

Reason and the Critique of Reason in Heidegger's Thought

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Abstract. If, in the history of philosophy, all manifestations of culture were brought before the judgment seat of reason, today it seems rather the other way around, as if reason were on trial. Has reason, the question arises, reached the end of its history and even the end itself? Hardly any thinker before him has undermined, depreciated and dissolved reason as much as Martin Heidegger. The actual main point of Heidegger's critique of reason is the questioning of the centuries-old understanding of human beings as *animal rationale*. According to Heidegger, an understanding of human beings as *animal rationale* prevents the 'clearing' [*Lichtung*] of being. For this reason, Heidegger continues, we must be careful not to resort to any 'properties' and 'capabilities' of human beings, for example, to reason. This article aims to determine the validity of this warning today and to what extent Heidegger's thinking of reason and critique of reason can claim current philosophical relevance. First, Heidegger's engagement with Kant and Husserl will be examined, along with his attempt to reflect on the origin of reason and logic. Subsequently, the focus will be on Heidegger's critical engagement with the calculating thinking of modernity and the influential figures of thought 'machination' [*Machenschaft*] and 'enframing' [*Ge-Stell*], in order to conclude with a short reference to the present. In doing so, I will comment, in particular, on two central aspects of Heidegger's thinking on reason and offer a brief outlook.

Keywords: reason, critique of reason, logos, rationalism, science, technology, mathematics, method.

Protas ir proto kritika Heideggerio mąstyme

Santrauka. Filosofijos istorijoje visas kultūros apraiškas teko vertinti ir teisti protui, tačiau šiandien susidaro įspūdis, kad vaidmenys apsigėitė ir dabar atrodo, tarytum būtų teisiama protas. Iškykla klausimas: ar protas pasiekė savo istorijos pabaigą, o galbūt net ir pačią pabaigą? Būtų sunku atrasti kokį nors Martino Heideggerio pirmą, kuris būtų taip kritikavęs, taip nuvertinęs protą ir jį iš esmės dekonstravęs kaip pats Heideggeris. Tikrasis Heideggerio proto kritikos kertinis taškas yra metamas iššūkis daugelį šimtmečių gyvavusiai nuostatai, kad žmogus yra *animal rationale*. Pasak Heideggerio, žmogaus suvokimas kaip *animal rationale* yra kliūtis būties „prošvaistei“ [*Lichtung*]. Heideggeris teigia, kad dėl šios priežasties privalome būti atsargūs, kad neapsiribotume kokiomis nors žmogaus „savybėmis“ arba „gebėjimais“, pavyzdžiui, protu. Šiame straipsnyje siekiama įvertinti tokio įspėjimo pagrįstumą šiandien ir nustatyti, kokių mastu Heideggerio mąstymas apie protą ir proto kritika yra aktualūs filosofijai šiandien. Visų pirma, straipsnyje analizuojamas Heideggerio santykis su Kantu ir Husserliu. Kartu svarstomas ir Heideggerio bandymas aptarti proto ir logikos kilmę. Toliau straipsnyje susitelkiama į Heideggerio kritiką kalkuliaciniam modernybės mąstymui bei įtakingus autorius mąstymo „mašinizacijos“ [*Machenschaft*] bei „po-statos“ [*Ge-Stell*] srityse. Straipsnis apibendrinamas pateikiant trumpą nuorodą į dabartį. Atskleidamas šią perspektyvą, aš visų pirma pakomentuosiu du kertinius Heideggerio mąstymo apie protą aspektus bei pristatysiu trumpą jų apžvalgą.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: protas, proto kritika, *logos*, racionalizmas, mokslas, technologija, matematika, metodas

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1. Preliminary Consideration and Introduction

While in the history of philosophy all manifestations of culture were brought before the judgment seat of reason, today it seems rather the other way around, as if reason itself were standing before judgment – and not before the examining self-judgment, but before the ‘other of reason’ – in particular, as a result of the harrowing experiences of the last century. Has reason reached the end of its history and is it even at an end itself (cf. Schulthess 1993; Bolz & Gethmann 1997: 10–21 and Pretzsch 2025: 279–288)? Has its authority dissolved into a multiplicity of partial authorities and rationalities, the unity of which must have been doubted long ago, so that talk of the one ‘reason’ in the singular has become questionable? Do we have to state *cum grano salis* today that the great Western project of reason has ended in a ‘dead end’ (cf. Krings 1994: 15-50)?

What is certain is that the absolutisation and self-overburdening of reason in German idealism in the 19th and 20th centuries was followed either by a broad return to the Kantian conception of reason, as in neo-Kantianism, or by a multifaceted critique of reason that intended the de-empowerment, relativisation or even abolition of reason altogether. Hardly any thinker – perhaps with the exception of Hamann, Schopenhauer and Nietzsche – has ever undermined, depowered and dissolved reason as much as Martin Heidegger. The competing philosophical project of critical theory lived and drew sustenance – perhaps even in an interdependent relationship – from Heidegger’s critical approaches to reason, despite all attempts at dissociation. There is no doubt that Heidegger, along with Nietzsche, was the inspiration behind *the critical rationality approaches* of Foucault and Derrida.

The real crux of Heidegger’s critique of reason is the questioning of the centuries-old understanding of human beings as an *animal rationale*. It is precisely this understanding, in Heidegger’s view, that resulted from a modern, reason-based thinking that has forgotten itself, which is based on a modern metaphysics of the will, is strongly aware of its technical and practical limitations – human beings becomes a ‘calculating creature’ (cf. Heidegger 1997d: 189) and is driven into a ‘spiritual narrowness’, perpetuated to instrumental reason, thereby harbouring a self-destructive potential. In a nutshell: according to Heidegger, understanding man as *animal rationale* prevents the ‘clearing’ (cf. Heidegger 2007: 79 and cf. Heidegger 2003b: 247) of being. For this reason, Heidegger continues, we must “be careful not to resort to any ‘qualities’ and ‘capabilities’ of man, for example to reason” (Heidegger 2003a: 453f.; and see in this context Wildfeuer 2011: 2333–2370).

In this admonition, not only Heidegger’s lifelong struggle with man’s forgetfulness of being but also his deep-seated mistrust of every (universal) claim to orientation, which is connected with the succinct reference to reason, is evident. In his famous lecture *Was ist das – die Philosophie?* from 1955, Heidegger once again questions the great claims to reason. He deliberates: “What is reason, rationality? Where and by whom was it decided what reason is? Has reason made itself the herring of philosophy? If so, by what right?” (Heidegger 2006: 8) A little later, he attributes a “coldness of calculation” and a “prosaic sobriety” (Heidegger 2006: 24f.) to reason in its present-day appearance. In the modern

age, reason characterises itself, according to Heidegger in his lecture, primarily as “confidence in logical-mathematical insight” in “principles and rules” (Heidegger 2006: 24f.).

In my opinion, it is more worthwhile than ever today to take an interest in Heidegger’s thinking on reason, because his reflections hold up a critical mirror to our times: they help us understand how we think, why we think that way, and where a certain form of rationality leads us. We must engage with his approach because it reveals the blind spots that arise when reason is understood exclusively as a technical, calculating or planning entity. Especially in an era dominated by digitalisation, automation and increased efficiency, Heidegger confronts us with the question of whether we are losing essential dimensions of human thought and existence.

Today, in particular, it is worthwhile to look at Heidegger’s thinking on reason because he opens up a perspective that challenges our present in surprising ways. While modern rationality is often identified with calculation, efficiency, planning and technical feasibility, Heidegger attempts to liberate reason from its narrow focus on instrumental logic. He reminds us that reason is more than calculation – i.e., that it includes open questioning, reflection on the meaning of being, and listening to that which eludes us. In an age characterised by technological acceleration, algorithmic control, and the belief in unlimited power of disposal, Heidegger calls on us to question the foundations of this attitude. His thinking thus becomes an antidote to the tendency to treat the world and human beings solely as resources. At the same time, he offers suggestions for a way of thinking that does not have to be immediately ‘useful’ but creates space for serenity, for other ways of relating to the world, for a pause that does more justice to the complexity of our time than any hasty solution. In this sense, Heidegger’s concept of reason – as a way of thinking that does not calculate but lingers in the open – can be an important correction and a necessary counterweight, especially today.

This article aims to show the extent to which we can still ascribe validity to Heidegger’s admonition today and to what extent Heidegger’s thinking of reason and critique of reason can claim current philosophical relevance. It is divided into two parts: the first part looks at Heidegger’s engagement with Kant and Husserl and his attempt to reflect on the origin of reason and logic (Section 2). The second part focuses on his critical examination of the calculating thinking of modernity and the influential figures of thought ‘machination’ [*Machenschaft*] and ‘enframing’ [*Ge-Stell*], and concludes with a brief reference to the present (Section 3). I will also raise two points of criticism regarding Heidegger’s approach.

2. Reason and the Critique of Reason – Heidegger’s Critical Engagement with Kant and Husserl and his Attempt to Reflect on the Origin of the Essence of Reason and Logic

A brief introductory assessment. In my opinion, Heidegger’s thinking has a dual relationship to Kant and Husserl: it builds on their work while also transcending it. He takes up Kant’s question about the conditions of the possibility of knowledge, but shifts it from the theory of the subject to the fundamental question of being itself. Kant’s transcendental

investigation becomes a fundamental ontological one in Heidegger's work: the focus is no longer on the structure of cognition, but on the mode of being-in-the-world. Heidegger's relationship to Husserl, on the other hand, is initially that of a student and continuator of the phenomenological method. He adopts the idea of returning to the things themselves, but radicalises it by not limiting phenomenological description to acts of consciousness – but, instead, extending it to the analysis of the existential structures of being. In doing so, he breaks away from Husserl's intentional philosophy of consciousness and develops an existential phenomenology that both honours Husserl's approach and leaves it behind.

In a critical examination of Kant and Husserl and in his highly ambitious attempt “to think the unthought” (Heidegger 2010: 246), Heidegger undertook a profound attempt at subversion in his attempt to determine the origin of reason and logic: instead of tracing the essence of reason back to the transcendental imagination – which Kant had lost sight of when he reworked the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* in favour of the transcendental ego – as Husserl¹ once did, Heidegger bases reason on the transcendental imagination. For him, the same is the faculty that imagines and envisions everything that exists (cf. Trappe 2000: 165–180). This, however, entails the tremendous consequence that thinking can no longer be understood primarily as ‘judging’, but as ‘pure imagining’. But what results from this is much more powerful: the transcendental imagination now “shakes” the traditional “dominion of reason and understanding” (Heidegger 2010: 243). In addition, “logic [...] is deprived of its priority in metaphysics, a priority that has been established since time immemorial” (Heidegger 2010: 243). Finally, according to Heidegger's approach, it is no longer the transcendental ego that connects the two branches of knowledge, sensuality and understanding, but the transcendental imagination (cf. Hoppe 1970: 284–317; Dahlström 1989: 343–366; Bach 2009: 75–92). According to Heidegger, it is now the actual basic faculty, and it establishes the connection between the categories and reality.

The reverberation of this enormous upheaval becomes particularly clear when one considers that Heidegger – in a view that is known to be closely aligned with Nietzsche – identifies Western metaphysics as logic, insofar as it is carried in all its “basic positions” by “trust in reason” ((Nietzsche 1967ff.: p. 16). The proposition of the ground is itself “the supreme principle of reason, as through it reason first reaches the full development of its essence as reason” (Heidegger 1997d: 176). Logic, as a form of Western metaphysics, is defined by Heidegger himself as reason that is directed towards the clarification and illumination of the “essence of being” (Heidegger 1996: 477).² For him, reason is essentially a “presupposing capacity, that which actually reaches out and encompasses” (Heidegger 1988: 64). Reason constitutes the unity on the basis of which knowledge

¹ Husserl had once interpreted the essence of transcendental imagination as ‘reason’ (hidden) in the sensually-descriptive environment (cf. Husserl 2009: §§ 14; 25). At this point, reference should also be made to the relevant works: McGuirk (2010: 31–56).

² For Heidegger, logic proves to be deficient in that it “not only inhibited but denied and still denies the development of the essence of the logos” (Heidegger 2003b: 232). In *Being and Time*, Heidegger emphasises that the foundation of traditional logic is “in an ontology of beings that is still raw” (Heidegger 2024: 172). In this context, he also interprets logic as a mode derived from the original logos, which is “rooted in the existential analysis of being” (Heidegger 2024: 212). See also in this context Neumann 2006: 65–87 and Dastur 2007.

is possible. Heidegger connects this with the transcendence of human knowledge into a whole of the knowable, just as transcendental reason does in the Kantian sense (cf. Heidegger 1988: 64).

As Heidegger notes in his examination of Nietzsche, only that “which reasonable thinking provides and ensures [...] can claim the seal: being-being” (Heidegger 1989: 531). But it is precisely this “securing of beings” that is subject to the constitutive “conditions of ‘life’”, i.e., it simultaneously means the securing of its “modern technical mastery” (Heidegger 1996: 55). Reason is therefore essentially practical reason: “To imagine being, to think reasonably, is the practice of life, the original securing of its own existence” (Heidegger 1996: 581). The latter takes place in two ways: on the one hand, with a view to the ‘thing’ as calculation, and, on the other hand, with a view to one’s fellow human beings as ‘understanding’, through which “the encounter of the same people in their sameness and selfhood” is first “established” (Heidegger 1996: 579). In both cases, reason is to be understood as “setting an ‘equal’”, as the “free setting forth of a self-same”, i.e., “inventing and inventing out”, in short: “poetic [...] reason” (Heidegger 1996: 583f.), executing itself in the basic achievements of subsumption, scheme- and concept-formation.

2.1. Heidegger’s attempt to reflect on the origin of reason and logic

For Heidegger, the origin of reason and logic does not lie in abstract rules of thought or in an autonomous subject, but rather in humanity’s historical openness to being. For him, reason and logic are derived, and not original, quantities: they only arise when being reveals itself to humans in a certain way, thereby enabling a certain form of thinking.

As is well known, Heidegger believes that the history of the West is characterised by three fundamental positions: its first beginning through “Being and Word”, the metaphysics founded by Plato and Aristotle through “Being and Ratio”, and the second beginning repeating the first through “Being and Time” (Heidegger 2018b: 113).³ In the course of these developments, Heidegger opts not for a metaphysical definition of the essence of man, such as the *animal rationale*, but, instead, for an idea of man as “that being that hears being” (Heidegger 1988: 21). Already in his early work, Heidegger, in his reflections on the origin of the essence of reason and logic and his fundamental problematisation of Western European logocentrism⁴ that λόγος originally means a “letting be heard of being” and only in an extremely derived way also means ‘reason’ (cf. Heidegger 2024: 34), in the later Heidegger, such ‘hearing’ then becomes in modern times a “hearing in the judicial (right-having and right-speaking) sense” (Heidegger 1997b: 295): According to

³ See in particular the article by Stasiulis 2020: 129–136, which successfully highlights that Heidegger’s thinking goes back to its pre-conceptual origins and shows how he thereby fundamentally transforms the concept of rationality. Heidegger, as Stasiulis skilfully points out, concentrates on the ontological basis of Western rationality and develops the structure of his own thinking on this basis. In doing so, Heidegger reinterprets the thinking of Aristotle and Plato in particular, as well as Greek thinking on presence. Central to his thinking is the rediscovered connection between thinking and finitude. His early reflections on the pre-conceptual origins of logical and conceptual thinking culminate in his later, mature philosophy in the idea of pain as an expression of ontological difference.

⁴ In this context, the following works offer a good overview of Heidegger’s thinking of logic: Denker 2006; Kolka 2006: 119–132 and Trawny 2006: 133–159.

Heidegger, the initial 'imagining (νοεῖν)' – "that perceiving which everywhere does not accept being passively, but rather actively looks up and allows the present to be revealed as such in its appearance (εἶδος/ἰδέα)" – developed specifically in the modern era into 'interrogating' (cf. Heidegger 1997b: 295). In ancient times, perceiving was understood as a form of contemplation (θεωρία), which allows itself to be given the lasting form (εἶδος) of being. In modern times, reason is used by Heidegger in a manner that merges into identity with 'thinking', 'understanding' and 'imagining', and thus becomes a "court of law that decides on the being of the being and says that, in the future, only that which is imagined by this being and thus secured for itself should count as a being" (Heidegger 1997b: 295ff.).⁵ "Reasonable, rational imagining" thus follows the "principium rationis" (Heidegger 1997d: 176). It is interesting in this context that Heidegger, in an approach similar to that of Goethe and Nietzsche, does not subordinate reason to moods and sensitivities. He remarks: "Perhaps, however, what we call feeling or mood here is more reasonable, namely more perceptive, because it is more open to being than all reason, which has since become ratio, has been rationally misinterpreted" (Heidegger 2003b: 9).

For Heidegger, this determination of λόγος as a statement 'transforms' itself in the course of the development of metaphysics "into ratio, into reason and into spirit" (Heidegger 1997d: 184 and cf. Richter 1997: 125–147). Ultimately, all these interpretations are preceded by the meaning of λόγος as word – "Being initially gives itself into the word" (Heidegger 1997d: 184). Already in *Sein und Zeit*, Heidegger pointed out the ambiguity of the word λόγος in Plato and Aristotle; the translations are "reason, judgement, concept, definition, reason, relationship" (Heidegger 2024: § 7). The common meaning of λόγος is speech. But speech allows for manifestation (cf. Heidegger 1994a: 115.). From an Aristotelian point of view, every λόγος is λόγος ἀπόφανσις, it means something. The λόγος ἀπόφανσις reveals the respective being "from itself and allows it to be seen" (Heidegger 1997b: 65). Only the disclosure in the articulations of λόγος ἀπόφανσις makes it possible to make distinctions in terms of 'either-or', 'positive-negative', 'true-false' (cf. Heidegger 2004b: 489). Therefore, λόγος ἀπόφανσις is closely connected with freedom for being. "The λόγος ἀπόφανσις as a statement is only possible where freedom exists" (Heidegger 2004b: 492). In the *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge* Heidegger takes up the idea of λόγος ἀπόφανσις again and translates it as "explanation", meaning "letting appear what has come to light from itself, brought out of the dark and hidden into the light" (Heidegger 2005a: 108). For him, ἀπόφανσις as the "letting appear of what is present" (Heidegger 2005a: 108) is the "all-supporting trait of the λόγος of logic" (Heidegger 2005a: 143). But ἀπόφανσις – understood in this way – subsequently disappears in favour of λέγειν τί κατὰ τινός, i.e., the statement that is "presented as a relation in itself" (Heidegger 2005a: 144). This clears the way "for the development of thinking as calculating, justifying, concluding" and thus for the "modern technical world" (Heidegger 2005a: 144f.). Heidegger's further reflection on the origin of the essence of rea-

⁵ See also Heidegger's remark elsewhere: "Only what rational thinking provides and ensures has a claim to the seal: *being as being*. The sole and highest court of law, in whose face and field of vision it is decided what is and is not, is reason. With reason, the ultimate preliminary decision is made as to what being means" (Heidegger 1996: 478).

son and logic leads via ‘ratio’ – which, in itself, ambiguously denotes “reason and reason” (Heidegger 1997d: 167)⁶ – ultimately to Heraclitus’ λόγος (cf. Heidegger 1997d: 177ff.). In Heraclitus’ thinking, Heidegger then recognises ‘originally’ and ‘in terms of being’ that supreme moment in which being is not thought “from the standpoint of beings”, but rather “as being, namely as ground, i.e. not as ratio, not as cause, not as rational ground and reason, but as a gathering leaving to be present” (Heidegger 1997d: 184). The connection and origin of being and reason remain hidden from modernity.

3. Reason and the Critique of Reason – Heidegger’s Critical Examination of Calculating Thought

Reason and its modern narrowing are at the heart of Heidegger’s critique of calculating thinking. He reveals that what we today mostly refer to as reasonable is primarily a way of thinking focused on calculation, planning, and efficiency. This form of rationality seems self-evident to us, but, for Heidegger, it is only a historical, and by no means original, form of thinking. His critical examination therefore asks not only *how* calculative thinking works, but *why* it so completely dominates our era. By exposing the foundations of this form of thinking, Heidegger opens up the possibility of understanding reason beyond mere calculability. This fundamental concern is particularly relevant in our time, because digital technologies, artificial intelligence, algorithmic optimisation processes and economic efficiency logics make computational thinking the guiding rationality of all social life. The world is increasingly being translated into data, probabilities and measurable risks – which is a process that Heidegger describes as a ‘framework’. Precisely for this reason, his question as to whether such thinking still leaves room for meaning, freedom, responsibility and an unavailable dimension of human existence is gaining an urgency today that goes far beyond the philosophical discourse.

In his essay, Heidegger considers *Nietzsche’s Wort “Gott ist tot”* and, in *Holzwege*, the traditional metaphysical understanding of reason as “the adversary of thinking” (Heidegger 2003b: 267). For him, thinking only begins when this covering character of reason has become clear in all its idiosyncrasy. In the *Schwarze Hefte*, he explains that the anticipation of reason is always thought of in terms of the ‘arché’ of being and is therefore essentially aligned with ‘techné’ and not with the ‘truth of being’ (cf. Heidegger 2015: 455). Reversing this relationship becomes Heidegger’s essential task after the turn, if he is interested in thinking of being itself as that which is thought of by existence (cf. Heidegger 2002b: 88). In other words: after the turn, thinking is most intimately related to being for him. Repeating the question about being, Heidegger’s historical task essentially lies in specifically determining the relationship between thinking and being: being as *the* “thing of thinking” (Heidegger 2006: 67 and cf. Barbarić 2005: 37–57) and thinking as the “path of the question of being” (Heidegger 2007: 110). Accordingly, it is thinking as such that

⁶ Cf.: “Calculation, ratio, is as such understanding the reason. Ratio is as calculation: reason and reason.” (Heidegger 1997d: 156) and cf. Cristin 1992: 93–100; Flatscher, 2005: 102–119.

Heidegger discovers for himself in a completely new way after the turning point. Before that, he had sometimes understood thinking as “knowledge of consciousness, imagining” (Heidegger 2005b: 204) or as the essence of metaphysics, as “western thinking as a whole” (Heidegger 2006: 60), with the fateful destiny of the calculating being (cf. Heidegger 2004a: 309; Heidegger 1997d: 189), whose “full force accumulates ‘in the centuries of modern times’” (Heidegger 2005a: 156) and which is ultimately, for him, “essentially the same” (Heidegger 2005a: 133) as dialectical thinking. Calculative thinking is essentially dealing with what is available. It is precisely this that is administered and calculated. For him, calculating is a “planning arrangement” (Heidegger 2022a: 46) of the world; it means a far-reaching and momentous determination of the being that is being calculated. So that the “gigantic” essentially rules through “devastation” and “devastation” in modern times (cf. Heidegger 2003b: 5ff.). It is striking that Heidegger does not distinguish between mathematics and the business of the “enframing” in calculating, and thus not between a counting and an idealistic way of dealing with numbers.

In his ontological originality, calculating thinking is anchored by Heidegger in the frame of reference of “*Zuhandenheit*” (tendency to-be-toward). As he says in *Sein und Zeit*: “Everyday life takes existence as something that tends to-be-toward, that is concerned, that is, administered and calculated” (Heidegger 2024: 384). Heidegger later equates securing the inventory as a basic condition of ordering in the rack with calculating thinking. Calculation already turns into a form of ratio in the *sentence on the ground*: “When we calculate, we present that with which and on which something is calculated, what must be kept in mind” (Heidegger 1997d: 149). The basic feature of calculating thinking is its association with ‘machination’ and ‘framework’, which ultimately leads to massive world domination and radical exploitation of nature, in which “everything is geared towards calculation, use, breeding, manageability and regulation” (Heidegger 2003a: 124). For Heidegger, calculating thought in modern times always finds itself in the vicinity of a mathematical-scientific mode of access, in which truth is reduced to certainty. In the course of calculating thought, we must also rethink man with Heidegger; he has become a “calculating creature” (Heidegger 1997d: 189).

In the modern age and modern times, the mathematical design applies. For the mathematical design, the quantitatively determinable moments of a materially existing thing are constitutive, namely, “movement, force, place, time” (Heidegger 2024: 479). The mathematical design leaps over things and creates a new experience of freedom, namely, “the binding to the principles demanded in it itself” (Heidegger 1984: 104). The dominant position of calculating thinking is essentially expressed in mathematics. But, with mathematics, according to Heidegger, there was a change in the essence of truth to certainty, a change from the Greek ἀληθεύειν “into the calculating setting up of ratio” (Heidegger 2018b: 74). The time of the “fact man” (Heidegger 1992: 82) begins, who is drawn into the coercion of calculating “machinations”, “science”, “economics” and “technology” (Heidegger 2003a: 277).⁷

⁷ See also the work of Carson 2010: 483–509 and Glazebrook 2012.

After his turning point, Heidegger redefines thinking as “initial thinking” (Heidegger 2003a: 58). For Heidegger, “initial thinking” is essentially the confrontation between the “first beginning” of metaphysics and the “other beginning” (Heidegger 2003a: 58).⁸ It is precisely this thinking, which Heidegger also identifies as “remembering” (Heidegger 1997c: 183), “essential”, “reflecting”, and “reflective” (Heidegger 2004a: 309; Heidegger 1997c: 152; Heidegger 2000a: 520f.), that for him goes back even further than metaphysics and the first beginning of the Occident, which the “initial” thinkers of the early Greeks founded (cf. Heidegger 2018b: 2), and which therefore marks a different beginning for him. For him, it is about “*awakening the debate about the question of the nature of thought*” (Heidegger 2024: 438). In short, the question of thinking must be posed anew. What thinking “means” becomes an imperative, i.e., the “world-historical question ‘What does it mean for us to think?’” (Heidegger 2002b: 141). This central question asks “how does what actually is concern the people of this age?” (Heidegger 2002b: 141). The question “What does thinking mean to us?” opens up the other beginning (cf. Heidegger 2002b: 128 ff.).⁹ With their reflection, we find ourselves placed in ‘initial thinking’.

3.1. Reason and the critique of reason – Modern calculating thought and machination

For Heidegger, modern calculating thinking forms the intellectual backdrop to an era in which everything that exists appears only from the perspective of availability. This thinking measures, calculates, optimises and transforms the world into an ensemble of processes that are to be technically controlled. Within this framework, those ‘machinations’ arise that Heidegger describes as the incessant and self-reinforcing workings of a technical-economic world order. They drive people to regard everything – including themselves – as a resource that can be exploited, renewed, or replaced. This reveals how closely modern computational thinking and machinations are interwoven, and how much they shape our understanding of reality today. For Heidegger, even the sciences of modern times, taken into their service by “the method” (Heidegger 2018c: 167), are not able to answer the question “‘What does thinking mean to us?’ ‘Science does not think.’” (Heidegger 2002b: 9) The path to being is blocked. Only poetry can support initial thinking (cf. Heidegger 2018c: 163). Heidegger’s “initial thinking” is completely contrary to the calculating thinking of modernity. For Heidegger, Europe is the name for the “modern Occident” (Heidegger 2006: 155) and belongs entirely to the “realm of machination”, because, in the course of atheism and nihilism, it has completely entered into the “power of posing” (Heidegger 2006: 156), and, for him, it has become a perfectly formed “technical-industrial domain of domination”, which “already covers the whole earth” (Heidegger 2012: 176). Thus, the ‘European’ and the ‘planetary’ are also related to him (cf. Heidegger 2009b: 95), and he consequently also speaks of the “European-planetary” (Heidegger 1997b: 300) when he reflects on the completion of metaphysics and thus of the West.

⁸ Heidegger’s understanding of thinking, and, in particular of ‘initial thinking’, is explored in the following works: Baum 1997; Coriando 1998: 27–43 and Wansing 2002.

⁹ Ute Guzzoni is dedicating her work intensively to this ‘new’ way of thinking. See: Guzzoni 2009.

In his rational logic, the modern man believes to be free in what he needs and he acts in his “calculating and planning” in a supposedly tightly controlled scope, but, in truth, according to Heidegger, he sees himself increasingly forced to ensure the “securing of his needs, their demand and its coverage” (Heidegger 1997d: 182). The “ontological determination” of this compulsion of needs is the “framework” (Heidegger 1997c: 7f.). In its self-interest, calculating thought is unable to follow the “altruism of actual existence” (Heidegger 2022b: 105), the “sacred-sacred earth” (Heidegger 2022b: 105) does not reveal itself to it. The realisation of the idea of “the poetic dwelling of man on this earth” (Heidegger 2002a: 152) seems blocked. Instead of the “quadrangle” there remains the “framework”. But the “framework” “is the essence of modern technology” (Heidegger 2005a: 51).¹⁰ In the age of planetary technology, science is preparing to “spread its power over the entire globe” (Heidegger 1997c: 39). At its core, it is an age “of the exclusive power of power, i.e., of the absolute rush of beings into consumption for use” (Heidegger 1997c: 91). The power of positing, in which the modern human is “himself posited”, “i.e. challenged to order the world, into which he belongs, throughout as a calculable stock and at the same time to secure himself with regard to the possibilities of ordering”, is hidden in the technical character of modern science” (Heidegger 2006: 158). The epoch of planetary technology is the epoch of ‘machination’ and the ‘enframing’. Reason breaks down into instrumental rationalities that struggle for the calculable existence of the earth. The supremacy of the calculated method and mathematical natural science applies, which, through its results, “more and more reveals its essence, the mathematical-technical” (Heidegger 2009a: 210).¹¹ The mathematical becomes the “measure of all thinking” (Heidegger 1997b: 101) in order to make the world calculable. Along with mathematics comes methodical thinking,¹² which Heidegger conceives of as a “securing, conquering approach against being, in order to secure it as an object for the subject” (Heidegger 1997b: 151). The victory of the method “today unfolds into its utmost possibilities as cybernetics” (Heidegger 1983: 141), and the term method is transformed into “the way we go about things in general” (Heidegger 1984: 102). With the “victory of the method” and its cybernetic world view in the epoch of the ‘framework’, the scope for a “consistently uniform and [...] universal calculability, i.e. controllability of the inanimate and the animate world” opens up, into which “man is also integrated” (Heidegger 1983: 140).

As a “provisional name for the enframing” (Heidegger 1997b: 445), Heidegger thinks of ‘machination’. For him, ‘machination’ is a reflection on modern technology, which is understood as “the production of being itself (of nature and history) in the calculable feasibility, the *Machtsamkeit* undergoing machination” (Heidegger 1997a: 173).¹³ As “the au-

¹⁰ The following work is particularly good at tracing the enormous power of the framework in modernity: Schödlbauer 2000: 99–121.

¹¹ On Heidegger's relationship to the sciences, see, in particular, the works of Bast 1986; Gethmann 1991; Bruzina 1996: 29–57; Ginev 2005: 141–164 and Richter 2010: 19–44.

¹² Cf. Gethmann 1974; Hopkins 1993 and Blok 2011: 285–307.

¹³ The following works deal intensively with Heidegger's thinking of ‘machination’: Gorgone 2006: 49–69 and Mejia et al. 2009.

thorisation of machination in itself”, technology is the “establishment of the abandonment of being to itself and thus the de-worlding, de-grounding, dehumanisation, de-divinisation of being” (Heidegger 2009a: 297). But the matter-of-factness with which being appears as “usable” and as “success of human endeavour” hides “the all-pervasive machination [...] its essence” (Heidegger 2022a: 186f.). Heidegger repeatedly defends himself against an understanding of machination “in a disparaging sense” (Heidegger 2020: 168) and would like to see it understood primarily in terms of the history of being (cf. Heidegger 2020: 168). However, it is clear from Heidegger’s thinking that we must understand machination as the characteristic feature of the late modern form of being-abandoned.¹⁴ Machination is essentially characterised by the fact that, with its rule, the lack of being is not specifically experienced. In machination, the earth is made available without limits or substitutes.

According to Heidegger’s interpretation, machination is essentially “determined by calculation and the computational” (Heidegger 2022a: 46), and it thus becomes the sign of modernity. Calculation as a characteristic of machination is an interpretation of λόγος as “the planning, setting up and bringing in of ‘interests’” (Heidegger 2003a: 131). Being is understood solely in terms of its feasibility. Machination, as a quantitative approach to the world, becomes the “dominion of the making and the made” (Heidegger 2003a: 131) and already refers with its wording to “making” and thus to “a planning, setting up and making of the world” (Heidegger 1992: 141) as well as to “power” (Heidegger 2018a: 150). Machination takes on the attitude of boundless expansion that knows no fear (cf. Heidegger 2003a: 131). It knows no fear because its entire logic is aimed at the dominance of the quantitative, in which, the essence of being is perverted into its ‘un-being’. The basic feature of machination is violence, in which, “the preponderance comes into its own in what is feasible and what is becoming” (Heidegger 2003a: 126), and which develops “in the securing of power” (Heidegger 1997a: 16). For Heidegger, however, its superior power is nowhere more evident than in thinking. Calculating thinking cannot bring the hiddenness of being into view.

3.2. Reason and the critique of reason – In the age of the planetary domination of technology

In the age of the planetary domination of technology – in short, in the “technological age” (Heidegger 2006: 159)¹⁵ – modern man sees himself as an ‘employee’ always already included in the ubiquitous ordering and all this under the rule of constraints, “to which today’s reality compels” (Heidegger 2005a: 28). “One setting”, according to Heidegger, “challenges the other, infests it with setting” (Heidegger 2005a: 28). The ordering takes

¹⁴ As is well known, in the *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge* (cf. Heidegger 2005a) Heidegger goes so far as to see ethical and political differences levelled in the face of machination and the enframing. The concept of machination is oriented not least to the *topos* of total mobilisation, which Heidegger essentially gains from Ernst Jünger’s phenotype of the ‘worker’.

¹⁵ The following works have dealt with Heidegger’s technique particularly intensively and comprehensively: Glaser 1983; Müller 1983: 277–298; Seubold 1986; Kozuma, 1989: 63–74; Leidlmair 1991; Margreiter 1992; Dreyfus 1994: 107–120; Gilliland 2002: 115–128; Fédier 2004: 127–143; Platte 2004 and Luckner 2008.

place “in advance” through the “machinery”, which is therefore something essentially different from just an “aggregation of machines” (Heidegger 2005a: 35). In industrial machine technology, being “as *machination*” is prefigured (cf. Heidegger 2009a: 287). All these developments go hand in hand with a change in rational thinking itself, which Heidegger saw as having come down to this point since the beginning of metaphysics: modern rational thinking recognises itself entirely in its calculating essence and the “human being” becomes “a calculating living being” (Heidegger 1997d: 189). Since his own destiny is affected, and the present is no longer an object but a state, man sees himself “challenged to order the world into which he belongs as a calculable entity and at the same time to secure himself with regard to the possibilities of ordering” (Heidegger 2006: 158). In the epoch of the “enframing”, according to Heidegger, the human being ultimately no longer functions “as the individual, but the industrial society is the subject that determines all objectivity” (Heidegger 2000b: 250f.). For this reason, today’s reality is essentially understood “as an industrial and performance-oriented society” (Heidegger 2002a: 213). Under the rule of the “enframing”, the danger “hides” (Heidegger 2005a: 54) for Heidegger *as a* danger – the actual problem. This is analogous to the “need for a lack of need” (Heidegger 2003a: 126) of Western metaphysics, which alone pursues will for the sake of will. The defect is that the defect as such is no longer visible and is seen to be disguising itself everywhere.

The problem of technology is that it “sends man’s destiny to the order” (Heidegger 1997c: 29) and veils the danger. Only when the danger is specifically experienced as danger and understood in its essence does salvation approach. Only then can we see “the growth of the saviour and draw hope from the growing light of the saviour” (Heidegger 2005a: 34). And only then can we see the possibility of a positive turnaround in it. This is a turnaround from “the oblivion of being to the awareness of the essence of being” (Heidegger 2005a: 71). Thus, the danger of modernity is that the power of calculating thought, the domination of the “enframing” “hides” (Heidegger 2017: 54) and “disguises” (Heidegger 2005a: 57) the danger and denies us a saving turn. “Being itself” remains “veiled and disguised” (Heidegger 2005a: 68).

3.3. Conclusion: *Where there is danger, the rescue also grows*

But what remains for the present in this criticism of modern rational thinking? Is there hope that the calculating thinking of the modern “fact-oriented person” (Heidegger 1992: 82) will change its mind and take a different path, merging in an “initial thinking”? Has reason come to an end with its disintegration into countless instrumental rationalities? According to Heidegger, there is hope. For the hitherto hidden Occident still awaits Heidegger. It must be preceded by a “fall”, “whereby the falling is to be thought of in Greek terms as entering into a concealment” (Heidegger 1994b: 68) – a “passage to the secret preparation of the future, of the moment and of the place in which the decision about the arrival and absence of the gods falls” (Heidegger 2003a: 397). This Occident is “more promising than the Platonic-Christian and even than the European imagined”, rather “the

dawn of a rising world year” (Heidegger 2018c: 73). Over “the not yet decided and excluded landscape of the earth” comes an evening, “which as evening essentially begins from the rising and therefore hides the morning of this landscape in itself” (Heidegger 2018b: 219). The path leads to a “Greece” that is the “*Oriental part of the possibly coming great beginning*” (Heidegger 2018b: 176). It no longer remains “in its Western isolation”, but “opens up to the few other great beginnings” (Heidegger 2018b: 176).

In his lecture *Was heißt Denken?* from 1951/52, Heidegger explains that we have not yet learned to understand what thinking actually means (cf. Heidegger 2002b: 5ff.). We are not yet able to think. The ratio of the *animal rationale* is characterised by the metaphysical concept of reason, but as long as this determines the epoch, Heidegger’s sentence applies: “The most worrying thing in our time is that we do not yet think” (Heidegger 2002b: 5). In short, we “must be prepared to learn to think” (Heidegger 2002b: 5) in order to enter into an “initial thinking”. To quote the poet Heinrich von Kleist, who was held in high regard by Heidegger: “But paradise is locked and the cherub is behind us; we have to make the journey around the world and see if it is perhaps open again from behind somewhere” (Kleist 1978: 476). We have to tread a new path of thinking. Heidegger’s plea for a new way of thinking seems to me to ultimately reveal the following: we live in an age that has forgotten poetry, and when it tolerates poetry, it confuses it with staging and kitsch. We are no longer sensitive to poetry. Poetry requires people to renounce clear certainty, control and availability. Modernity and capitalism essentially recognise unambiguity as currency. On the cost side, not least is the forgetting of poetry. Instead of forgetting being, today, we are perhaps much more concerned with forgetting poetry. Something that was once deeply important to people is increasingly being lost sight of. We overlook or conceal our weakness, our sensitivity and vulnerability. One could also say: when you no longer know your needs, desires and weaknesses, you feel soulless. What remains at the end of Heidegger’s rational thinking? What remains for our time? How can we cautiously continue Heidegger’s thinking?

Finally, I would like to comment on two points in Heidegger’s understanding of reason. My aim is not so much to refute them, but rather to try to find the ‘loose ends’ in Heidegger’s approach and to think them through and develop them further, but, above all, to relate them to our own time. Let us start with the first point. Heidegger’s reference to the necessity of a new beginning does not, however, mean that modern man could force this change on his own. Rather, Heidegger understands initial thinking as something that occurs when humans learn to listen to that which eludes them and yet calls out to them. This listening requires a shift from an attitude of control to one of serenity towards that which is. In this serenity, the world begins to reveal itself not as a collection of predictable objects, but as an open space for meaning. The fall into concealment is therefore not a loss, but a prerequisite for regaining a deeper relationship to the world. Only when calculative thinking reaches its limits can humans experience that their security is based solely on a construct. This experience opens up the possibility of a way of thinking that no longer asks about utility, but leaves the lead to being. The ‘rising morning’ imagined by Heidegger refers to a historical event that transforms human beings themselves. This

transformation does not consist in an escape from modernity, but in an inner shift in its standards. The thinking that will be possible in the future would be one that does not reject technology, but removes it from the centre of our relationship to the world. This creates a free space in which humans once again become receptive to that original event that Heidegger describes as the 'great beginning'. In this free space, a new form of reason could emerge, one that does not result in fragmentation and availability, but rather in a unity of meaning that is only accessible to humans through letting go.

Heidegger's approach to new or initial thinking is fascinating, but, at the same time, difficult to grasp, and it must be viewed critically. He describes this thinking primarily in metaphorical images – of the 'great beginning', of the 'other Greece' or of the 'event' – which possess poetic power but do not specify clear criteria or methods for how such thinking can actually be realised. Much remains vague and enigmatic because he thinks in terms of grand historical epochs and describes moods or vibrations instead of providing verifiable arguments. In addition, he deliberately questions traditional logic and rationality, which means that his thinking eludes the usual standards of clarity and comprehensibility. The language itself contributes to the opacity: terms such as 'event', 'clearing' or 'framework' are ambiguous and generate resonances rather than clear definitions. This creates the impression that Heidegger wants to convey an experience of thinking rather than a concretely comprehensible philosophy. At the same time, his idea of a new beginning seems almost quasi-religious: the thinking that 'comes' appears like a fate that occurs without human intervention. This leaves little room for concrete ethical or political responsibility and can have a resigning effect.

Heidegger develops a new language and his own terminology in order to overcome the traditional philosophical concepts, which he considers narrow and metaphysical. With neologisms, he attempts to express original structures of being and thinking that cannot be adequately captured with conventional language. The aim is to initiate thought processes that are not reduced to predictability or instrumental rationality, but rather to openness, serenity and listening to being. However, this becomes problematic because the new terms are often ambiguous, difficult to define, and highly context-dependent, so that readers easily lose track. This creates a density of language that is fascinatingly poetic, but, at the same time, unclear and hermetic, making it difficult to comprehend and critically examine his thinking. This seems to be a particular difficulty when he wants to contrast his new thinking with the contemporary understanding of reason. Perhaps the incommensurability is too great? On the other hand, we can certainly speak of a courageous attempt that perhaps cannot be valued highly enough. Ultimately, it is also up to the recipient to decide whether they want to understand. Whether they really want to make an effort to understand the language and speech of the sender.

Let us move on to the second point. What defines us as human beings is not simply fixed, but is subject to constant redefinition. We make something of ourselves by answering the question of who we are. By giving an answer, we shape ourselves in a certain way. This self-shaping is inherent in us as human beings. Heidegger recognised this brilliantly and took it up in his concept of 'projection'. Although, in my opinion, he was never able to

fully reconcile ‘projection’ with the ‘thrownness’ of human beings.¹⁶ It seems to me that Heidegger was not really able to reconcile availability and unavailability. I also find it particularly critical that Heidegger essentially overlooked the fact that we, humans, have a need to share. Being in the world is only possible because we recognise that we have an inherent need to share. We want to be understood because we want to share something. Practical reason is inconceivable without this need. And yet it must be emphasised that Heidegger, alongside Nietzsche, is perhaps the greatest thinker on the indeterminacy of human beings. He recognised that a central aspect of realising our humanity is being able to distance ourselves from certainties. In his examination of reason, Heidegger focused too much on the calculating nature of reason, in my opinion. He neglected the fact that reason is essentially self-assurance, and therefore always self-determination.¹⁷ Admittedly, he reflects on this fact, but he never states it clearly. Furthermore, the question arises: why should calculating thinking not also be capable of self-criticism and self-determination? Is it really so blind? Has it reached a complete dead end? Should we not understand it as the essence of reason that one’s own practice is constantly questioned critically in order to avoid dangerous stagnation? Is there really no possibility for calculating thinking to find what has always constituted reason: a constitutive openness in the sense of self-criticism? Although some questions may remain unanswered, it is nevertheless evident that Heidegger struck a chord that is particularly relevant to our time. It is important to think further about this. To dismiss Heidegger’s approach as outdated, or even as mere rumination, is to take the easy way out. Heidegger challenges us. Today, in our times and with our technology and thinking, more than ever before.

Perhaps we can go beyond Heidegger and, rather than relying on or waiting for a new way of thinking, understand that, in modernity, reason must repeatedly break free from its rigidities and apodictic determinations. For reason is, first and foremost, self-criticism. And thus, in my view, it should be understood as a practice of openness rather than rigid fixation. In my view, Heidegger overlooks in his critique of modernity that it is also important to repeatedly weigh one’s own thinking and not to be biased towards the future. As times change, so does what people consider to be important. And this change always requires a new determination. Reason must face this change openly, impartially, and with cautious optimism in a practice of constant self-criticism. Perhaps it is worth emphasising a concept that Heidegger highlighted so strongly in his early and middle phases: the concept of ‘resoluteness’. Resolutely and courageously, existence must face the challenges of modernity and must not sneak away from the danger zone.

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¹⁶ See the following works on this issue: Gander 1994: 15–31; Pretzsch 2023a: 97–119 and Pretzsch 2023b.

¹⁷ In my opinion, this is a point of criticism that is raised too rarely. Unfortunately, this is also the case in the wonderful volume by Burch et al. 2020.

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