

DISCUSSION
HEIDEGGER'S INTERPRETATION OF KANT'S
CONCEPT OF METAPHYSICS

In the continent of Europe, we find that the German philosopher Martin Heidegger has tried to evaluate Kant's view relating to metaphysics quite differently from his own philosophical perspective. In this article, a brief review on Heidegger's interpretation of Kant's doctrine has been offered.

Throughout the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant denied the theoretical knowledge in the realm of traditional metaphysics since human cognitive faculties are strictly limited to the realm of possible experience only. Kant states clearly in the *Dialectic* that human reason is so constituted that it cannot overcome the realm of possible experience. Heidegger interprets the above Kantian thesis in his own way. Heidegger thinks that *to limit human cognitive faculty is to limit man itself*. Actually, the limitation of knowledge reveals man's fundamental limitation, that is, man's *finitude*. It is simply because man's relation with the world, as manifested in the knowledge situation, reveals the essence of man, that is, the essence of his finitude. In fact, Heidegger used Kant's notion of man's limitation in the transcendental sphere of knowledge to express the essence of his doctrine, that is, the finitude of human being.

Heidegger thinks that Kant's purpose in the *Critique of Pure Reason* is not to construct a theory of knowledge but precisely to lay foundation for metaphysics. Heidegger's attempt is to rediscover Kant in that light. He, in his book *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, rejects the idealistic interpretation of the *Critique* denying both the assertions of the priority of consciousness and the cognitive relation of the world. Heidegger thinks that Kant's problem is not in the realm of knowledge but in the realm of the ontological speculation concerning *man's* place in the world. Actually, Heidegger's own quest was not for his metaphysical

leaning but for an understanding of the *Critique of Pure Reason* as metaphysics of man, or in other words, as *the ground-work for a metaphysics of man*.

Heidegger thinks that the fundamental ontology must investigate what Kant calls the "natural propensity" (*naturanlage*) of man for metaphysics. According to Kant, the three fundamental problems of metaphysics are the world, Soul and God. Heidegger thinks that these three questions lead to a fourth one : "What is man?" The reason as stated by Richardson is simple : " a knowledge (ontic) of those beings with which *metaphysical specialist* is concerned would be impossible, unless the metaphysician already possessed some previous comprehension of the structure of those beings (ontological knowledge). This according to Heidegger, is the proper sense of the famous 'Copernican revolution', i.e., that ontic knowledge is rendered possible only by an ontological comprehension that precedes it and resides in the very structure of the knower."¹

It is to be noted here that although the school of Marburg describes Kant as the founder of philosophy of science, Heidegger nowhere admits the central role of science in the domain of philosophy. Heidegger thinks that its primary role is to reveal the essence of man. The role of man cannot be realised without a detailed analysis of the "essence of man in the real world". So, we have no way out but to analyse the realm of the metaphysics of man. In fact, Heidegger's interpretation of Kant's metaphysics (as the metaphysics of man) is guided by certain fundamental concepts, namely, ontology, transcendence and finitude. In order to clarify Heidegger's position *vis-a-vis* Kant we have to take into consideration above three concepts. Basically Heidegger aims at an "ontologization" of Kant's *Critique* and ends up in attributing a thesis of finitude (of man).

(A) *Ontology* :

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger makes a distinction between "Ontology" and "Ontics".² By the term "Ontology", Heidegger means the consideration of the meaning of Being. Being in its ontological standpoint, is a consideration of the meaning of Being in general. He thinks that Being has meaning for the man who understands it. Thus, the realm of ontology correlates man and Being. Having considered in this light, Heidegger interprets Kant's transcendental philosophy as ontology.³

Heidegger's attempted ontologization of knowledge reveals Kant's formulation of the problem of the possibility of ontology as the problem of the synthetic - *a priori* judgement. The problem of synthetic - *a priori* judgement is the problem of the possibility of knowing the datum by virtue of pure knowledge and of determining it with universality, necessity and novelty. In Kant's philosophy, the problem belongs, of course, to the realm of the theory of knowledge but Heidegger converts the whole problem of knowledge into the problem of *Being*. Being contains within itself not only the predicate of its own but certain judgements of peculiar type which are identical with Kant's synthetic - *a priori* judgements.⁴ Such judgements are prior to experience, still they assert something about the world as a whole.

(B) *Transcendence* :

Usually the term "transcendence" stands for the fact of there being something separate and beyond. But Heidegger ascribes another meaning to the concept "transcendence". It is precisely because of man's profound and fundamental *subjectivity* that the problem of experience arises altogether. In fact, the problem of experience arises simply because of *man's removedness from the world*. This removedness reveals man's subjectivity, that is to say, man's self enclosure.⁵ Man goes beyond himself and in him there is subjectivity on the other hand.

(C) *Finitude* :

By the term "finitude", Heidegger does not mean the limits of human knowledge in terms of its scope and degree of validity. But Heidegger links up the finitude of man with the finitude of knowledge attainable by human being. It is simply because he thinks that "the finitude of man" is the pivotal concept in his philosophy and consequently the axis of interpreting Kant's theory. Heidegger thinks that man's going beyond or transcendence is due to his finitude. Human knowledge is composed of two elements, immediate intuition and universalising judgements. Both are finite. The faculty of intuition is essentially receptive as it consists in a primary "acceptance". Again human understanding knows objects and places them before itself but such an understanding is not the creator of those objects but it merely unifies different concepts.

With Heidegger, the ontologization of human knowledge consists in the "essence" of man, that is, the finitude of man. But the concept of "finitude" can be grasped properly only in relation to "productive imagination". Heidegger thinks that both the faculties of knowledge (sensitivity and understanding) are provisional in character and have their common root in transcendental imagination. The role of productive imagination is vital one since the three faculties of knowledge are rooted in the basic one known as productive imagination. The transcendental imagination is the root not only of the pure understanding, but also of the pure reason which is the power of the ideas. The ideas organise the rules of understanding in different modes of totality. Heidegger argues that the practical reason, too, is rooted in pure imagination. Thus, the transcendental imagination is the common root from which stem both pure intuition and pure reason, practical as well as theoretical. In other words, it is the centre of "entire man".

To sum up Heidegger's interpretation of Kant's doctrine of metaphysics, we can say that -

- (a) Heidegger's interpretation of Kant's *Critique* depends upon the fundamental ontology or in exact language, upon *the ontologization* of the theory of knowledge. Here, any question regarding knowledge or even the so-called synthetic - *a priori* judgement is treated as question relating to being.
- (b) Incidentally, whereas Kant speaks of three faculties of cognition, Heidegger strives to reduce them to a single one, viz., imagination / productive imagination, which is taken as constituting the common root in respect of the rest of faculties.
- (c) The 'Imagination' with Heidegger in his attempt to interpret Kant's philosophy (*Critique* as a preparation/groundwork for *Metaphysics*) may be said to be of paramount importance. Apart from its relevance in the context of the question of (man's) transcendence, imagination is viewed as one of important marks of finitude since it reveals the essential finitude of human cognitive faculties.
- (d) This notion of finitude, according to Heidegger, remains the most pervasive of Kant's philosophy and with this, "the Ontologization" which Heidegger seeks to institute in respect of Kant's *Critique*,

becomes complete.

Throughout his work *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, Heidegger states that the intention of the *Critique of Pure Reason* remains fundamentally misunderstood if one interprets his work as a "theory of experience". Heidegger fights against the assumption that Kant's essential goal consisted in grounding metaphysics on epistemology. He thinks that Kant's entire work is a *doctrine of being*, i.e., an ontology. The entire "*Critique*" leads to one fundamental question, i.e., "the question of man".

In this connection Professor Cassirer's article "Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics"⁶ is worth mentioning. In this article he evaluates Heidegger's interpretation of Kant's concept of metaphysics. Professor Cassirer says that before criticizing him we have to consider the actual perspective and circumstances on which Heidegger has considered Kant's view.

Heidegger designated the problem of the finitude of human knowledge as the central theme of Kant's criticism of reason. He thinks that Kant does not begin with the theory of the general essence of the things; rather he begins with the question concerning the essence of man. As Heidegger says :

"The foundation of metaphysics is grounded in the question concerning the finitude in man and, in such a way, that this finitude can only now become a problem."⁷

The primary task of metaphysics is not merely to describe 'the things in themselves' or being as such but to describe the finitude of man.⁸ According to Heidegger, finitude itself is the main problem of metaphysics which deserves notice. Automatically the questions arise : What does it characterise the object of knowledge? The answer given by Kant is very prompt and clear. Kant says in the "Transcendental Aesthetic" that human knowledge is the joint product of sensibility and understanding. The faculty of sensibility is 'receptive'; it creates nothing but only receives the manifold of intuitions. Human understanding, on the other hand, "knows" object but this faculty of knowledge does not create such object of knowledge. Kant admits "the spontaneity of understanding" and he develops this concept of spontaneity more clearly in course of his deduction. According to Heidegger, this emphasis must be understood

only as a certain characterisation of finite knowledge. All the thought as such, even the purely logical use of understanding, carries the stamp of finitude. As Heidegger says :

"This discursive character which belongs to the essence of the understanding is the sharpest index of the finitude."⁹

Thus, according to Heidegger, the three-fold division of knowledge into sensibility, understanding and reason has a provisional character. It does not lead us into the centre of Kant's problem but is rather only a means and vehicle of the mode of presentation. Heidegger thinks that there really do not exist for Kant three different faculties of knowledge which are sharply separated from one another. Rather they are originally unified in a fundamental faculty, i.e., the faculty of transcendental imagination. According to Heidegger, such faculty of imagination is the original unifying faculty and is the source of sensibility, understanding and reason.

Professor Cassirer thinks that Heidegger has completely misunderstood Kant's position. According to Heidegger, Kant artificially constructs the structure of schematism and also introduces the faculty of transcendental imagination for merely external reasons of symmetry and architectonics. Prof. Cassirer states clearly that there lies the seed of misunderstanding. "If we want to understand and interpret the doctrine of the finitude of knowledge in Kant's own spirit we have to see the double point of view which Kant establishes for all investigations in the field of transcendental philosophy and which he retains throughout."¹⁰ In Kant's philosophy, we see that throughout his entire philosophy, Kant separates the sensuous and intelligible worlds, experience and idea, phenomena and noumena from one another. But Heidegger does not find any justification for this complete separation. Heidegger thinks that human understanding is also to some extent finite since it does not create objects but merely receives sense-data to form the object of knowledge. Prof. Cassirer states firmly that the faculty of understanding is not merely a receptive faculty of knowledge and thereby finite. He says that although it cannot create an absolute existence or derive such an existence from its concepts, still it cannot be denied that human understanding is "infinite" in so far as the absolute totality in the synthesis of conditions belongs to its peculiar and essential task.

Further when understanding refers to intuition it does not

make itself absolutely dependent upon intuition nor does it subordinate itself to intuition. It is the synthesis of the understanding that lends definiteness to sensibility. The objectivity that we ascribe to knowledge is, therefore always an achievement of spontaneity and not of receptivity. It is the view of Kant, as interpreted by Heidegger, all kinds of knowledge is ultimately dependent on intuition. Since the faculty of intuition is in its ultimate nature receptive, the faculty of understanding is also receptive and thereby becomes finite. But we find Kant saying firmly that the understanding is service for, not under, intuition. Understanding requires the manifold of intuition but it is not relevant to intuition. In fact, it is the view of Kant that each form of knowledge requires the function of synthesis of manifold and the function of synthesis is the function of understanding. Prof. Cassirer thinks that the misunderstanding regarding the view of finitude of knowledge becomes clear as soon as "We make the transition from the pure concepts of the understanding to the concept of reason", that is, from the 'Transcendental Analytic' to the 'Transcendental Dialectic'. The faculty of reason never refers immediately to intuition but rather pertains to the use of the understanding itself. Consequently, we get the "Idea of the Unconditioned". Moreover, in the *Critique of Practical Reason* we get the concepts like "freedom", "a purely intelligible Kingdom of Ends", "the moral law", etc. Such concepts reveal that we are not limited to whatever the forms of our existence present us. It is clear that reason can entertain notions to which no experience can confirm. So, there is no sufficient reason to claim, as Heidegger does, that human existence for Kant is finite.

In fact, Heidegger interprets Kant's doctrine, as stated by Prof. Cassirer, in a peculiar fashion which is not Kantian at all. Heidegger thinks that the doctrine of Kant is not the theory of experience but it is the discovery and revelation of the essence of man. Prof. Cassirer thinks that Kant's theory of schematism and transcendental imagination does not justify Heidegger's theory. Since Kant's entire theory does not treat the existence of man immediately, his theory deals with the objective condition of empirical knowledge. The schematism that is demanded for the pure concepts of understanding shows that the schematism belongs to "the phenomenology of object" and not to "the phenomenology of subject". Prof. Cassirer states clearly that Heidegger has not interpreted the place of imagination in Kant's 'First Critique'. The doctrine, actually, belongs not to Kant's theory of man but rather to his theory of empirical objects.

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NOTES

1. *Heidegger Through Phenomenology to Thought*, Richardson, Introduction; Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1974.
2. *Being and Time*; pp.11 - 12 (Quoted after Rotenstreich's *Experience and Systematization*).
3. In a foot note of *Being and Time* Heidegger explains that the positive product of *Critique* is not a theory of knowledge but the natural logic of the region of being called 'Nature'.
4. *Being and Time*; p.24.
5. *Ibid.*, p.186.
6. See Ernst Cassirer's article "Kant and the Problem of Mataphysics" published in *Kant : Disputed Questions*' ed. by Gram Quadrangle, Chicago, 1967.
7. *Ibid.*, p.136.
8. *Ibid.*, p.137.
9. *Ibid.*, p.138.
10. *Ibid.*, p.137.