *overman* contains a negation; it signifies a going up and "over" man as he has been heretofore. The no of this negation is absolute, in that it comes from the yes of will to power. It directly concerns the Platonic, Christian-moral interpretation of the world in all its overt and covert transformations. Thinking metaphysically, this negative affirmation steers the history of mankind toward a new history. (Vol III, 217)

If the metaphysical definition of the essence of 'man' has been understood as 'rational animal,' Heidegger suggests that this as yet has not been questioned primordially, that metaphysically it has been engaged in a thinking of the being of beings, but not more primordially as "the truth of Being and thus the relationship of the essence of being with the essence of man." (217) Thus, in his question of the essence of man, Nietzsche will continue to engage metaphysically in an inversion of the rational animal with respect to will-to-power, that is with respect to nihilism. Thus Heidegger emphasises that with metaphysics, thought is the enabling perceiving as representation of what comes to presence as the being of what is. In the modern age, the ground of this representing is certitude, perceiving as judging correct, "tribunal that decides about the beingness of beings." (219) In this sense, reason becomes the absolute, culminating in Hegel's phenomenology as "Being's bringing-itself-to-concept as absolute self-appearing." (223) Heidegger quotes Hegel: "The act of dividing is the force and the labour of the *understanding*, of the most wonderful and grandest, or rather, of absolute power." (223)

With the nihilistic interpretation of metaphysics, understanding posits value and thought is the calculating proper to the securing of what is, as valuation. In the negation of reason, in the inverting of the rational animal, thought is not negated in the sense of being eliminated. Rather, it is relegated to serve will-to-power as animality. However, animality itself has been inverted in the sense that it is not mere sensation: "The name body identifies the distinctive unity in the constructs of domination in all drives, urges, passions that will life itself. Because animality lives only by bodying, it is as will to power." (218) Heidegger notes Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*:

But the awakened and knowing say: I am *body* entirely, and nothing else; soul is merely a word for something about the body. The body is a great reason, a plurality with one meaning, a war and a peace, a herd and a shepherd. An instrument of your body is also your little reason, my brother, which you call "spirit" — a little instrument and toy of your great reason. (218)

We thus recognise in Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche's nihilism as will to power, that the modern age presents, in Nietzsche's diagnosis, as a fundamental inversion of prior metaphysics, wherein rationality as the absolute power of understanding is transposed to animality as bodying will to power: "*Body* is the name for that configuration of will to power in which the latter is always immediately accessible, because it is always within the province of man identified as "subject." Nietzsche therefore says: 'Essential: to start from the body and employ it as the guideline.' (223) Thus the will, which in prior metaphysics served as "self-legislation" for representational reason, is now "pure self-legislation of itself ... the pure powering of power." The essence of will becomes the being of beings constituting the horizon of disclosure as such for what presents itself to our representing, while representing is nihilistic, as the reckoning of valuative thinking, subject to the "empowering of overpowering." This constitutes at once the supreme dehumanization of man, as the rational animal of prior metaphysics and the supreme humanization of man as that being that is capable of bringing itself before itself in its essence, in what Heidegger words as the "supreme consummation of its own essence and in the way *to be* this essence itself," and in citing Nietzsche: "Not 'humanity' but *overman* is the goal!" (226) Thus we recognise Zarathustra's "midday" as "midpoint ... between beast and overman" between a rational animal whose body is base animality and an inversion of this in the supreme, the most powerful instinct, in life. (Vol 2 79)

Being as a whole

It is in his analysis of "Being as a Whole as Life and Force; the World as Chaos" that Heidegger gets to the heart of the matter, if one can say his one thousand pages on Nietzsche has a heart. I say "heart of the matter" for the particular emphasis Heidegger gives to the notion of being as a whole, and the difficulty he recognises in the primordial disclosure of being as a whole. We may remember the difficulty the being as a whole of *Da-sein* presented in *Being and Time*, necessitating the thinking of being-for-death as its disclosed moment. The question of being as a whole is essential for Heidegger as ontological questioning in the fore-having of the thematic unity of the being of beings. (*Being & Time* 214). Heidegger moves through ten key moments in

his determination of “what stands in view” and “the way it stands in view,” or the *essentia* and *existentia*. In summary, Nietzsche does not juxtapose the inanimate and the animate, the living and the dead: “Our whole world is the ashes of countless living creatures: and even if the animate seems so minuscule in comparison to the whole, it is nonetheless the case that everything has already been transposed into life — and so it goes.” (84) (As an aside, it would be useful to give some considered thinking to an essential relation of Nietzsche to Heidegger here on Heidegger’s being-for-death.) The pervasive character of the world is force, not to be equated or subsumed under force understood as calculative in physics or as dynamics, but precisely as will-to-power as the disclosure in nihilism as the being of beings. Force is not infinite but limited. Thus the totality of the world is finite, hence the finitude of being as a whole. But as there is no equilibrium of forces, there is no standstill, rather a perpetual becoming, not a genesis or progress but a changing and passing away. The finitude of the world is not surveyable or knowable as such. Hence *becomings* produce infinite effects, innumerable appearances. For Heidegger, Nietzsche insufficiently thinks the spatial and temporal, though he is “on the trail” of them: “Viewed as a whole, Nietzsche’s meditations on space and time are quite meagre.” (90) Space, for Nietzsche is bounded and time is actual, unbounded and infinite. The primordial structure of the being as a whole as life and force fore-grounds force, finitude, perpetual becoming, innumerability of appearances, bounded character of space and infinity of time. This collective character of the world, Nietzsche suggests in the *Gay Science* to be “chaos,” with unity and form excluded *ab initio*. (91)

This exclusion from the beginning is the precautionary measure to avoid the introduction of anthropomorphism, a defence against the ‘humanization’ of being. For Nietzsche, there is no goal, purpose or intention but equally no purposelessness or accident. Heidegger comments here on the de-deification of beings: “Truly metaphysical thinking, at the outermost point of de-deification, will uncover that path on which alone gods will be encountered — if they are to be encountered ever again in the history of mankind.” (94) Yet, at the same time Nietzsche calls for the supreme ‘humanization’ of beings. If ‘chaos’ is the *ab initio* warding of all anthropomorphisms of beings, all we can say is *nothing*. This *nothing*, Heidegger suggests may well be the most human of humanizations in which we catch sight of the task of determining being as a whole. For Nietzsche, necessity is the trait or trace of chaos. How would this dehumanization of being yet be a supreme humanization? Heidegger explores this via the *Doctrine of The Eternal Recurrence of the Same*. ‘Man’ is decisively and solely that collision of the future and the past that affront one another in the Moment. Heidegger digs to a more primordial questioning: initially the question “what is man?” which he suggests has yet to be essentially thought outside of metaphysics’ history of the rational animal and its more recent inversions, whose engagements with technology or humanized technologies continue to obscure the essential nature of the question. But he will go further and suggest the question “What is man?” cannot be asked without the prior question of what is being as a whole: “the latter question embraces a more original question, one which neither Nietzsche nor philosophy prior to him unfolded or was able to unfold.” (105)

We are by now on the most familiar of Heideggerian thinking on the forgetting of the question of Being and the essence of human being as the belonging of human being to Being. Nietzschean “eternal return” becomes here the midday of the propriative event of a temporality of being that “no timepiece measures: that point in being as a whole when time itself is as the temporality of the moment. We are returned to the *Augenblick*, the glance of an eye, already encountered as authentic Da-sein in *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*.

The Biopolitical

I will conclude, as I began, with Foucault. If we are to believe Foucault’s own testimony that it was all Heidegger and Nietzsche for him, the path of thinking of the question of ‘man’ cannot neatly or in a summary fashion be so simply read. It is significant that in his *College de France* lectures of 1977-78 he provides an important corrective or further resolution to the understanding he gained in his research for *The Order of Things*. He suggests that his later research on the emergence of “population” as a new entity on the horizon of understanding

humanity at the end of the eighteenth century, allowed him to recognise the extent to which the emergence of the forms of knowing and techniques for control of populations constituted the grounds for the emergence of the modern episteme in labour, life and language. Foucault suggests: "The population is not conceived as a collection of subjects of right, nor as a set of hands making up the workforce; it is analysed as a set of elements that, on the one hand, form part of the general system of living beings (the population then falls under "the human species," which was a new notion at the time, to be distinguished from "mankind") and, on the other hand, may provide a hold for concerted interventions" (S.T.P. 366). Perhaps it is the case that our own concerted efforts to think and rethink this subject of right was long ago overtaken by another entity under the eighteenth century claim that man is nothing other than a figure of population. (379) Perhaps it is this figure of population and not the individuated subject that is essentially Heidegger's concern with beings as a whole and perhaps it is this figure, and not that of an individuated subject who knows, that may be erased in its fragility. Whatever the case, we may want to shift our horizons from asking if man is the animal who got bored or whose disclosure of temporality is ecstatically technological. Rather we might ask if the necessity of this species would have ever coincided with a question of being.