

Critiquing the Construction of Modernist Discourse from the Perspective of Both Husserl and Heidegger

نقد بناء خطاب الحداثة من منظور كل من هوسرل وهايدغر

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Abstract:

The contemporary philosophical question remains trapped between either returning to or correcting the trajectory of philosophy's history; for all those philosophies known as postmodern philosophies—whether manifested as genealogy, phenomenology, archaeology, or even deconstruction—turn back to reread the past, precisely because modernist discourse failed to achieve humanity's ultimate ends and instead sought to create a new metaphysics far more oppressive and controlling than traditional metaphysics had ever been.

Thus, necessity demanded the emergence of a renewed philosophy announcing a reinterpretation of philosophical history through methods and mechanisms suited to the human condition, especially after this human being had been marginalized by the overreach and interweaving of countless ideologies; and these postmodern philosophies constituted an attempt to propel the wheel of thought toward the human dimensions (language, history, art, beauty, etc.).

Keywords: Modernity; Postmodernity; Critique; Husserl; Heidegger.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Modernist discourse was founded upon a number of constitutive elements, foremost among them the elevation of human value and the restoration of humanity's place in existence as a supreme and primary authority – this after centrality had been confined to religious circles possessing absolute power to control the human mind and issue judgments. Yet, it is only fair – at the same time – not to deny the distinction modernity brought, setting it apart from other epochs in the history of philosophical thought; something we clearly perceive in scientific and technological progress and development, in addition to philosophers' persistent attempts to formulate their philosophical ideas in a scientific, objective, and methodical manner. However, modernity's slogan remained deficient, indeed contradictory, once it made technology the mistress over human beings; for modernity's achievement – if we ponder it – consisted in rescuing man from the Church's grip by liberating reason, only to cast him, shortly after, into technology's grip.

From this sprang "postmodernity" as a reaction against this irrational and unethical loss of control, through numerous philosophical theories (such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, and deconstruction) that sought to diagnose modernity's crisis and offer definitive solutions to rescue the human sciences from the abyss of technological domination. Accordingly, we shall attempt to critique modernist thought through the lens of postmodern philosophers, considering postmodernism as a philosophy in its own right that renders the human sciences sciences that stand alongside the exact sciences rather than under their tutelage – contrary to what modernity did in taming these sciences. Based on the foregoing, we pose the following problem: What did modernity's crisis consist in, and what alternatives did postmodern philosophy offer?

2. Modernity (The Transition from the Authority of Heritage to the Authority of Reason):

It can be said that modernity brought about a kind of revival of the Greek heritage through its interest in art and literature and its restoration of dignity to the human subject, something we clearly witness with the philosopher “René Descartes” and his adoption of the cogito; for modernity – in its essence – sought to render the knowing subject rational in relation to its object of knowledge, contrary to its previous state of immersion and other preoccupations. Accordingly, modernity “carries the banner of freedom of choice and elevates the individual; it is thus a modernity of individuality, and by striking at the sanctity of religion through the revolt against the Church and the separation of religion from everything, and by employing instrumental reason” (Jaloul, 2018, p. 307).

Nor can we attribute modernist thought and the revolt against the old solely to the philosopher “Descartes”; there were countless attempts by other philosophers, such as “Spinoza,” who was even more fervent in championing truth and elevating the value of reason, launching a not inconsiderable attack on the Church’s clerics and refuting every attempt at mediation between man and his God. For dismantling the prevailing traditions that rendered the subject incapable of knowing its own existence and limits, as well as its relationship with God as requiring an intermediary, made Spinoza’s work more modern and more resistant, in the sense that reason – as a human faculty – is every individual’s capacity to realize his own thought independently of any bond or mediation claiming to understand the Holy Scriptures. Thus, the fundamental paradigm of modernist thought was the declaration of the suspension of the idea of God, and the immersion in epistemological research as a crucial field for the transition from the stage of religion to instrumental reason,

“and hence to change and control the world, so that man becomes a god, or a substitute for God, or has no need of Him” (Al-Masiri & Al-Turki, 2010, p. 17).

Through this citation, we witness the powerful demand for attention to epistemology and all the achievements of modern science, and the enhancement of matter’s value in favour of material reality; therefore, the field of work was directed toward attention to human achievements through the reversal of control (humanity – nature), and this is what we witnessed with the achievement of the philosopher “Bacon” in his *New Organon*, where he said: “It would be absurd to expect any great progress in the sciences from the process of adding and grafting new things onto old ones; we must begin anew from the very foundations if we do not wish to revolve forever in a circle that leads to no significant progress” (Bacon, 2018, p. 18). From all this, we adduce that the ABCs of modernity proclaim a new beginning that founds modern science and denies any central principle built on anything other than science, as long as instrumental reason holds heritage as an alienation of knowledge rather than its realization; accordingly, we ask: Was the philosophy of modernity able to establish a renaissance of thought in opposition to religion? And did it achieve its goal of declaring human freedom and liberating reason from dogmatism?

3. Critique of Modernity (The Alienation of the Knowing Subject):

The paradigm of modernity proclaimed the death of a god in return for the resurrection of a new human being, the “Superman”; yet this paradigm was nothing but a mere protocolary display of scientific and technological superiority and humanity’s domination over nature – that is, sheer control and hegemony. For modernity, even though it freed man from the authority of religion to the authority of reason and shattered myths, superstitions, and idealisms, nevertheless fell into myths of a new kind. So if the era preceding the modern era was known by the authority of the papacy, the modern era became known as the era of the horizons of crisis and the disappearance of the human

subject, which had been among the most important characteristics of the rise of modern Western philosophy. And just as it was declared at the outset that modernity is indebted to the philosopher “Descartes” and his methodological doubt regarding preceding truths – by re-examining them and reading heritage through a rational foundation – the crisis was caused by “Descartes” himself, who left the knowing subject drowning rather than revealing. This is what we witnessed with the critique of the philosopher “Friedrich Nietzsche,” for “Nietzsche was the philosopher of critique and demolition, the one who inaugurated the dynamic of the collapse of the pillars of modern thought, and the first to show the evaporation of the modern spirit” (Al-Masiri & Al-Turki, 2010, p. 216).

Nietzsche’s discourse on the philosophy of modernity shook its central pillar, “reason,” considering that Western reason failed to grasp that scientific progress and the use of instrumental reason are not exclusive to all sciences (especially the human sciences). Thus, he overturned the foundation of modern Western thought through his critique and deconstruction of its strategies of construction, and began by striking the Cartesian subject and demonstrating the impotence of Kantian Enlightenment reason, by overturning values and undermining them on the basis that the modern age reflects the image of nothingness – or what he himself calls the age of nihilism – “for modern European man believes that he can build his value project under a purely moral cover, while being, nevertheless, freed from every religious inclination” (Abdellatif, n.d., p. 39).

In Nietzsche’s view, modernity abolished the concept of God and created a god of its own making, namely “reason”; thus reason became centralized as an instrument and annulled every other concept as a supreme ruler with Kant and as a revealer of truth with Descartes. The questions of postmodernity turned modernity into the crisis of all crises, something that “Theodor Adorno” and “Max Horkheimer” addressed when they said: “Technological and

social development in every age has turned into the imprisonment of man; considering all this, adaptation to the authority of progress has entailed the progress of authority, and thus the repetition of these regressions that exhibit progress... Progress is the opposite of progress; the irresistible language of progress in irresistible progress” (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2006, p. 58).

The birth of the crisis was linked to the idea of substituting progress in all areas of life, considering science as the sole mechanism capable of programming development; and just as reason brought order to the modern world, technology brought progress, and we found ourselves facing what is called instrumental reason, which in turn produced the so-called centering of the unconscious in place of the conscious, with dire and costly consequences. Modern man has been programmed to manufacture his own eclipse, which was once his ambition for conquest and sovereignty; yet technology left him neither in control of nature nor able to realize himself in a new world where the subject has become submerged, after having been knowing and alienated from all dimensions (social, ethical, psychological, cultural). There are theories known during the modern age that did not achieve independent existence and realization as projects until after the postmodern age; a prime example is the revival of Kantian ethics. Kant’s questions did not acquire the same value they gained after the dissolution of modernity, and this is among the most important points confirming that work during modernity consisted entirely of ideas unrelated to reality; rather, they were theories that recognized in their own time that they were living a crisis, and there was a call to emerge from this crisis, as the philosopher “Immanuel Kant” frankly declared: “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end and never merely as a means” (Kant, 2002, p. 11).

Thus, the meanings of crisis – however multiple – become one, namely considering man as a means; so modernity’s claim of the end of myth and the replacement of God by man is

merely a claim to consolidate control and tamper with this very being. Consequently, several questions were raised about the controversy and debate that occurred during the age of science and technology, which led to the birth of postmodernity; and then, what do we mean by the term “postmodernity”? “The credit for using this term goes to the British historian Arnold Toynbee in 1947 in his book *A Study of History*, where he described Western society as irrational, chaotic, and anomic, due to the waning of the bourgeoisie’s role... which he saw as a revolution, indeed a degeneration of traditional bourgeois values” (Boughoura, 2009, p. 13). Postmodern philosophy can be considered a critical reading of modernity’s achievements through the deconstruction of the paradigms that constituted the central force supporting modernity. Hence, we are now facing an immense crisis requiring multiple mechanisms for its dismantling; there were therefore multiple attempts to investigate the situation, beginning with the question of the possibility of emancipation from the dependence of instrumental industrial society. The questions of postmodernity focused on diagnosing modernity’s illnesses, as the reality of the modern age proved its own incapacity, following the loss of control of the authority of “instrumental reason”; thus, understanding postmodernity is a radical critique of pathological illnesses, and several theories emerged attempting to resolve the crisis and reconsider the human heritage after it had been marginalized and the value of epistemology elevated at the expense of axiology. Hence, the call to return because science alone cannot achieve progress and development. “The matter concerns a critique of philosophy, and because it is a critique of it, we do not wish to sacrifice it” (Afaya, 1998, p. 27). Through this citation, we witness the basic structure adopting a critical paradigm founded on elevating the philosophical discourse to a higher level regarding the heated debate over the critique of modernity. For philosophy – as an enterprise founded on critique and questioning of grand narratives – now attempts to

absorb this transformation (modernity – postmodernity), causing theoreticians to wonder about the reality of the end of the modern age and the beginning of a new age, the postmodern age. We can acknowledge that this questioning justifies the strength and unity of the crisis and its fear of the emergence of the “post” age: can this age truly realize the idea of the “post,” or is it a continuation in a different form or manner? The idea of modernity and its remnants is clear, but the foundations of the emergence of postmodernity are entirely unclear. So we are now facing questions that even doubt postmodernity and its foundations, including: Has postmodern society truly absorbed the crisis of modern European man from all sides? Can this crisis be overcome, and if so, will the remedy come through a new beginning or through continuity? What is the fate of science, technologies, technological progress, and everything called modern science? How can postmodern man determine his place after the wave of alienation he experienced? Numerous attempts have appeared in the intellectual arena during the postmodern age, aiming to dismantle the state of alienation experienced by European man, and to move toward thinking about new values that are hostile and different from the modernist condition, adopting ideas with axiological and aesthetic dimensions founded on the openness of the self to the other (alterity); these attempts have manifested in the philosophies of Husserl, Heidegger.

4. Postmodern Philosophy:

Before detailing the vision of both Husserl and Heidegger, it is worth pointing out that postmodern philosophy was never a blind rupture with the past; rather, it was, in its essence, an attempt to reconstruct the great questions neglected by instrumental rationality. For the postmodern project, despite the diversity of its methods between phenomenology, hermeneutics, and deconstruction, all agreed that the crisis of modern man arose not only from the extremism of secularism but also from the forgetting of the very question of Being. Hence, it was necessary to open a new horizon for thinking, one that does not content itself

with criticizing modernity from the outside but rather works to deconstruct its internal structures in order to recover the meaning of life, the self, and the other. This is precisely what we will observe through Husserl's phenomenology, which sought a return "to the things themselves," and through Heidegger's existentialism, which made "the question of Being" the axis of all serious philosophical thinking.

4.1 Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology:

Among the most significant philosophical studies in the history of philosophy is that found in the major work *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* by the German philosopher "Edmund Husserl"; a work that – if we may say so – was a witness to its age by reflecting the truth of the crisis of modern Western thought. For Husserl, through his phenomenological study, opened the way for a correct scrutiny of the causes of the crisis and the causes of the collapse of industrial society, as he states: "The modern man's view of the world was entirely determined in the second half of the nineteenth century by the positive sciences... which led to an indifferent disregard for the decisive questions for all genuine humanity; sciences that concern themselves only with facts produce human beings who know nothing but facts; the reversal of the public appraisal of science was inevitable" (Husserl, 2008, p. 44).

The philosopher "Husserl" is acutely aware of, and describes, the situation or the reversal occurring in the structure of thought, the shift from concern with Being as a whole to concern with material reality alone. The problem is not the social reality that concerns man and realizes his humanity, but rather the reality in which science became exclusive and dominant. This dependency, known during the modern age, where science and the connection of every philosophical, social, and historical orientation to science, led to this crisis; the subject's primary task became progress according to science and what it dictates alone. Hence, the

novelties resulted in the exclusion of every knowledge and every thought outside the framework, limits, and requirements of science. Thus, Husserl's fundamental question – "What can science tell us about reason and unreason?" (Husserl, 2008, p. 45) – is among the most important questions he raised, attempting thereby to show that even Descartes' subjectivity was impotent before the scientific achievement. For despite the resulting programming of philosophical projects to align with the goal of the natural sciences for the sake of precision and objectivity, this was among the most important causes of the horizons of the crisis. The rush behind science's ambition with a non-scientific object – through the attainment of objectivity – achieves negativity more than positivity, because the objects of science are specific and known, and cannot raise the great philosophical questions and make them a subject of dispute, debate, and thought.

Philosophy gradually receded, so fascination with the achievements of science grew, and all attempts were focused on conforming to the requirements of science; the result was a crisis – but a crisis of the spiritual sciences – as Husserl says: "The inevitable consequence of all the foregoing is that the domination of the positivist and objectivist spirit over all sciences has led to the exclusion from science of the fundamental problems, namely the questions concerning human existence, which essentially concern the meaning of human existence, and which scientists exclude from the outset" (Gaidi, 2022, p. 53).

Husserl recognized the artificially and previously fabricated gulf between the knowing subject and the object of knowledge, after falling into the scientific and objectivist tendency, considering that the object is the fertile field for study and research and that the subject is merely an observer of this object. This free fall to avoid and analyze the problem of the gulf between subject and object led to a world devoid of meaning – a meaning that appears to science as a mere metaphysical idea – but which is important in the field of studies conducted in the human sciences and their relation to the subjects they confront.

Accordingly, Husserl's tool emphasized a return to the origin of things, because the crisis requires a radical and deep treatment of what technical and material thinking, which abolished the concept of life, left behind, as he says: "What makes modern sciences incapable of helping man give meaning to his existence, his action, and to guide his intellectual and scientific life – and one cannot deny that this mode of science constitutes the spiritual and historical horizon of man" (Msabih, 2022, p. 159). Consequently, the project of returning to the origin of things became imperative and certain for the revival of the remnants of the human sciences and for attempting to breathe a spirit of renewal with their own tools, not with the tools of other sciences (such as the natural sciences). The crisis of any science depends on the mechanisms of treatment: do they correspond to it or not? If science is a mechanism subject to experimentation, the human sciences – on the contrary – cannot achieve the same results as the exact sciences, and this difference is due to the nature of the object and sometimes to specificity. Thus, Husserl declared phenomenology as the sole method or as a solution for the human sciences to achieve their goal and ground themselves, saying: "For one cannot accept the principle of generalizing the precise scientific model to all cognitive sectors, including philosophy, because that is among the errors of contemporary philosophers who repeat the very mistake of the seventeenth century... which leads to a correspondence between philosophy and the sciences in terms of method and object" (Husserl, 2007, p. 15).

Through this citation, we ask: how could a field like philosophy be swept along by science, when its original task is to follow up on its results? This is what led philosophy to retreat from its fundamental role, namely the critique of the sciences. Therefore, a new method or a new philosophy had to be adopted to readjust the trajectory and role by returning to the principal role, which we witness with Husserl: So what is the work of phenomenology?

"Phenomenology is the science of critique: the critique of reason in its forms (theoretical, practical, and normative)... the phenomenological reduction is its very property; it is the philosophical method par excellence, to the extent that it is essentially affiliated with the meaning of the critique of knowledge, inseparable from the critique of reason" (Husserl, 2007, p. 27). Thus, Husserl adopted the phenomenological reduction as a methodological mechanism to analyze the phenomenon of crisis and to rescue the project of human culture, which had been reduced by irrational thinking under the pretence of reason, considering – from Husserl's viewpoint – that the phenomenological reduction is the guarantor in the field of the human sciences, as long as these sciences are based on relativity, change, and the property of understanding, not experimentation. Accordingly, Husserl's pillar was clear in his attempt to make philosophy an exact science; in truth, his dream was not fully realized, but he managed to unravel the dilemmas of modernity and propose essential alternatives for examining the crisis through his method based on the phenomenological reduction.

4.2 Heidegger's Existentialism:

The philosopher "Heidegger" is considered among the most important postmodern philosophers, known for his fierceness in the field of subversion and treatment. He devoted his research to studying the motives of Enlightenment thought and attempting to eliminate its achievements that violated the sanctity of the human sciences and turned thinking from thinking with man into thinking against man. It can be said that the philosopher "Heidegger" lived through the time of persecution that Germany suffered, so his call was always focused on questioning the existence of "Dasein" and its destiny, and expressing his fears about technology and its repercussions. The saying is attributed to him – when he pointed out in a dialogue – that "science cannot think," meaning thereby that science succeeded in achieving the tool but failed in service, as he says: "Yet today man no longer encounters his self in truth

wherever he exists, that is, he no longer encounters his existence anywhere" (Heidegger, 1998, p. 83).

Modern man, when he put the file of existence on the shelf and became master over nature and installed freedom of action by making technology a tool for his development, imprisoned himself in the focus of reification and alienation: "The threat that weighs upon man does not primarily come from technology and its devices, which may possibly have a lethal effect; the real threat to man has struck his existence; the supremacy of technology threatens us with the possibility of its refusal to allow man's return" (Heidegger, 1998, p. 84). Heidegger's fear was justified when he affirmed that man is threatened by technology; so the master became a servant (man – technology) and (technology – man). Technology, with all its achievements, has as its primary goal the achievement of human well-being and the exploitation of his superiority and intelligence in developing machines and devices to serve him. This achievement has reached more advanced technologies, but it moved from the stage of subjugation (serving man) to the stage of reduction (control over man). All forms of human culture have reached the passion for progress in any direction other than that of man. "Everything essential – not only the essence of technology alone – remains hidden for the longest possible time, and it remains so under its directing force... The Greek thinkers had some knowledge of this state of affairs when they said early on: something opens up and exercises its power, then afterwards it shows itself to us humans" (Heidegger, n.d., p. 66).

The beginning is always with a programming of a recreational connotation, to which subjects are drawn in order to realize themselves and prove their capacity for thinking, then control. But in the matter of technology, the situation is different: its novelties are clear and its methods of use are even clearer, yet its method of harnessing and its goals only appear after a time, like the technology of the modern age, which moved from domestication to

disciplining (man – technology) and (technology – man). For Heidegger, he declared that the goal of Dasein is to achieve its authentic existence in the world, disclosure, and escape; but this rapid progress with the dominance of technology led to the horizons of truth and its loss of control instead of disclosure, which he calls nothingness: the non-realization of disclosure. “The age of man as community or society has ended, and the solitary or individual man has replaced it, because everyone has begun to worry, fear, and be annihilated alone” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 118).

Thus, contemporary man could not free himself from the constraints of technology, which went on to disperse his authentic or raw existence in the world, so the subject became lacking in its original truth of an existential character, following its fall into the illusion of anxiety, dissolution, and positioning within this complex and meaning-emptied network. Hence, Heidegger’s attempt focused on identifying the most important slippages of the ego in the age of technology.

5. CONCLUSION

Modernity, with all its might, harnessed all its potentialities to achieve the greatest progress in the history of human knowledge by devising scientific methods whose initial intention was good: to control nature, achieve human well-being, and liberate man from utopianism. However, all of this was merely a display and a pre-programmed protocol to complete the domination over man. It can now be declared that modernity created a human being emptied of his humanity, for it made the object its centre and set its sights on achieving a society governed by industrial forces and advanced technologies; this was the cause of modern man’s crisis. Accordingly, the postmodern phase emerged to diagnose the crisis into which Western reason had fallen, and it harnessed all possibilities for a new renaissance and the renewal of thought by returning to the Greek heritage, echoing the philosopher Husserl’s saying: “Return to the origin of things themselves.”

Postmodern philosophy opened up thinking about human dimensions, which manifested in the philosophy of art, beauty, language, and contemporary rationalities (communicative reason, aesthetic reason, scientific reason, etc.), for it was not satisfied with restricting thought within the boundaries of a single path of thinking. Rather, philosophical reason – through its specific object – surpasses the objects that confront it, i.e., objects characterised by stability; and as long as change and transformation are man's qualities, the essential task was to direct vision toward this specificity. The turn toward the philosophy of consciousness, which represents the most important philosophy adopted by phenomenology with the philosopher "Edmund Husserl," also managed to break the stranglehold of scientific mentality and turn toward concern for the human subject, as Descartes had constructed it before him with his high tower, and toward which all sciences are now turning for their importance and the efficacy of their results.

As a continuation of the Husserlian work, we find the Frankfurt School harnessing its efforts – through its three generations – to overcome the construction of modernity and to focus on man in his social dimension, attempting to erase all forms of alienation that accompanied him, with a Hegelian and Marxist spirit, in order to build a sovereign self far removed from crisis, moving from counting the self as part of the world to adopting it as an "I" that constitutes the world through lived experience. Here we find a clear convergence among postmodern philosophies in rescuing man from technical injustice to the arena of the ego's existence in its own primordial being.

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