

THESIS OF PhD DISSERTATION

**THE BASIC PROBLEMS CONCERNING HEIDEGGER'S INTERPRETATION OF  
KANT IN REGARD TO THE FUNDAMENTAL-ONTOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF  
THE HUMAN EXISTENCE**

GÁBOR TÓTH

Supervisors:

Prof. Dr. Dezső Csejtei

Prof. Dr. Zoltán Gyenge

UNIVERSITY OF SZEGED

Doctoral School of Philosophy

Szeged, 2013

## **I. The thematic area of the dissertation**

The fundamental thematic issue of the work is the analysis concerning Heidegger's interpretation of Kant in respect of the fundamental-ontological approach of the human existence. The elaborated investigations mainly focus on Heidegger's challenging book "*Kant and the problem of metaphysics*", published in 1929. Interesting and valuable momentums of the topic can be also found in certain chapters of *Being and Time* and *The basic Problems of Phenomenology*. The dissertation focalizes on the specific structure of the human being. Its philosophical ground is hidden is the thesis of the book *Being and Time*. Because of this fact, the human existence is comprehended as a finite entity fixed into the horizon of time on the basis of the primordial reflection to its own ontological structure. Heidegger in the different chapters of his "Kant-book" tries to grasp the subjectivity of the Kantian subject worked out mainly in the first edition of *The Critique of pure Reason* under the auspices of a unified and primordial ontological theory, i.e. the fundamental-ontological explanation of the human existence, called Dasein. According to Heidegger, the first edition is especially important, because reveals the original intention of the critical philosophy. The second edition of the *Critique* means a step backwards from the authentic attitude: Kant shrinks back from the metaphysical consequences implied by the radical finitude of the human existence. On the basis of this standpoint Heidegger intends to integrate the conceptual system of transcendental philosophy into the general process of the "ontological destruction." This effort implies an essential transformation of the genuine Kantian philosophical methodology: the transcendental model of the human subjectivity appears to be "the ontology of the human finitude." Many of Heidegger's contemporaries criticized this interpretative method, especially Ernst Cassirer, one of the most important representatives of the neo-Kantian philosophical school. They claimed that philosophy must turn back to the original transcendental attitude and focus on the question: What are the *a priori* conditions of human cognition? Heidegger on the contrary, wants to eliminate the epistemological method of thinking and is on to replace it with the fundamental-ontological ground. That's why the neo-Kantians (first of all Ernst Cassirer and Hermann Cohen) accused him with the "violation" of the Kantian philosophical thinking. This sharp opposition appears in the debate among Cassirer and Heidegger right after the publication of the Kant-book. In the dissertation we argue that there is a fundamental common feature that links the two virtually different

methods of reflection. This is the question concerning the essence of the human type of being graspable by the philosophical thinking and formed as follows: What is the essence of man?

## **II. The most important conclusions in the different chapters**

The first and the second chapters examine the role of the Kantian conception of time worked out in the Transcendental Aesthetic. It implies first of all the argumentations concerning the finitude of human subjectivity, temporality, the problem of transcendence and the functional law of transcendental schematism. In the focus stands the primordial finitude of the human existence. In order to reveal the ontological role of time and temporality it is necessary to understand the activity of transcendental imagination, the common root that organizes the distinct sources of human cognition: sensibility and thought (understanding) into a synthetic unity. In accordance with Heidegger's interpretative method, transcendental imagination is in a primordial connection with time, the universal condition of human cognition. Time as the general framework of human experience plays the role of the transcendental substratum of any relation among the subject and the object and synthesizes the diverse elements of the experience into a unified structure. This sphere is named *transcendence*, and is equivalent with the systematic connection of the objects available in a possible (human) experience. Heidegger, on the basis of the Kantian thesis that all the possible objects of human cognition are subordinated to the *a priori* conditions of time, concludes that time in the ontological interpretation of human finitude should serve as the transcendental horizon of transcendence. On the basis of that opinion Heidegger concludes that temporality in Kant's philosophical theory means the necessary ground of the human existence. All the activities of human cognition can be conceived in respect of this primordial ontological horizon. Heidegger emphasizes this fact, claiming that human cognition necessarily consists of three fundamental elements: the process of apprehension, reproduction and recognition. These cognitive acts are conceptualized in analogy with the ecstatic-horizontal structure of Dasein explicated in *Being and Time*. Various places in the books "*Kant and the problem of metaphysics*" and "*The basic Problems of Phenomenology*" prove that some remarkable aspects of Heidegger's conception of finitude appear in the philosophy of Kant. According to Heidegger, the most relevant testimony of this fact is that our cognition has its roots in receptivity. Finitude means subordination to receptivity. In the very end of the

second chapter we analyse the basic problems concerning the famous and significant debate among Heidegger and Ernst Cassirer. Cassirer claims that philosophers should regress to the original conception of the Kantian transcendentalism. It means that the *Critique of pure Reason* should be read as the *a priori* foundation of human cognition and not of the ontological structure attributed to the finite existence. According to Cassirer, the essential attribute of human being is infinity that is maintained by the unconditional imperative affirmed by the transcendental ideas of human reason. Heidegger on the contrary insists on his own original starting point: existential finitude proves to be an inherent element in the ontological structure of the human being.

The third chapter concentrates on the discursive differences concerning the Kantian category of appearance and the term of phenomenon used by Heidegger with the meaning given by Husserl in his phenomenological philosophy. The conceptual and argumentative differences concerning this problem separate definitely the philosophical system of Kant from Heidegger's phenomenological thinking-method. In accordance with Heidegger's standpoint, the authentic meaning of the term "phenomenon" refers to the manifestation of the entity from itself. Through that self-revelation its internal and essential structure becomes absolutely apparent. It means that in the entity nothing remains hidden from the eidetic view. In contrast with this idea, the transcendental methodology of Kant shows an acute difference from this standpoint. "Appearance" (indefinite object of the empirical intuition) in the *Critique of pure Reason* refers to the surface-aspect of the cognized object, which presupposes a sphere that is incomprehensible to the senses. This fact infers that in the system of Kant the ontological structure of the object can never be explicated in its completeness. This important conclusion justifies Heidegger's thesis that the philosophy of Kant is unable to penetrate into the depths of human existence, i.e. it is insufficient to disclose the true ontological pattern of Dasein.

The subject of the fourth chapter is an excursus related to the well-known thesis elaborated by Kant in the *Critique of pure Reason*: "Being apparently is not a real predicate." The explication concerning the philosophical (and ontological) content of this proposition enlightens the causes that defeated Kant's efforts to comprehend the genuine ontological structure of human existence.

The analysis in the fifth chapter focuses on Heidegger's view related to the Kantian model of the self. The starting point of the investigation is the methodological idea of the ontological destruction: the fundamental-ontological attitude demands the critical revision of the traditional metaphysical categories, because of their inability to lay the foundation for the general philosophical theory of man. The problem of the self becomes emphatic in the texts of *The basic Problems of Phenomenology* and *Being and Time*. Heidegger connects the investigation of the Kantian self with the fundamental-ontological explication of the authentic and inauthentic modes of the existence. In his point of view, the ontological structure of the Kantian moral subject means an extremely significant step towards the adequate ontological explanation of Dasein, but in spite of its indubitable accomplishments, fails to apprehend the human existence in its authenticity. Heidegger distinguishes three constitutive momentums of the Kantian self: *personalitas transcendentalis*, *personalitas psychologica* and *personalitas moralis*. The *personalitas moralis* represents the highest level of the subject, because it is the form of its intelligible determination, free from the necessity of natural processes. The moral aspect of the subject represents its real freedom. That's why Heidegger claims that this is the key to understand the importance belongs to the Kantian philosophical system. The independence of the moral self from the determinative laws of nature also implies a different ontological approach: the essential character of the subject is different from the traditional category of the substance (fixed, unchangeable entity, enclosed in itself), and in some sense anticipates the fundamental-ontological texture of Dasein. The moral self (personality determined by the *a priori* and unconditional imperative of practical reason) is completely separated from the realm of natural substances (things). Nevertheless Heidegger emphasizes that in regard to the general problems of the "ontology of man" Kant's theory about the moral self lacks the most important characteristic, i.e. the absolutely primordial question towards Being in general. This is the *par excellence* manifestation of the fundamental-ontological standpoint that derives from the ontological characteristic of Dasein: only this type of entity is capable of opening itself towards itself and towards the entities with a different structure. These objects form Dasein's environment (Umwelt). According to Heidegger, in the philosophical system of Kant we cannot find the fundamentals of this conception. In this way transcendental philosophy remains within the framework of the traditional metaphysical standpoint, which is based on the term "substance" brought forth by the ancient Greeks.

The sixth chapter tries to involve the Kant-interpretation of José Ortega y Gasset into the thematic field of the investigation. This topic is especially interesting, because brings light on the connections among the philosophical thinking of Ortega, Heidegger and the neo-Kantian school. This thematic unit focuses mainly on the relationship between Ortega and Heidegger. Their intellectual connection has a very special character. Ortega in his two short texts about the philosophy of Kant doesn't even mention the name of Heidegger, nevertheless his interpretation of Kant has many common features with the argumentations elaborated in "*Kant and the problem of metaphysics*" and "*The basic Problems of Phenomenology*." Ortega argues that the original Kantian theory of human subjectivity needs a radical transformation. He claims that the transcendental subject of human cognition is imprisoned into the sphere of the self. That's why it's unable to comprehend the objects of the extra-mental reality in their full sense: remains inside the speculative sphere of cognition, doesn't reflect on the practical issues related to man's everyday-existence. According to Ortega the Kantian conception of man is one-sided and needs to be revised. It means that instead of the concept named "critique of pure reason" one should accept the attitude called "critique of vital reason." In this way the transcendental subjectivity of the human self becomes dynamic and open towards its surrounding world.

What kind of conclusions can be drawn in regard to the above-mentioned philosophical characteristics levelled at the fundamental-ontological interpretation of the transcendental method of thinking? We tend to affirm that human existence has a specific and unique status inside the immensity of entities: its ontological status is not definitively fixed and determined. It means that human being is constantly open to the possibilities involved in the scope of his existence. Dasein hasn't got a definitive ontological state; the existence is involved in the uncertainty generated by its primordial finitude.