FACING THE CHALLENGES OF MODERNITY: MARTIN HEIDEGGER AND THE ROLE OF HUMANITIES

AFRONTANDO LOS RETOS DE LA MODERNIDAD: MARTIN HEIDEGGER Y EL ROL DE LAS HUMANIDADES

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Abstract: This article's goal is to examine why and how Humanities –Philosophy, in particular– can still play an important role in our understanding the modern society's problems of being and the ontological challenges they raise. Taking as point of departure Martin Heidegger's philosophy, emphasis will be laid on the analysis of technology's role in modern man's life as well as on the significance of Sacred and of Being in a western society shadowed by Nietzche's "Death of God". Finally, attention will be paid to the necessity of integrating into our everyday life the thinking about truth and Being's meaning for us.

Keywords: Humanities, Heidegger, Technology, Being, God

Resumen: El objetivo del presente artículo es analizar por qué y cómo las Humanidades -en particular, la Filosofía- aún pueden desempeñar un papel relevante a la hora de entender los problemas existenciales y los retos ontológicos suscitados por la sociedad moderna. Tomando como punto de partida la filosofía de Martin Heidegger, este texto se centrará en el análisis del rol que la tecnología juega en la vida del ser humano moderno, así como en la importancia de lo Sagrado y del Ser en una sociedad occidental ensombrecida por la "muerte de Dios" proclamada por Nietzsche. Por último, se prestará atención a la necesidad de desarrollar un pensar activo en nuestra vida cotidiana acerca de la verdad y del sentido que el Ser tiene para nosotros.

Palabras clave: Humanidades, Heidegger, Tecnología, Ser, Dios

INTRODUCTION

Our goal in this article is to contemplate the role of Humanities in modern society. Departing from the everyday life we will detect how the rhythm of modern social and working life is trapping us in a vice circle of constant decision making and acting, leaving us no space to think about what we are doing. Emphasis will, first, be put on the use of technology in modern society and on how the former is enabling us to have access both to an almost endless flow of information- which will inevitably disperse our attention impeding us from stopping to think- and our approaching beings and the world (as a whole) as resources to be ordered and kept stocked for a future use; making, thus, beings equal to pure objects whose only value lies in their utility.

Secondly, we will try to comprehend the ontological significance of the "Death of God", as proclaimed by Friedrich Nietzsche, and which its consequences are for the modern society. We will behold how the death of our metaphysical understanding of God is opening up the space for our redefining what the sacred is in the modern society and how, through Humanities, we can trace the trail of Being in our Being-in-the-world as Being-along-Others; a Being which will no longer be perceived as a pure idea or concept but as an event which sets upon new grounds our understanding of the Other's significance in our lives.

Finally, we will take a closer look at Heidegger's contribution to Philosophy and Humanities; namely, how the German philosopher's thought is constantly engaging us into thinking about our own Being and about the importance of truth in modernity's era.

1. CAUGHT IN THE WEB: TECHNOLOGY'S ESSENCE AND MODERN MAN'S EVERYDAYNESS

One possible criticism to be levelled at against Humanities nowadays would be that they are not as effective in producing/predicting results as other sciences (physics, mathematics, economy etc). The predominance of economics and of the economic spirit in western society can be easily grasped when thinking about the recent (2008) still on-going crisis. Thanks to the news- full of information concerning the evaluation of countries' debts by Moody's or other companies- we were getting acquainted with the "nervosity" of the markets, which did not exactly know what would happen afterwards, while the healthiness of the banks has become our main concern. The way this crisis has been lived and the manner most of the countries treated it raises the important query: what do Humanities have to do with the problems the modern man is facing? Can Humanities predict

the "attitude" of the markets or the economic future of a country? Certainly not. Can Humanities take measures in order to put a check on the crisis' economic and social consequences? Doubtful. Speaking about Humanities and their essentiality to a person that has just lost his house to the bank or has witnessed his salary being cut off to 50% would probably engender an awkward situation. Our well-being in modern society, especially in times of crisis, seems to be entirely dependent on material goods and productivity. As long as we are able to produce we will be able to go on living. No product no gain, no gain no food. Modern man has become a producer in a world where the result of this production process is what really matters. The effort may be sunk into oblivion, but the result will always stay as a reminder of modern man's capacities to produce. Modern society seems to be becoming a ground of never-ending production. When reaching up to one result, we realize that we are in the nick of time to (re)start our effort to reach out for another result. Once the latter has been reached and accomplished, we make plans for the future and for the future results. That is what matters in a society which finds itself being entangled with the necessity of the result and the obligation of a constant "progress".

Commenting on the above, one could uphold that this is the way labour relations are and, when the man finally gets home, everything is much more relaxing, since he finds himself in a refuge, protected from the necessity of constant movement and action. But, even at home, he cannot really rest because he is under the dire necessity of being informed about everything happening in the world. He will open his "Facebook" or "Twitter" account and thousands of events will immediately appear on the screen calling for his demanding attention, his opinion, his "like", or his sentiment expressed in an emoticon. Issues ranging from those labelled as being of high importance, like child poverty or war in the Middle East, to the ones touching his personal life's references, such as happy dogs and friends' photos, will flood from the screen of his mobile phone or computer; the immersion has just begun. The social network has, thus, become a web where modern man tries to cope with all the information provided to him and begging for his attention. As soon as we switch on the TV apparatus, the same thing happens; endless are the programs from which we may pick out what seems the best to our liking. But when we decide to watch it, then, suddenly, publicities appear giving us the options either of calling for our patience with the highest goal of seeing the movie till its end, or of starting zapping to find another program- the procedure to follow remaining virtually the same. Switching on the TV, nowadays, is like entering the rabbit hole of Alice in Wonderland where news concerning war(s) mix with products' advertising (i.e how to lose weight) and with gossip about famous people's lives. Moments of human ordeal such as hurricanes, wars and famine, among others, are dogged by highlights of Cristiano

Ronaldo's scoring a goal and taking off his shirt. We are literally entrapped in a society of spectacle where the significance of the image quite often outpowers our resistance's will not to pay attention to it. Finally, even after the TV apparatus is switched off, the mobile phone keeps on ringing to remind us that, in the meantime, a good many received messages are waiting for our answer. No rest for the socially "networked" man. We find, hence, ourselves, during the whole day, roped in a situation of constant action and activity. We have to comment, communicate at every single moment, catch up with the news and express an opinion about everything in the "social court" of "Facebook". We should not forget, however, that this way of life is our personal choice; so, it is in our hand to say no and abandon it. The cost, nonetheless, would not be low. Let's imagine the case of a 13 years old pupil whose friends in their majority have "Whatsapp"[1] and "Facebook/Instagram" accounts. They upload everything they want, then they comment on it and, in order to facilitate their meeting each other, they create chat groups wherein they make their plans. Not having the above-mentioned utilities would be equal their (pupils') non-participating in the social life and, thus, being isolated from their social sphere. Of course, there exists the possibility of teaching them how to use technology as a tool without their being converted into its tool. To unveil this thin but sensitive line of knowing when, where and how to stop should, and could, be Humanities' contribution to modern society's quest for successfully being up against the odds of our time.

This endless flow of information and the dispersion of our attention because of it, has become possible thanks to the very rapid progress of technology which has opened new paths of understanding the world, making clear, however, that in great benefits may lurk great costs, disguised as necessary steps for the further development. Martin Heidegger, in his work *Question concerning the Technology*, put forward a possible extreme ontological consequence of the use of technology when coining the concept "Enframing". Even though there is no space to thoroughly present the idea of the German philosopher about technology and the "Enframing", we can, nonetheless, understand what he had in mind from the following extracts:

> Enframing means the gathering together of that setting-upon which sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve. Enframing means that way of revealing which holds sway in the essence of modern technology and which is itself nothing technological. On the other hand, all those things that are so familiar to us and are standard parts of an assembly, such as rods, pistons, and chassis, belong to the technological. The assembly itself, however, together with the aforementioned stockparts, falls within the sphere

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1   "Whatsapp" is mobile phones' application to chat and exchange messages.

of technological activity; and this activity always merely responds to the challenge of Enframing, but it never comprises Enframing itself or brings it about (Heidegger 1977, 20-21).

Everywhere everything is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering. Whatever is ordered about in this way has its own standing (*ibid*. 17).

Modern technology as an ordering revealing is, then, no merely human doing. Therefore we must take that challenging that sets upon man to order the real as standing-reserve in accordance with the way in which it shows itself. That challenging gathers man into ordering. This gathering concentrates man upon ordering the real as standing-reserve (*ibid*. 19).

In a nutshell, the "Enframing" is the gathering of beings, human beings not excluded, from the distorted version of Being as the essence of Technology. Beings, humans and the whole world become standing-reserve, resources used for the fulfillment of the goal of an endless production which will stop at nothing. Technology, seen in this light, is not an external threat per se like if the human agent did not have any possible connection to it apart from his enslavement to it. Technology, in the form of "Enframing", has become possible because of the human being's obsession with the production and the necessity of an outcome and result. Technology is not the devil disguised in gears and metal but, rather, human being's vision of the world as a never-ending mine of resources as well as a big experiment where every being could eventually be used/exploited so as to fulfill its role solely as a requisite for a further development of the production process. The "Enframing" is a way by which the human being decides to reveal the world; everything is brought into light as an ordered storehouse where all the beings are to be kept till the moment of a higher goal's arrival. This higher goal, however, is nothing more than an obsessive calculative analysis of the beings and the world in general. There is no attunement to the world; just a struggle to order it and oblige it to make sense through numbers, products and pure instrumentality. The "Enframing" still remains, though, a kind of unconcealing the world, even if this unconcealing casts its shadow on what could be understood as the Truth of Being. It represents the manner in which the modern man has decided to find significance in the world even though this act may lead him to treat every single thing as objects lacking significance since the latter are reduced to their tool role. The act of bringing into light is becoming an endless circle of ordering where everything is ordered so as to become fit for a further ordering and so on. The whole Earth is an inexhaustible mine of resources waiting to be ordered and our relationship with the World is transfigured into an obsessive calculative, spiritless analysis of the things as data and raw material. From this whole process the human being is not excluded becoming, at the same time, the agent and the sufferer of the agent's actions which degrade himself into means, resources for

something that would fulfill the search for a presumably higher good and higher goal. The human being as flesh gets sacrificed on the altar of human being's pure potentiality, as the wielder of Technology's essence; an essence, though, that has long possessed him letting him live in the illusion that he can uncover Being while Being, in its most distorted version, has been guiding him into the groundless oblivion. An oblivion which is groundless not as a potentiality for the founding of a ground but as the nullity of the opening up of the "there" of Being's revelation; a revelation taking place as a freely chosen eventuation in the human being and by the human being and not as a calculative, result-obsessed enchaining of the human being to the wheels of world's artificial revealing in calculation and experiments.

Trapped between the "Scylla and Charybdis" of modernity's informational and technological progress, the Humanities have the responsibility of telling the human being to do one simple thing: stop to think. Modern man swept by the hurricane of constant change of the situations and the incessant flow of information has to stop so as to realize that he is much more than a simple gear in a machine of utility multiplication. Not everything is a resource and not everything requires our immediate response and attention. Being in an ceaseless phase of dispersion the human being gets lost in the artificial necessity of having to control everything always. There is no time to stop so as to think, understand his/our current position and try to make the sense out of it all. If we simply act, we can never think about the result and the motives of our action. We are chained to an ever repeating now which makes of every decision a strictly present issue letting out of the bigger schema the past and the future. The future, more specifically, is seen as a potential result and outcome of the current activity and not as a con-templation of the meaning of our life and actions. Death, instead of being seen as the inevitable nullity of our existence making us reconsider what we have been and what we would like to be when faced with this inevitable impossibility of every possibility, frequently takes the form of the obsessive necessity of filling the gaps of our lives with actions and products as a proof that we have not been wasting our time during all those years. Nevertheless, in this perpetual chase of results apt to prove that we have done things/been productive in our life, we are undertaking the risk of losing the most important one: what does life mean to us and which our relation with the world is. The relation with the world, our necessity to feel homely in this world of changes and turmoil lead us to another core characteristic of modern society, a society where "God has Died".

2.   "GOD'S DEATH" AND THE SEARCH FOR BEING IN THE MODERN SOCIETY

Having presented the essence of technology as "Enframing", we will now see how Humanities can help us conceive what Being is in an era when "God has died" as Nietzsche proclaimed it[2]. In a world where the metaphysical death of God has been announced, a question that could probably arise is who took His place. Can modern society find a new God or has it decided to take God's death as an ontological fact and place itself on His throne?

The 20th century was the century in the course of which the European society lived two world wars. The bloodshed that irrigated the trenches planted the seed for an even bloodier struggle in the WW2. Personalities and systems arose and tried to proclaim themselves as being the centre of the existence. The idea of a new man, socially, mystically or biologically understood, emerged as a sacred purpose; millions of people suffered and died in the name of this (un)holy quest. No grimmer beginning could have followed God's death. The man having killed God went on killing his fellow men. Killing for the sake of God was replaced by killing for an idea; the religious zeal was replaced by an ideological rage. The idea of what could finally replace the sacred of God was violently sought for during the two world wars; a lot of blood was spilt, and all the dead bodies as well as the massacres were the proof of the great uncanniness that the human being of modernity was, and probably still is, feeling. Having no God to pray for, the western society was possessed by the lack of the ground of ideas, a ground that, until the "Enlightenment", the idea of God was offering as a duty or a joy. Having no ground of ideas, the soldiers of the modern society embarked upon the foundation of their own brave new world leaving debris and tombs on their path.

Given that the WW2 passed-having left open wounds and scars- the question we would like to ask, now, is the following: what is sacred today, in a society that has lived the death of God? Is there anything sacred if we cannot attribute it transcendentally to something/someone higher? Is transcendence still possible if God is dead? Can there be the Absolute in the postmodern world of relativizing? If the Absolute and the never before cast into doubt ground of God has fallen apart, is there a stable ground on which we can found our new morality and our care for the Other?

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2   In the section titled "The Madman" of his work *Gay Science,* Nietzsche wrote: God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him. How can we console ourselves, the murderers of all murderers! Nietzsche, F. *The Gay Science*. (Ed. Bernard Williams). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2001, 120.

All these questions far from being mere rhetoric enquiries for philosophers and thinkers are thoughts that dredge up steadily onto the surface the question of the human being's Being. Kirillov in Dostoevsky's *Demons* got to the core of God's death when saying "If God exists, then all will is his and I can't escape his will. If he does not exist, then all will is mine, and I am obliged to proclaim self-will (Dostoyevsky, 2008, 607)". Nietzche, having pronounced the death of God, blazoned out with a majestic rally cry the arrival of the power of will; the human will, the will to become something more than human, was the will that willed God's death. No barriers can restrain the human will and now that God is dead who can object to the deification of will? If God is dead, then there can be no sacrilege because with Him the idea of sacred did die. But if there exists nothing sacred, then what/who can protect the human being from its own will which no longer knows any limits? The danger of a godless and lacking in sacred society is depicted by Friedrich Schelling in his *Freedom Essay* when coining the concept "indivisible remainder":

> After the eternal act of self-revelation, everything in the world is, as we see it now, rule, order and form; but anarchy still lies in the ground, as if it could break through once again, and nowhere does it appear as if order and form were what is original but rather as if initial anarchy had been brought to order. This is the incomprehensible base of reality in things, the indivisible remainder, that which with the greatest exertion cannot be resolved in understanding but rather remains eternally in the ground (Schelling 2006, 29).

According to Schelling, when Logos (Word), the Son of God, revealed Himself, shed His light on the world and set everything in order, there was still something resistant to His calling of light; something that did not wish to be merged in Logos, or better said, something that did not *will* to become one with Logos. There is something lurking in the dark ground of our existence and this is no other than the potentiality of our will to actualize itself in every possible way; through its being brought into the light of the understanding or through its urge to become the centre of its own existence. In the modern society where Logos is mostly understood as logic or speech –with few exceptions, like Heidegger who searched for the significance of the word in the act of gathering, λέγειν[3]– the act of self-revelation has lost its epistemological validity; the understanding is not becoming possible from the act of God's self-revealing but as the subject's projection upon the world.

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3   For an interpretation of Heidegger's understanding of Logos as gathering see also; Dahlstrom, D. "The Scattered Logos: Metaphysics and the Logical Prejudice". In Polt, R. & Fried, S. (Ed.) *A companion to Heidegger's Introduction to Metaphysics*. New Haven: Yale University Press. 2001, 83-102

The fact that the individual as subject has acquired the power of making the understanding of the world his own, is what makes the role of Humanities more important than ever. In the ceaseless struggle of wills among individuals there has to be a common ground of mutual understanding and respect; some red lines whose violation, no matter the utilitarian benefit, would be a threat against what makes of us human beings, against our own Being. Bringing Being into the centre of our understanding what the human being is, becomes more important than ever due to the lack of any other ground on which the respect and the recognition of the importance of the Other can be based on. The Being of Parmenides and the Heraclitean Logos are not mere concepts to be used when engaging into philosophical contemplation; they, rather, constitute ways of life and guidance in projecting our possibilities on the world- crucial elements for our understanding the relationship with the rest of the human beings and with the world as a whole- and which have been inviting us, since thousands of years, to accept their calling of our getting attuned to the world; a world whose metaphysical centre, God, is declared dead.

Getting attuned to the world can hardly be understood as the result of ontic activities whose final step would be our feeling homely or "enchanted". The modern world, as we have seen before, is characterized by the velocity of technology which, supposedly, brings everything closer and provides us with a never-ending flow of information. Nonetheless, even if everything is brought into the reach of our mental grasping and representing, this does not necessarily mean that all barriers have fallen down. No matter how universal we want our values to be, what is close to us is always more personal and affects us much more. After the cruel attack against the French magazine "Charlie Hebdo"'s installation and personnel, prominent personalities from the political, and not only, world participated in huge manifestations to express their indignation and democracy's resistance to ISIS and terrorism; at the same period, in Nigeria's village Baga, the terrorist organization "Boko Haram" was killing as many as 2000 people, sending also a 10-years-old girl belted on explosives to detonate at the entrance of a city market in the city of Maiduguri, Nigeria. Although everyone remembers the atrocities committed against the journalists of "Charlie Hebdo", many fewer will remember what happened in Nigeria. There is no doubt that the fear of a terrorist attack occurring in Europe is much more disturbing the western public opinion than an attack happening far away in a "third world" country like Nigeria. Nevertheless, what a human being is, as well as its value and dignity, cannot change according to the distance or the information reaching us. If the western society wishes to make of human value(s) the centre of its post-God social and political existence, then it must seriously consider two factors: first, that the human rights are, indeed, universal and, second, that the human being is a living and suffering

being whose needs should be faced up accordingly and, in any case, not as a subject of purely academic studies or of merely political discourse, but with real concern about human being's values and their authentic respect.

The great burden Humanities have to bear on their shoulders is the reappearance of the Being in our lives; our perceiving it as an event in our lives-as Martin Heidegger also saw it in the later stage of his thought- and not as an abstract idea that canalizes all of us in the same category of human beings. Humanities, in particular Philosophy, should, firstly, open the space for the appearance of Being and, then, clear up the site in which the Being may eventuate through us and as all of us. On that point, a quite accurate question to raise would be whether this Being is something tangible, rigidly defined or clearly understood as a concept. Our answer is negative; Heidegger in his colossal *Being and Time* tried to clarify the issue of what Being is but was not as clear as it could be expected. He let us, however, a terminology and some concepts that will be of crucial significance for our understanding the human being. As human beings, hence, we are as Being-in-the-world, as Being-along-Others and we interact with the Others through the acting, or not, in solicitude. We care about who we are and why we are here, we care about the Others and their lives, and we care about finding a meaning in the world. We do understand that we all *are*; we realize that we are not as stones not even as common animals, but as beings whose Being is a question addressed to ourselves. We understand that a stone can be an object; we feel, however, bad and guilty when thinking about using someone- even metaphorically speaking- as an "object" to achieve a supposedly "higher goal". We care about the Others and we understand that caring about them is closely tied to the way we *are.* This care, this importance we attribute to our co-belonging with the Others are trails for our understanding what Being is. We can feel what Being is at the moment we are suffering and grieving for the loss of someone or because of someone's pain. We feel at the moment of our suffering a bond that unites us with the Other in the moment of pain. Trying to define this and limit it to purely biological or psychological reasons would be a vain effort at conditioning the unconditioned Being. The fact that Being cannot be calculated or set into numbers is neither a disadvantage nor a lack of "objectivity"; it is, rather, an enduring appeal towards the human being to measure itself with something higher than its own understanding and personal projection. The ceaseless effort of the human being to find its Being is the incessant quest of the human being to measure himself with the unmeasured and the incalculable, namely, the Being. Hölderlin in his poem "In lovely blueness"[4] says that man measures himself with the Godhead; but God's

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4   The English translation of the poem is taken from the work: Heidegger, M. *Poetry, Language, Thought*. (Trans. Albert Hofstadter). New York: Harper & Row. 1971

appearance happens only through His not appearing in the dimension of the sky. Hölderlin did not grasp God as an entity to be seen and mentally grasped; he just followed the appearing trail of God's non-appearance to find Him. Quoting the poet: "Is he manifest like the sky? I'd sooner Believe the latter. It's the measure of man (Heidegger 1971, 213)".

Following those trails is also Humanities' most sacred goal today. In the modern world characterized by the constant change and turmoil, in a world where God has been declared dead by the human, the goal of Humanities is to open the space for a potential recovery of the feeling of sacred in Being. Humanities, using a vast arsenal of knowledge, thinkers and philosophers, have to bring the human being into a direct attunement, first, to its own essence through the latter's understanding of what being is, and, afterwards, the rest of the people so as to make of them a true society, a κοινωνία (koinonia) of the people in the eventuation of the Being. Our primordial being with the Others and our co-belonging with them in the society could only come forth as the expression of our resolute struggle to find the meaning of the world and the meaning of our *being* in the world. No one can guarantee that Being will be found and grasped; but each step towards the dimension of the sky in our measuring with the Godlike is (a) burying deeper the metaphysical and abstract idea of God while, at the same time, a bringing us closer to the eventuation of the living Being in our lives through our Being and Being-along-Others.

3.   THINKING AS THE DISCLOSURE OF BEING

In the previous parts we have seen the challenges faced by the human being and the Humanities in modernity; challenges raised by the growing expansion of technology and the direct ontological confrontation with the idea of sacred in the modern society. In both cases the argumentation has been based on the (later) thought of Martin Heidegger. This does not mean that he is the only thinker who has approached those two issues. Max Weber, years before Heidegger, saw the modern world as "disenchanted". In his speech at Munich University, under the title *Science as a Vocation*, the German sociologist said the following:

> Hence, it means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted (…) The fate of our times is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world (Weber 1946, 139, 155).

Calculation and rationalization are taking the pace of the gods and the "mysterious" forces of the past, whilst, the human being finds itself caught in the maelstrom of its own possibilities. Since there is no veil of mystery casting its shadow on the world, the human being becomes the master of its own fate, science and technology becoming its strongest tools. Another great German sociologist, and, arguably, one of the founders of this science, Ferdinand Tönnies saw modernity as the passage from Community (Gemeinschaft) to Society (Gesellschaft); a passage that loosens the strong bonds between the narrow group of the community, leading to a much larger, market-dominated matrix of the city life. Quoting Tönnies:

> Thus the big city, and Gesellschaft conditions in general, are the ruin and death of the people. They struggle in vain to achieve power by numbers, and it seems to them that they can use their power only for riot and insurrection if they want to be quit of their misery. The masses come to selfconsciousness with the help of education offered in schools and newspapers. They progress from class consciousness to the class struggle. This class struggle may destroy the Society and the state which it wants to reform. The entire culture has been overturned by a civilisation dominated by market and civil Society, and in this transformation civilisation itself is coming to an end; unless it be that some of its scattered seeds remain alive, so that the essential concepts of Community may be encouraged once again and a new civilisation can develop secretly within the one that is dying (Tönnies 2001, 256).

The subject of the modern society and its unconscious part have also been psychologically interpreted by Sigmund Freud; the father of psychoanalysis and the thinker who made a radical breakthrough into human thought by showing how the rational and conscious of its actions subject has an unconscious ground, which has the power to shape its personality and guide its actions and behaviour. Max Weber, Ferdinand Tönnies and Sigmund Freud are some of the most distinguished, among many other thinkers, who have taken into serious consideration the fact of modernity, the changes it provokes, as well as the place of the human being in it- each one analysing the changes in his own perspective and through his scientific/ideological prism. At any rate, in this paper the emphasis has been laid on the thought of Heidegger.

The reason for doing so is that Heidegger is a philosopher who has managed, or at least struggled, to set forth an idea of the human being not as an omnipotent subject, but as "Dasein"; as the being which will clear the "there (da)" so that Being may eventuate in human being's life. Quoting John Caputo: "The great being of Dasein is to be the place of truth, the clearing in which the "event of appropriation" (Ereignis), the event of truth, comes to pass (Caputo 1986, 162)." The whole philosophy of Martin Heidegger has as its core Being's relation to the human being and describes the ontological strife of the latter to

find a meaning in the modern world; in a world living the "flight of the gods"[5]; what is more, the philosophy of Martin Heidegger is a constant appeal to the human being to become part of the discourse with its own Being. Heeding the call for the search for meaning in the world, we are actually answering the call of our own Being; a call challenging us to unconceal the world as a meaningful place and as the place where Being can eventuate. The importance of Heidegger's thought lies in the fact that the German philosopher unfalteringly challenges the human being to think about its own Being; this thinking about beings and Being is possible through philosophy. A philosophy which will not alienate the human being from the actual world it lives in so as to contemplate solely abstract ideas and concepts. The everyday life of the human being and everything that he sees and experiences are, and should be, part of philosophy. In his lecture *Introduction to Philosophy* Heidegger comments:

> We should in no way abandon immediate daily thinking through the guide to philosophy; instead, we, the thinking beings, should become more thoughtful in this daily thinking, which means that we should become more contemplative [*nachdenklicher*] and more reflective [*andenkender*], and thereby, learn to genuinely [*eigentlich*] think. Philosophy is not, however, what it widely and continually appears to be: the remote or the beyond of "real" life. Rather, philosophy as genuine thinking is the continually unknown region in which habitual thinking constantly sojourns without becoming versed or at home in it as the property [*Eigentum*] that has been allocated to the essence of humans insofar as they are the thinking ones (Heidegger 2011, 3).

Martin Heidegger struggled to bring philosophy into our everyday life by showing how our being in the world alongside other entities and people is affecting the way we understand the rest of the world and our relation with Being. Our life is a ceaseless struggle for meaning, but most importantly, for truth. This is another aspect that makes Heidegger's philosophy a strong ground on which Humanities could be based. Heidegger unswervingly fought to show how truth is the unconcealment of Being in the way the ancient Greek philosophers understood it, namely as ἀλήθεια (aletheia). It is exactly this capacity, if not necessity, of the human being to search for the truth, to *think* of the truth, that could become human being's saving power in modernity. While modern era finds the human being as a subject ready to actualize its potential through the use of sciences and technology, Heidegger's revolutionary message lies in his urging call to start thinking again; to think in relation to our Being and to the meaning we attribute

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5   The "flight of the gods" and the arrival of the "Last God" is a recurring theme in later Heidegger's works criticizing the godlessness of modern society. For a more detailed analysis see: Wrathall, M., Lambeth, M. "Heidegger's Last God". *Inquiry: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Philosophy*, 54:2. 2011, 160-182.

to it. To think that even in the essence of Technology as "Enframing" lies our deepest necessity to search for the truth. Heidegger comments concerning the saving power, which can be found in the event of "Enframing", the following;

> The essence of technology is in a lofty sense ambiguous. Such ambiguity points to the mystery of all revealing, i.e., of truth. On the one hand, Enframing challenges forth into the frenziedness of ordering that blocks every view into the coming-to-pass of revealing and so radically endangers the relation to the essence of truth. On the other hand, Enframing comes to pass for its part in the granting that lets man endure-as yet unexperienced, but perhaps more experienced in the future-that he may be the one who is needed and used for the safekeeping of the coming to presence of truth. Thus does the arising of the saving power appear (Heidegger 1977, 33).

Heidegger's goal for philosophy, hence, as well as for the rest of Humanities, is to open the way for human being's (re)engagement into thinking: into thinking its own Being and its own necessity of understanding what truth is in this world. The fact that it is seeking the truth through an absolute rationalization and an extreme, in many cases, calculative thinking does not hide that what is true still matters for the human being; no matter the way the human being strives to unconceal the world, its feeling the necessity to do so proves that it is still seeking for the truth in the world. It is no coincidence that Heidegger, in his *Question Concerning Technology* quotes the following lines from Hölderlin's poem *Patmos*: "But where danger is, grows the saving power also (Heidegger 1977, 28)".

The ontological danger lying in the core of modernity is the illusion of the human being, as the omnipotent subject, that everything can be understood and brought into unconcealment through the exact, calculative thinking and the expulsion of the "irrational" sacred in all its forms. Nevertheless, closely tied to this danger also lies the saving power of thinking; a thinking whose power is to be found in its disclosive capacity through the seeking of the truth. Philosophy's and Humanities' role should be at the heart of this disclosive activity, since through them thinking comes to find its proper place in the life of the human being. Confronted with such great potential to change the world, the human being, now probably more than ever, should be able to think before acting; think in terms of its own being, think in terms of its own necessity to unconceal the truth of the Being.

It is the role of Humanities and Philosophy, to preserve the importance of truth in human being's life. No matter the course the former can take in its strife to find meaning in the world, it should never lose sight of the fact that its every effort is linked to finding the truth in the world. In modernity, as previously said, human being is struggling to find the truth in the ongoing development of technology and in the removal of God and of the sacred from its life. So be it; Philosophy's and Humanities' role is not the one of controlling and setting limits. On the contrary, their importance is nested in the act of thinking. Their role is

to accompany human being in its every move reminding it that thinking is crucial and its every strife should aim at the seeking for truth and for Being's meaning in its life. As long as thinking remains alive, as long as thinking is not restricted to pure abstraction and repeated calculation, the human being will always be able to find the saving power in all of its moves, all of its steps, no matter destructive and dangerous these latter may be.

CONCLUSION

Before completing this article on the role of the Humanities in a modern society, where the human being finds itself confronted with a great range of onto-logical challenges, and for our better understanding why Humanities have still a lot to offer, the following should be stressed.

Humanities, far from being simple disciplines at school or at the university, represent the necessity of the human being to find meaning in a world which is persistently changing. Antigone and Ajax of Sophocles, Prometheus of Aes-chylus, the Practical Reason of Kant, Schelling's Dark ground of human being, Nietzsche's Death of God and Hölderlin's Godhead- their mention is just indicati-ve- are not mere philosophical concepts, devoid of any relation with our everyday life, restricted to the "pure" abstract domain of the ideas. They are ventures of the human being's mind into the world; a mind triggered by the will to make sense of its own Being, its own way of living and acting in a world offering it an infinite amount of possibilities. Humanities are the comprehension of the pure potentiality of the human being; a human being whose life is a constant struggle to find a meaning, to find *meaning* in the world. In other words, Humanities represent human being's strife to understand the "unconditioned" of its own Being in a world-especially in the modern world- where the spirit of calculation and the obsession with result opt to become the only condition of our knowledge.

The same way that Hölderlin saw in sky the dimension by means of which the mortal can measure himself against the Godhead, Humanities, as well, must guarantee that the span between the earth and the sky is not to to be transformed into a vast storehouse of resources where beings are getting lost in their utility. On the contrary, it is Humanities' duty and obligation to safeguard the span bet-ween the earth and the sky; namely, where the world appears to the mortals as the site of the potential unconcealment of their truthful and meaningful Being in the world.

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