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CHAPTER EIGHT

The Struggle of the Self Against Itself: Adorno and Heidegger on Modernity

Josef Früchtl

The General Thesis

To reflect upon modernity is inevitably to reflect upon the self.¹ This is the general thesis that forms the basis of the following discussion. Hegel was the first to formulate this as the basic question and problem of modern philosophy, and in recent times it has been taken up once again by thinkers who otherwise represent the most varied theoretical perspectives on the present. Thus Habermas, provoked and challenged by the protagonists of so-called post-modernity, has felt called upon to defend the cause of modernity and those *maître-penseurs* (to use André Glucksmann's expression) who have been criticized so vehemently in this connection, namely the heritage of Kant, Hegel, and Marx (though not Nietzsche). Richard Rorty, the principal American representative of the post-modernist challenge, has expressly taken up the alternative and competing cause through a vigorous defense and rehabilitation of the Romantic tradition and its ideal of human self-creation through art and artistic sensibility (a strategy that will hardly come as a surprise, at least to German readers). There are also of course numerous French representatives of this challenging current of thought. Thus Michel Foucault, in *Les mots et les choses* (in English translation, *The Order of Things*), attempted to describe modernity from a theoretical-historical perspective in terms of the 'episteme' of 'Man,' understood as sub-

jectivity; in *Surveiller et punir (Discipline and Punish)*, he appealed to a genealogical theory of power to reinterpret modernity in terms of a fundamentally 'disciplinary society': the development of subjectivity here represents a process of discipline and regulation, and vice versa. The specifically modern form of rule and regulation transforms those who are ruled and regulated into 'subjects' insofar as they learn inwardly to rule and regulate themselves. Jean-François Lyotard, in *La condition postmoderne (The Post-modern Condition)*, attempted to identify modernity as an epoch grounded in a self-legitimizing discourse that is articulated through various 'grand' or 'meta-' narratives. Unlike the post-modernity invoked by Lyotard himself, modernity requires a specific grounding or foundation, derived from within itself, and the appropriate model here, as originally suggested by Descartes, can be provided only by the ego or subject. Again, like Rorty, Charles Taylor has emphasized the romantically accentuated expressive dimension of subjectivity for a proper understanding of modernity (this was already a major theme of Taylor's large book on Hegel, which he has further systematically developed in *Sources of the Self*). But the identity of the modern age is also nourished by other important sources, religious and rationalist ones, and Taylor himself wavers between a post-modern emphasis upon the inevitable internal conflict of these different sources and a kind of classically modern overall synthesis that is reminiscent of Hegel.

To reflect upon modernity is thus, indeed, to reflect upon the self. But to reflect upon the self is therefore to thematize its different dimensions and their internal relationship to one another, for the self or the I, as Hegel above all had already shown, cannot be grasped as a simple unity. The I that knows itself as I thereby negates its apparent identity and sustains itself (both preserves and acquires itself) as a duality, as an I that equals I. Whoever says 'I' has always already doubled himself and implicitly said 'I' twice. This is why 'diremption' and 'self-othering,' or 'externalization' (*Entäusserung*), are basic concepts in Hegel's philosophy, even if the fundamental underlying motif here (that something is itself and its own opposite) has a theological origin and is essentially a secularized form of the Christian doctrine of *kenosis* as the self-othering of God in the incarnation.²

The German Romantics, philosophers and writers like Schelling, F. Schlegel, and Novalis, also dramatized this inner contradiction within the

self and developed this thought in terms of tragedy or irony. The ego here is nothing but an infinite and ceaseless movement, a never-ending attempt to identify itself as authentic or self-transparent. This challenging thought cannot properly be grasped through Hegelian dialectics, but only by recourse to an aesthetics that invites and acknowledges paradox, or perhaps, as in the later phases of German Romanticism, by recourse to religion or the new kind of philosophy that eventually came to be known as 'existentialism.' Here we see the pre-modern principle of the tragic, originally articulated in the ancient Greek world, re-emerging in the midst of modernity itself. For, as Hegel again had emphasized, tragic conflict involves a collision of values that appears as inevitable as it is irresolvable, since the competing claims involved appear to be equally justified.³ But it is true to say that Romanticism did not specifically cultivate the tragic as such, but tended rather to present 'irony' as an alternative form of art. The tragic moment appears in modernity in a less tragic form: as an *agon*, as the contest and struggle of equally powerful elements.

All these problems also reappear in contemporary attempts to theorize modernity. While Habermas generally endorses Hegel's interpretation of modernity, and its characteristic principle of the subject or ego, he does not start from the Hegelian idea of a bifurcated unity, but interprets the principle in a threefold manner broadly corresponding to the structure of Kant's critical philosophy: as a relation between the dimensions of self-knowledge, of self-determination, and of what I would call, deviating from Habermas's own terminology here, self-experience. But the dimension of self-determination is fractured by an inner conflict, namely, that between autonomy and authenticity, between (deontological) morality and (eudaimonist) ethics, between self-determination in the strict sense and self-realization in general. 'Enlightenment' in the properly Kantian sense is directed essentially toward the first alternative in each case, toward autonomy and morality, while the Romantic approach is primarily concerned with the second, with the self-realization, self-creation, and self-expression of concrete individuality.

Contemporary theorists and interpreters of modernity have reacted to this problem with a variety of different strategies that emphasize the need for an *expanded-classical*, an *agonistic*, or a *hybrid* conception of modernity. The agonistic conception, along with essential elements of the

hybrid one, can be regarded as versions of a generalized *Romantic* emphasis upon the ineliminable moment of *conflict*, while the expanded-classical conception can be read as a continuation of an *Enlightenment* notion of *reconciliation*. Thus Habermas transforms the basic conflict involved here with a new expanded principle of subjectivity, namely, the principle of communicative inter-subjectivity, but he can only really resolve it by granting ultimate priority to a morality oriented toward principles of justice. Rorty alleviates the conflict in an ironic, but also dogmatic, manner by appeal to the traditional liberal principle of the separation of spheres. Public morality and private self-creation are sharply distinguished and emphatically set over against one another. Taylor acknowledges the conflict and recognizes that the tensions between the different major sources of our moral tradition are characteristic of modernity itself, but he aspires to resolve the difficulty by appeal to an aesthetically redeemed form of metaphysics. For Taylor's moral ontology, and the trans-subjective value and significance of those 'hypergoods' that form the necessary background that discloses specific norms, can be justified only by recourse to the 'epiphanic' potentialities of art. A truly agonistic conception, which refuses to betray the Romantic emphasis upon dissension in a liberal or metaphysical fashion, simply leaves the conflict irresolvable in principle. It is the French theorists who furnish the clearest example of this approach, whether in its harshest form, which appeals to the experience of *rupture* (Foucault and Lyotard), or its weaker version, which invokes displacement, *différance*, or *rhizome* (Derrida and Deleuze).

To reflect upon the self in an appropriately modern way means giving much greater weight to that dimension that Habermas all too easily and quickly accommodates under the concept of the aesthetic-expressive. It means giving greater weight to the agonistic-ironic (Rorty), the agonistic-expressive (Taylor), and the hybrid-creative (Foucault, Deleuze, and Guattari), in short to the Romantic dimension. In this sense I shall be concerned here with emphasizing what I shall call the *Romantic* discourse of modernity. According to the core thesis of this discourse, modernity is the struggle of the self with and against itself.

The End of the Individual

If we now consider Adorno in relation to the context that I have just briefly sketched, we would surely have to say that he maintains an intermediate position here between the classical understanding of modernity as articulated by Hegel and the agonistic conception of modernity developed by the Romantic tradition. Adorno's achievement was to combine the theory of dialectic with an aesthetics of paradox, to present the process of thinking through a series of unavoidable contradictions, pursuing this idea not dynamically under the sign of some preordained progress, but by inscribing it emphatically within the conflictual network of a 'negative dialectic.' If we say A, we must also say B, but there is no longer any C in which both former terms could successfully be 'sublated' (*aufgehoben*). A and B continue to stand over against one another, each with an equal right, with an equal truth. And yet, although this is all too frequently overlooked, the equality here is not itself total or complete. As Adorno shows in *Minima Moralia*, perhaps his finest and most successful work from a literary perspective, which side one ultimately adopts in the case of a fundamental collision of norms or values is certainly no matter of indifference. While it is true that there is nothing absolute here, nothing absolutely good, there are indeed things that are more or less good than others. In *Minima Moralia* this thought is best expressed in a motto that derives from Francis Herbert Bradley, a famous Fellow of Merton College Oxford, where Adorno was enrolled as an 'advanced student' in the mid-1930s after he had completed his post-doctoral dissertation in Germany and eventually fled the Nazi regime. "Where everything is bad, it must be good to know the worst."⁴ The good is simply knowledge of what is (more or less) bad. This moral-philosophical point is clearly shaped by the contemporary political circumstances. But it had already been theoretically anticipated by Adorno's (and Horkheimer's) original attempt to combine elements from the thought of Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, and Weber. It was this project that first produced the distinctive culturally and psychoanalytically based social theory and, ultimately, in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the characteristic philosophy of history that furnished the basic premise for our chastening motto: namely, the thought that 'everything is bad.'

But the problem that this premise ascribes to the principle of society

itself can also be formulated in the language of transcendental philosophy. For it was a central concern of Adorno's, and indeed of all post-Hegelian philosophy, to expose and decode the content of what Kant and the German Idealist tradition had called 'transcendental consciousness.' Marx had already contributed to this task with his concepts of 'ideology' and 'social praxis,' and twentieth-century thought would explicitly develop it further. In the field of philosophy, as in that of historiography, we can say that the twentieth century only really begins in the 1920s.⁵ Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* (1921), Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness* (1923), and Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1927) are the three decisive texts in this respect. Common to them all is the attempt to penetrate behind transcendental consciousness, even if what they claim to discover there is quite different in each case: *language*, *society*, and *being*, respectively. The 'subject' finds itself accordingly de-centered linguistically, ideologically, and ontologically. In this respect Adorno himself clearly stands in the tradition that runs from Marx to Lukács insofar as society here reveals itself as the true transcendental subject. It is society that constitutes empirical subjects and the world-view (in the literal and extended sense) that they generally share. On the one hand, this allows us in certain rare cases of artists and thinkers to justify the genuinely universal claim that is articulated in their work and thought without appealing to the concept of genius. On the other hand, the consequences of this approach are undeniably disastrous as far as the remaining majority of subjects is concerned. The struggle of the self against itself, from this perspective, is not merely that between the moral and the aesthetic, the sensuous and the cognitive, the political and the private self, a struggle that knows no decisive victor, but merely a provisional and damaged one. (For *Minima Moralia* contains, as the subtitle explicitly tells us, "reflections from damaged life.") The struggle in question is also one between the social-transcendental and the empirical subject, and a struggle that the latter is now unambiguously losing.

Adorno, like Horkheimer, describes this defeat through his famous thesis of the end of the individual. In what follows I should like to address this issue directly in order to reveal, in an exemplary manner, the specific form that this struggle of the modern self with itself assumes in Adorno's work. In this connection Adorno draws principally on three theoretical perspectives, those of Marx, Weber, and Freud.

For Adorno 'individuality' and 'the individual' are in the first instance historical, rather than biological or ontological categories. They characterize something that has emerged in the course of history, and therefore something that can also cease to be. Historical materialism is a specific development of this governing perspective: "The individual has been crystallized in and through the forms of political economy, in particular those of urban capitalism." The individual is defined on the one hand through a certain 'independence,' and thus also a certain 'resistance' to the collectivizing tendencies of socialization, an independence on the other hand that the individual only acquires *through* that same process of socialization, namely, through the pursuit and preservation of its own 'particular interest.' The capitalist market system binds the members of society together as economic agents while simultaneously opposing them to one another. Marx proved himself a true student of Hegel in observing that in bourgeois-capitalist society each individual is an end for himself, but one who can never pursue and realize his own ends without making himself and others into mere means. The 'decline' of the individual must therefore be "derived from the overall tendency of society." But this tendency realizes itself not simply as a "mere enemy" of individuation, but precisely "by virtue of individuation."⁶ To this extent the latter reveals itself as a two-sided process that is socially and economically constituted from the first.

The decline of the individual is characteristically marked by a loss of "autonomy" in the economic sense. "It is a mark of the age that, without exception, no one can now determine his own life in a relatively transparent manner, as this was once possible in relation to the market."⁷ This is a thesis that is already familiar from the work of Weber and Marx (once again as an instructive student of Hegel). But Horkheimer and Adorno are willing to acknowledge the role of capitalism only in encouraging individuality in its 'liberal' phase before its eventual monopolistic development during the modern period. It is only in this earlier liberal period that some degree of distance was still possible for the individual, that is, the (small) individual employer or entrepreneur, over against the relations of the market. That is why this figure of early capitalism can also appear as a model of personal individuality in this context. Nonetheless, Adorno is also a good deal more hesitant than Horkheimer in this regard. His preferred models of individuality are to be sought in the sublimated, and therefore less de-

terminate, realm of art and are certainly not limited to the male domain in gender terms. And there is no passage in Adorno's work that expresses this more perfectly than his 'homage' to the figure of Zerlina from Mozart's *Don Giovanni* (1787): "The rhythm of the rococo and the age of Revolution is suspended in the figure of Zerlina. She is no longer a shepherdess and not yet a *citoyenne*. She belongs to an intermediate historical moment and reveals, fleetingly, a kind of humanity neither maimed by feudal coercion nor exposed to bourgeois barbarism."⁸ For it is society, historically developing capitalist society, that furnishes the condition of both the possibility and impossibility of human individuality.

But Adorno also closely combines this politico-economic analysis with a further sociological form of argument. Max Weber is the decisive theorist in this regard. Adorno's lecture "The Individual and Organization," from 1950, gathers together the various argumentative strands of his debt to Weber. There Adorno identifies the "disturbing character" of the concept of organization in the fact that it has come to assume a truly "all-embracing form that structures society through and through."⁹ And this characteristic structural feature also corresponds to one equally reproduced within the subject itself, for employers and employees do not merely designate certain professions or occupations, but also "types." And as such they have come to involve certain values like "responsibility for oneself," "foresight," "commitment to duty," but also a certain "rigid self-imposition of conscience, an internalized dependency upon authorities of one kind or another."¹⁰

In this regard Weber exercises a particularly powerful influence in the development of Adorno's argument. Adorno's analysis of 'bourgeois anthropology' in terms of the fulfillment of duty and the coercive power of conscience points back of course to Weber's celebrated study *Protestantism and the 'Spirit' of Capitalism*. There Weber claims that the rational conduct of life based upon a vocational ethos is constitutive for modern capitalism and indeed modern culture in general, and is itself ultimately derived from the spirit of Christian, specifically puritan, asceticism. The consequence of this puritanically based ethos, which emphasizes the solitude of the individual subject who must seek God's grace, is ambivalent. On the one hand it implies the "absolutely negative attitude of puritanism in relation to all sensuous and emotional elements," while on the other hand it also repre-

sents “one of the roots” of that “illusionless and pessimistically colored” individualism that has established itself so firmly in the Anglo-American world.¹¹

Horkheimer and Adorno acknowledge this ambivalence but lend it added emphasis through recourse to a Hegelian dialectic and radicalize it by reference to Marxian theory, and the subsequent cultural generalization of that theory in Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness*. They are not simply content with interpreting this ambivalence in the established moderate form that bourgeois-capitalist society liberates human beings in one respect, while simultaneously oppressing them in another. Rather, they strictly link both these respects directly with one another: each emerges only in and through the other. The birth of the individual is *only* possible *through* the concomitant mortification of that individual as a sensuous and hedonistic being. In *Dialectic of Enlightenment* this specific process is captured in pregnant formula: “self-preservation through self-destruction.” “Destruction” here bears a primarily internal-psychological sense. It refers to “renunciation” and “the introversion of sacrifice,”¹² precisely that asceticism characteristic of the ‘Protestant’ phase of western history that Weber had analyzed and identified.

Moreover, Adorno’s politico-economic and historico-sociologic argument runs parallel with a specifically psychological one. Adorno develops the latter under a title that alludes indirectly to a text by Kierkegaard: namely, “Health unto Death.” The fact that “contemporary sickness consists precisely in supposed normality,” that human beings are psychologically deformed without even registering the fact, thus requires a psychoanalytic explanation, or as Adorno often expresses it in a conditional form, *would* properly require just such an explanation, for Adorno can hardly suggest more than a certain “suspicion” or “supposition” in this connection. But we must here at least acknowledge his heuristic proposal for a specific etiology of neurosis that effectively goes beyond the Freudian perspective. For a psychoanalytic interpretation of the “regular guy” and the “popular girl”—the human type that is principally envisaged by Adorno here and is itself directly produced by the American culture industry—must assume that the perpetual “gaiety, openness and approachability” of such a type results from a second-order repression that is directed not merely against instinctual impulses, but also against the symptoms of

first-order repression. Symptoms effectively give evidence of a sickness, but when these too are repressed, it is no longer possible to diagnose a sickness directly in the first place.

Under these conditions, which could hardly be presented or justified in purely objective scientific terms, Adorno is honest enough to admit that he requires a moral criterion for his own claims. We can only show that those who believe themselves healthy are actually sick by “revealing the disproportion between their rationalized way of life and a different possible and rational form of life.”¹³ How this criterion can itself be justified presents a problem for which the earlier representatives of Critical Theory were unable to provide a satisfactory solution. In *Minima Moralia*, as we have seen, and much later in *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno expounds the unsatisfactory character of solutions generally proposed by moral philosophy from the varying perspectives of universalism, particularism, contract theory, moral skepticism, and the ethics of compassion. There simply is no unconditionally right answer here. The best we can do is to discover the least bad solution. But it is impossible, at least for Adorno, to say clearly and precisely what this amounts to. In the last analysis, therefore, Adorno fails to justify or clarify philosophically the moral criterion that is required here.

It is true, in this connection, too, that Adorno upholds the central criterion of autonomy, which he interprets in accordance with Freud and the Freudian tradition. Adorno had already presented this interpretation of autonomy in relation to the figures of Zerlina and Don Giovanni: through the idea of surrender. For what surrender, or ‘self-othering’ as Hegel would say, properly demands, in Freudian terms, is precisely a ‘strong’ ego rather than a ‘weak’ and accommodating one. The strong ego is a psychoanalytical equivalent to the autonomous Kantian subject, the self that judges independently and acts in a universal manner. This ego also requires the equally important development of that dimension which western rationalism with its characteristically limited concept of rationality has effectively repressed: the sensuous or ‘mimetic’ dimension of the self.¹⁴

The thesis of the end of the individual can also draw further psychoanalytic support from theories of “self-identification with the aggressor” or “gratification through identification with the mass,” etc. And Adorno appeals to all these theoretical approaches, deeply radicalizing them

and thereby distancing them from the normal empirical procedures of scientific research, for the disadvantage of all such reliably and empirically grounded knowledge is that it readily congeals into the 'conventional.' And this is clearly a serious problem for any critic of society who sees everything unconventional threatened by historical developments, but especially for a thinker like Adorno, who emphasizes the independent character of thought and of one's own "experience" above all else.¹⁵ In attempting to justify his thesis of the end of the individual in psychoanalytic, politico-economic, and sociological terms, Adorno's work thus deliberately operates in a kind of indeterminate and intermediate space between scientific research and unregulated, spontaneous experience. He simply hopes to formulate a general hypothesis that may prompt further investigation and independent reflection.

Heroic Nihilism and Releasement

On the one hand, therefore, the internal struggle of the modern self we have been describing culminates in Adorno in a negatively dialectical, paradoxical, or aporetic predicament. The different dimensions of the self, that is, the different dimensions of modernity, those of the universal and the particular, of (Kantian) self-determination and (Romantic) self-realization, of discursive knowledge and individual experience, cannot successfully be brought into a genuinely non-contradictory relationship with one another. On the other hand, Adorno suggests that the struggle between the individual-empirical and the social-transcendental ego in modernity has already yielded a clear victor: totalitarian society finally triumphs with the end of the individual.

In relation to this analysis Heidegger represents, in the first instance, a different kind of approach altogether. His way of thinking is paradigmatically oriented toward a philosophy of being, rather than to a philosophy of consciousness that remains within the parameters of the subject-object relation and is expressly articulated as a critical theory of society. Instead of decentering the subject through a critique of ideology, Heidegger attempts to do so ontologically. Already in *Being and Time*, the 'subject' that is recast as *Dasein* is essentially the 'there' (*Da*) of being. To this extent there is therefore a certain analogy, or identity in difference, in rela-

tion to Adorno. But there are also some specific corresponding similarities, with regard both to particular claims and to particular patterns of thought, in Heidegger and Adorno. One of the corresponding patterns of thought that particularly interests me here includes, as I shall show in more detail, the agonistic motif, that of an irreconcilable—that is to say, romantically modern—conflict within and between prevailing principles of thought. But precisely here it is also possible to identify a striking contrast between the two thinkers. Whereas *Adorno* holds a certain balance between a more *classically Hegelian* and a *Romantic-agonistic* style of thought, *Heidegger* operates in a space between an *agonistic* and what I called a ‘*hybrid*’ style of thinking. I understand the term here not in the etymologically connected ethical or psychological sense of *hubris* as ‘self-exaltation’ (over-valuation of the self), but rather in the specific sense familiar from biology, namely that of ‘crossing’ and ‘intersecting.’ On this reading, the development of Heidegger’s thought turns from a heroic, ethically and psychologically ‘hybristic,’ self to a self that is capable of affirming being, albeit a self that can no longer properly be described in the prevailing determinate modes of discourse, a self that can however be characterized as hybrid in the modern, originally biological, sense of the word.

Heidegger remained attached to the hybristic concept of the self as long as he continued to follow Nietzsche in interpreting the modern world as the culmination of European *nihilism*. In this phase of his thought he still regarded Nietzsche’s provocative distinction between ‘passive’ and ‘active’ nihilism as a possible solution for the fundamental and self-generated crisis of the West. Nihilism implies that there is “no longer any end or purpose” (*Ziel*) in which “all the powers of the historical *Dasein* of peoples” could be “brought together,” no end or purpose that such historical *Dasein* could project in a “unifying” fashion. And that is also to say, in Nietzsche’s words, that there is no longer any God, any ground (*arche*) or purpose (*telos*) of historical development or change.¹⁶ Every kind of super-sensible principle, and especially the Christian one, has already forfeited its historical power. Here ‘active nihilism’ seems at first to offer a solution. Heidegger thus proudly proclaims the need for sacrifice, adopting the maxim that “that which is falling should also be pushed!”¹⁷ ‘Passive’ nihilism, on the other hand, clings to the old values without recognizing that these are already dissolving through an internal logic of their own. Like many other

social and cultural critics of his period, Heidegger contemptuously ascribes this passive nihilism to the mediocre type of outlook that supposedly characterizes bourgeois life, without realizing how much he was simply reproducing an established stereotype in this respect.¹⁸ The writer Ernst Jünger belongs among such critics, too. He was also willing to draw specific social and political consequences from Nietzsche's general diagnosis of nihilism. Heidegger admiringly incorporated Jünger's essay "Total Mobilization" (1930) and his book *The Worker* (1932) into his own philosophical reflections. Rejecting the Hegelian, and in a certain sense already Kantian, view that the modern age represented a self-determining era, an epoch of freedom, Heidegger presented it rather as an age of the forgetting of being, of existential and metaphysical ignorance. Jünger's 'worker' stands for the new anti-bourgeois type of individual who finds both an aesthetic and redeeming form of creative virility in the activity of struggle, in struggle for the sake of struggle, who is prepared to serve a state that is organized throughout along principles of readiness for war. Jünger, like Nietzsche, seemed to offer Heidegger a way of escaping the European crisis. Their *heroic nihilism* wills the overcoming of prevailing nihilism through a heroic act, through actively consummating the process of decline that is immanent in European culture, through attempting a revolutionary grounding for a new culture.¹⁹

The total mobilization that National Socialism effectively accomplished thus initially appeared to Heidegger as a potentially successful counter-movement against nihilism. But only initially. Heidegger's reading of Nietzsche subsequently begins to pursue "a strategy of double association, of Nietzsche with the essence of modernity, and modern metaphysics with the nihilistic essence of the Western tradition."²⁰ While Heidegger continues to claim that Nietzsche has brought the nihilistic essence of modernity to light, he also argues that nihilism itself, together with the critique of nihilism, including therefore Nietzsche himself, is nothing but the culmination of the metaphysical tradition since Plato. This second claim is developed on the basis of a specific conception of metaphysics that Heidegger had already emphatically announced in his Inaugural Address at Freiburg in 1929. On this account metaphysics is the science of being (of the being of beings). But with the dawn of the modern age, according to Heidegger, beings are definitively identified with what is actual insofar as

they submit to the calculating and rationalizing process of objectification, and thus the ongoing process of manipulation and control. The 'will' thus reveals itself as the fundamental principle here. Nietzsche had already expressed this with the formula of "the will to power" without being able himself to reflect critically in turn upon its significance. For Heidegger, nihilism has thus come to mean that the question of questions, "what is being?," can no longer be asked. If being is completely subjected to the human will, then the ungroundable super-sensible ground that religion names as God has been lost. From this perspective, the modern age represents a desperate and increasingly catastrophic attempt to find a response to the death of God, a substitute for the highest principle that once guided human action. To take leave of modernity, therefore, is to take leave of the entire tradition of metaphysics. In this respect Heidegger has found ready and eager students in Derrida and Vattimo.²¹

In the first instance, therefore, the figure of the hero represents a substitute for God, and not merely to Nietzsche and Heidegger. One could write, as I try to in *Das unverschämte Ich (The Impertinent Self)*, the entire history of the modern age since the beginning of the nineteenth century as a profoundly ambivalent tale of heroes. Yet the hero is the very embodiment of the will, and thus remains itself a moment caught up in the history of decline that characterizes the West. It was precisely Nietzsche's achievement to reveal this, and although this was something that Heidegger himself was unwilling to appreciate, his own French followers have been more than ready to do so under the banner of post-modernism. Deleuze in particular, in his book on Nietzsche, has emphasized the overcoming of the (hybristic) self in the direction of the *Übermensch* and a corresponding kind of ontological affirmation. The Over-Man affirms a process of becoming that includes affirmation and repudiation as true being. But what Deleuze fails to recognize is that Nietzsche presents this overcoming in a *twofold* form, in terms of an infinite movement and in terms of a series of stages. The 'over' that belongs to the Over-Man refers on the one hand to something 'higher,' on the other to something 'over and above' or 'beyond.' This is not itself a contradiction, for it is only on the highest level that the infinite movement can commence. On this level, as English appropriately allows us to put it, the *superman* can become the *overman*. This level replaces the linear development from lower to higher stages with a cir-

cling movement.²² The self no longer tries to be *better*, but to be *otherwise*. To reach this level human beings must be able to transcend and relinquish two great stages, that of the ought and that of the will, if they are to arrive at the stage of (the affirmation of) being: “Higher than ‘Thou shouldst’ stands: ‘I wish’ (the heroes); higher than ‘I wish’ stands: ‘I am’ (the Gods of the Greeks).”²³

But in order to unfold the full sense of this ontological affirmation Nietzsche also draws upon the aesthetic tradition, and Heidegger follows him here, apparently without realizing that this is what he is effectively doing. For Nietzsche, the overman explicitly takes the place formerly occupied by the genius and the artist. The overman stands for a de-sublimated art that has been returned to life. And in this connection Nietzsche answers the relevant question concerning the nature of art in an entirely traditional way, for the overman is one who has learned to forget the ‘heroic will’ and thereby learned to grasp the contingent, the *Zufall*, which literally falls to our lot, as a matter of favor, fortune, or grace. But the appropriate paradigm for this, in accordance with the classical idealist tradition, is the beautiful. As Nietzsche puts it, “The beautiful eludes the vehement will.”²⁴ It calls rather for a light and carefree effort to let it transpire, let it touch us. And when “power” becomes “gracious,” as Nietzsche says, when it bestows, or appears to bestow, its “favor” (*Gunst*) upon us, as Kant and also Heidegger can say, this manifests itself for Nietzsche, as it had for Kant, precisely as “beauty.” The “ultimate self-overcoming” consists therefore in shaping one’s life aesthetically in the sense of permitting passivity itself to enter in all dynamic activity. This is precisely what is possible for the “overhero” (*Über-Held*) who has finally relinquished everything that marked the hero, namely: willing, struggling, fighting.²⁵

It is thus the overman reconceived as overhero that furnishes a more appropriate substitute for God. Heidegger himself finds a variety of expressions for this substitute: “releasement,” an “other kind of thinking,” an “essential,” a “commemorative,” an “originary thinking,” etc.²⁶ It would not be easy to identify the contribution of the active or passive elements, of willing and letting, in such thinking. There is much in Heidegger, however, that implies a certain priority on the part of passivity. He thus easily exposes himself to a cognitivist and political kind of critique insofar as a thinking that hearkens so faithfully to being turns to a trans-discursive

realm of knowing and, from the practical and political perspective, would seem to encourage a posture of obedience.²⁷ But there is also something here that suggests a finely balanced relationship between activity and passivity: the way in which Heidegger characterizes the various analogous relationships explored in his thinking. He says that releasement or letting-be (*Gelassenheit*) involves a “simultaneous posture of yes and no with regard to the world of technicity.”²⁸ Similarly, the relationship between “world” and “earth,” the principle of “revealing” and “concealing,” of the *dis*-closing and closing-*off* of meaning, as presented in the essay on the work of art, is marked by an agonistic parity that Heidegger calls “strife.”²⁹ But this interdependence of activity and passivity is also particularly well-exemplified in the relationship between traditional metaphysical thought and Heidegger’s own metaphysics of alterity. The latter cannot be conceived as something that is simply contrary to, or a simple contradiction of, the former. As Heidegger puts it, echoing Hegel and Freud, all “counter-movements remain entangled in what they overcome.”³⁰ It is not as if false thought holds sway on one side, while true thought occupies the other. On the contrary, the ‘other thinking,’ the truly ‘originary’ thinking, is something that belongs to the future. It is rather, as Derrida says, something that is perpetually displaced. If this were not the case, history itself would no longer be open. There can be no end of metaphysics, and thereby of modernity, and therefore no radical post-modernity either.³¹

And yet this ‘other thinking’ is also supposed to be *entirely* other. Its relationship to the preceding thought of the tradition remains unclear, and certainly becomes no clearer when we are told that both kinds of thinking are “the conflictual in concordance, the concordance of the conflictual.”³² The basically *agonistic* character of this relationship, however, is quite clear. To this extent the principle of modernity, the struggle of the self with itself, appears in Heidegger on an anonymous, subjectless level of thought, as a struggle between two fundamentally different paradigms. In this sense Heidegger offers an utterly modern response to the problem of thinking. This response specifically assumes a position between the agonistic and hybrid versions of modernity, for the modern age is hybrid not only in the sense that it appeals to the principle of the creative human being as a surrogate for God and thereby tends constantly toward a certain hybris, but also insofar as it de-subjectivizes this very principle and renders it any-

mous, de-sublimating the 'humanistic' form that it had assumed in the modern philosophy of subjectivity. This 'other thinking' wishes to be neither new in a revolutionary sense nor merely, so to speak, a little different from what has gone before. It wishes rather to be the one precisely through the other, to be what has never been thought precisely through the ceaseless recombination and re-articulation of what has already been thought. But it was Deleuze who expressed this emphatically hybrid understanding of thought much more uninhibitedly than Heidegger. In stressing the dynamic and radically non-circumscribable character of being, both thinkers reveal themselves as the inheritors of 'life philosophy' and the Romantic tradition. They are also indebted to the Romantic tradition to the extent that they both (like Derrida, too) make appeal to the aesthetic dimension as the appropriate *model* for thinking. To this extent Rorty is right to interpret Heidegger (and Derrida) in relation to the philosophy of Romantic self-creation. But what also leads Heidegger far beyond this kind of private philosophy of the self—and this is something for which Rorty has no appreciation whatsoever—is Heidegger's attempt to rethink metaphysics under specifically modern conditions, or to put it differently: after Hegel to reconcile modernity once again with metaphysics. And this is something, once again, that he shares with Adorno.

—*Translated by Nicholas Walker*