



A reading of Heidegger's *the Age of the World-picture*

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Part One: The structure and content

- **The background**
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Some background about the essay

- *the age of the world picture* (1938, Freiburg)
- *The Founding of the Modern World Picture by Metaphysics*
- *The question Concerning Technology and Other Essays & Off the Beaten Track*
- Two parts: the main body and the appendix.
- Theme : essence of the modern age. (“Man becomes subject”and“world transforms into picture”.)

The structure of the essay

A

Heidegger paid his attention on the essence of science.

B

He pointed out the metaphysical basic of science.

C

He considered “world-picture” and “man becomes subject” as the essence of modern age.

The essence of science

- There are five essential phenomena of modern age, that Science, Machine technology, Art's moving into purview of aesthetics, Culture and the loss of gods (*Entötterung*).
- Among these phenomena, Heidegger took precedence to science, and tried to find the essence of modern science.

The essence of science

- Heidegger indicates that the essence of modern science is research.
- “Projection and rigor; methodology and ongoing activity, mutually requiring one another, constitute the essence of modern science, transform science into research”.
(P126.AWP)

The metaphysical basic of science

- Heidegger indicated research as science was a process of representation (*Vorstellung*) .
- Research has character of calculation. Through calculating, nature and history become the object of a representation.
- “We first arrive at science as research when and only when truth has been transformed into the certainty of representation.”(P127.AWP)



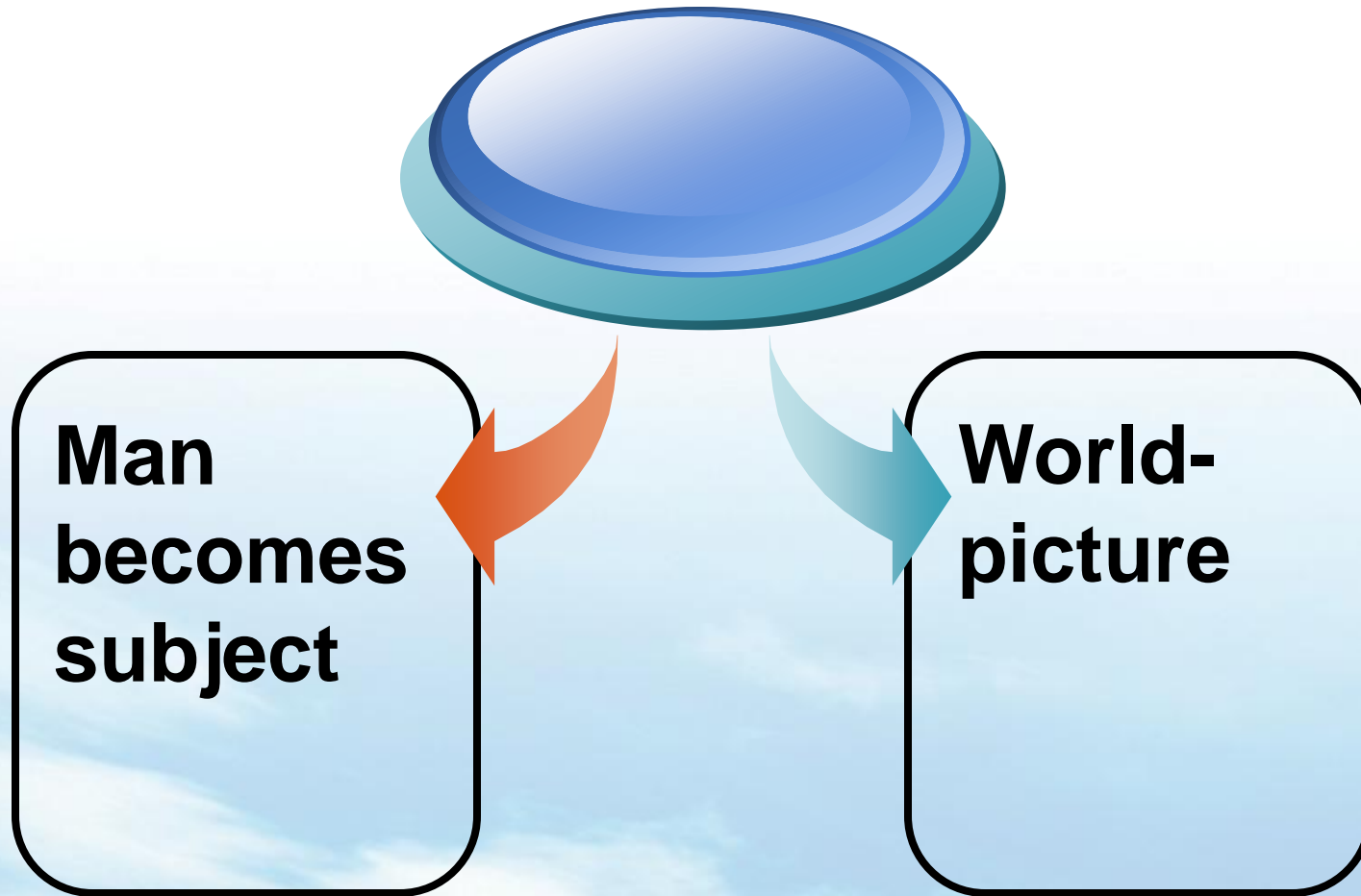
representation

- *Vorstellung* (n)——*vorstellen* (v)
- *stellen* is “to place, make it stand”
- *vor* is “before, in front of”
- *Vorstellen* is “to bring, move forward; to put something in front of something else”
- Here, *vorstellen* means to bring what is (beings) before oneself and to let it stand as object. (what is becomes object for a subject)(concealment)

See more in *A Heidegger Dictionary*



The Essence of Modern Age



Man becomes subject

- In modern age, what is decisive and profound is not that man frees from himself from the bonds of the Middle Ages in freeing himself to himself, but that “the very essence of man itself changes, in that man becomes subject.” (P128.AWP)

Subiectum

- *Subiectum* (that-which-lies-before, which, as ground, gathers everything onto itself)
- In Greeks, no special relationship to man and none at all to the I.
- in modern age, *subiectum* is limited to the man .
- So the relation of man and what is as whole has changed extraordinarily .

How dose man become subject?

- a pursuit for something certain
- Descartes considered the *ego cogito (ergo) sum* as the something certain
- Thinking is representing.
- Representation means, of oneself to set something before oneself and to make secure what has been set in place, as something set in place.
- Man becomes subject in presenting what is.



Descartes

ego cogito (ergo) sum

World-picture


- In Heidegger, the “World” means what is in entirety include cosmos, nature, history and even the ground of the world. Where the world becomes picture, what is in its whole, is brought before man himself and is had before himself. (P129.AWP) So word-picture does not mean a picture of the world but the world is grasped as picture. And in the picture, the Being of whatever is, is the representedness of the later.

How does the world transform into picture?

- Understood essentially, the world was conceived and grasped as picture by **representing**. As Heidegger clearly indicated, “Man as representing subject, however, “fantasizes,” i.e., he moves in *imaginatio*, in that his representing imagines, pictures forth, whatever is, as the objective, into the world as picture” (P147.AWP).

The dangerous

- For Heidegger, “That the world becomes picture is one and the same event with the event of man’s becoming *subiectum* in the midst of that which is”. (P132.AWP)
- Humanism
- Metaphysics changes into anthropology.
- the nihilism and the dominance of technology.

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- At the end of essay, Heidegger quoted a poetry written by Hölderlin, which seems bizarre.
 - It is certain that poetry is a kind of nonmetaphysical thinking, which is one of the original ways to reach the truth of being in later Heidegger.

The commentary

- A. The critique of modern age was put under the framework of the critique of metaphysics.
- B. Both the critique of modern age and the critique of metaphysics were launched through the critique of representation.
- C. That man becomes subject was a main clue which ran throughout the whole modern metaphysics. And that world is grasped as picture was the historical consequence of metaphysics.

The understanding of metaphysics

- a. the ontological difference
- b. the onto-theo-Logical constitution of metaphysics
- c. the history of Being

the ontological difference

- the difference between Being itself and the being of entities (*Sein und Seiende*)
- “what is being?”
- “what is the being of entities?”
- Being itself was forgotten.

the onto-theo-logical constitution

- Metaphysics is determined by the onto-theo-logical constitution.
- Metaphysics as ontology is the science of being of entities in general, and metaphysics as theology is the science of highest entity.
- *essential*
- *existentia*

See more in *Onto-theo-logical Constitution of Metaphysics & Heidegger on Ontotheology*


the history of Being

- The history of metaphysics starts with Plato and ends with Nietzsche.
- The modern age is the age of nihilism and dominance of technology.
- The first beginning is pre-Socrates thinkers.
- a new beginning in Hölderlin's poetry.

See more in *Nietzsche*

The critique of representation

- The representation features of objectification, calculation and dominance.
- Metaphysics always interprets the being of what is by presentation.
- “Where anything that is has become the object of representing, it first incurs in a certain manner a loss of Being”. (P142.AMP)
- the Being itself is forgotten, the truth of Being is concealed.

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- That man becomes subject was a main clue which ran throughout the whole modern metaphysics. And that world is grasped as picture was the historical consequence of metaphysics.
 - If Descartes is the beginning of this process, according to Heidegger, and then Nietzsche as the reversal of Platonism, who completed the metaphysics, must be the end of this process.

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Thank you !