

**Dostoevsky's Conception Of Man:
Its Impact on Philosophical Anthropology**

by

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DOSTOEVSKY'S CONCEPTION OF MAN:
ITS IMPACT ON PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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by
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ABSTRACT

Dostoevsky's novels have contributed to a conception of man that reverberates in the conclusions of prominent twentieth-century philosophical anthropologists. Max Scheler, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Albert Camus, among others, have explicitly admitted that the works of Dostoevsky had a certain influence on the manner in which they learned to conceive of the nature of man and the world in which humans live. The aim in this dissertation is to ask: what is there in the novels of Dostoevsky concerning the nature of man, of which certain philosophers could claim that in their philosophical conceptions of man they were positively influenced by him?

The main thesis is substantiated in a careful analysis of four novels by Dostoevsky: Notes from the House of the Dead [Zapiski iz mertvogo doma], Notes from the Underground [Zapiski iz podpol'ia], Crime and Punishment [Prestuplenie i nakazanie], and The Brothers Karamazov [Brat'ia Karamazovy]. These novels were chosen partly because a study of Dostoevsky's entire oeuvre lies far outside the domain that can be covered in a doctoral dissertation. Moreover, I have come to the conclusion that these novels, more than others, concretely show in what sense the leading characters appear to have made themselves be what they had freely chosen to be under the circumstances in which they had to live, and that they were fully aware of the responsibility they had to bear for the implications and consequences of what they had thus decided. Based upon a close reading, four interpretive chapters employ the most significant literary criticism from English, Russian, and French scholarship.

Dostoevsky's philosophical conception of man is compared and contrasted with the conception that Scheler and Heidegger hold, i.e., that freedom is man's essence. Sartre's atheistic humanism and Camus' thoughtful interpretation of man are likewise considered.

Chapter one contains three sections: section one presents a historical survey of the philosophical positions taken on the nature of man. Section two addresses the question: What can an artwork teach us concerning the philosophical conception of man? A provisional conclusion establishes that artworks are indeed capable of providing insights concerning the truth of man. Chapter one concludes with a survey of the literature addressing some of the critical responses which have focused on the (usually) implicit philosophical conception of man in the works of Dostoevsky. This survey indicates that a philosophy of man is present in Dostoevsky's literary work.

Specific investigation reveals several observations that confirm Dostoevsky's image of man:

- 1) The first observation concerns man and his freedom which is not to be understood in connection with choice; rather freedom is constitutive for the essence of man. Dostoevsky depicts how his central characters go about achieving their humanity and reveals the consequences of their choices. Raskolnikov, for example, attempts to surpass his humanity with his "Napoleonic Idea." As though in negative relief, the portrayal of man attempting to surpass his humanity (Raskolnikov, Ivan Karamazov, Orlov) sketches just how fundamental is this link between man and his freedom. Likewise, the attempt to shirk one's humanity as with the Underground Man only serves to highlight the thesis

that freedom is constitutive for the being of man. Hence, man must achieve his own humanity.

2) The second observation concerns the centrality of crime in Dostoevsky's work and its relation to freedom. Dostoevsky's depiction of the "dead House" of a Siberian prison provides a "philosophy of crime" and an understanding of how freedom is vital to the criminal. The prison is a threshold where human unfreedom is highlighted in order to better "show" man. Likewise, the crisis situation such as the criminal act depicts the moment where man splits from his freedom, and is a threshold which reveals man's primary relation to freedom. Ivanov has commented on how central murder is to the later novels. Dostoevsky strategically exploits these episodes in order to better show off the problem of human freedom. Man's freedom implies a resolve to be authentic as well as a resolve to be unauthentic; the latter is a necessary condition of all evil in men. Man becomes the greatest threat to his own freedom, both individually, and collectively. The former is illustrated in the Underground Man and his self-defeating rhetoric. The latter is made clear in Ivan Karamazov's dystopic "poema." The Grand Inquisitor makes all too clear how willing humanity is to sell-out on its most precious asset, i.e., the freedom to be human and the possibility to actualize and make concrete the kind of humanity one chooses.

3) As Crime makes clear, man suffers his freedom. Whether victim or criminal, man is accountable not only for his action

but his being. A close reading of the text reveals how Raskolnikov's crime cannot be disengaged from his literary presentation. He is a "criminal hero." Of all the novels, Dead House best paints a tableau of the hellish prison walls which indicate to the prisoner that the problem of freedom is inescapable. That freedom and the consciousness of freedom are a source of suffering as real as any physical pain the Underground Man makes clear. Imprisoned by acute consciousness, the Underground Man reveals through a number of metaphors that the "antheap," "desiring according to tables," and the "Crystal Palace" are promises of happiness to be won with the cessation of human suffering at the cost of human freedom. Finally, the manner in which Ivan Karamazov suffers his freedom is poetically integrated into his rebellion against the creation where children must suffer. His poema, the "Legend of the Grand Inquisitor, crystallizes the realization that human suffering has dimensions which exceed the terrestrial.

4) A final observation: Dostoevsky does not attempt to shirk the consequences of human freedom nor to reason them away. The result of portraying man's freedom in this manner is that human freedom constitutes the ground of evil and the denial of God. The consequence of real freedom is real evil and apostasy. Dostoevsky was aware of this and yet, he did not seek to avoid the problem of human evil. He defends man's freedom in a total manner. Dostoevsky's thought concerning man and his freedom is "totalistic." It constitutes a radical approach. Ivan Karamazov, Raskolnikov, the Underground Man, and a "terrible monster" such as Orlov present all-encompassing pictures of man.

For example, the Underground Man remarks that man must hew a road wherever it may lead. There is no fixed purpose for human existence, and like the prisoners in the Dead House who toil breaking up old boats and pounding alabaster on the banks of the Irtysh, man must create his own meaning. This is a consequence of total freedom. Man cannot look outside himself to find a "boss" to allocate him meaningful projects. Such presentation of total freedom is made possible by the artistic description of a world without God. Moreover, the "artistic system" allows this total picture of human freedom which the medium of philosophy and the sciences cannot render.

Dostoevsky's works do not force one view of human freedom to be taken over the other. He provides no definitive image of man. The presentation of freedom in this manner is a defense of man, a speaking on behalf of man against dissolution into the rhetoric that theology and science bring. It is worth observing that Dostoevsky wrote these novels at a time when the "sciences of man" were beginning to emerge. His artwork defends man against a dissolution into the acid bath of psychology, sociology, and economy, all of which sought to account for man's being in terms of their own rhetoric.

Jean-Paul Sartre has written that existentialism begins with Ivan Karamazov's "all is permitted." While it is true that this conception of maximal freedom is distinctive to the existentialist conception of man, Sartre's saying does not comprehend the full extent of Dostoevsky's saying about man. The following conclusions are consonant with Dostoevsky's work: that freedom is constitutive

for the being (or the mode of being; essence) of man; that his freedom is an inalienable duty; that one must become oneself; that man strives not only to overcome himself and to exceed his freedom, but in so doing invariably loses his freedom; and that man can exceed himself only in the sense that he realizes an ideal human possibility. This is the revelation of Zosima. In order to overcome himself, man must surrender in humility before men. The Dostoevskian man reveals not only the absence of human nature but also the enormous power which man possesses for achieving his ideal human possibility. To a certain extent, interpreters have overlooked these ideas while emphasizing certain others. These revelations about man are not particular and detailed but are the essential, underlying ideas which will prevail upon any philosophical anthropologist who would attempt to think about man in a foundational way. It is for this reason that Dostoevsky's works will continue to make a significant contribution to any thoughtful discussion about man and his freedom.

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

The Library of Congress system of transliteration will be used in the bibliography, footnotes, and bracketed material within the text. A modified Library of Congress system will be used for the text, and accordingly, names ending in "ii" will show the "y" ending (i.e., Dostoevsky rather than Dostoevskii); and soft-sign markers in names are dropped (hence Raskolnikov, rather than Raskol'nikov).

INTRODUCTION

There is a conception of man and human freedom in Dostoevsky's work which has had a central influence on twentieth-century philosophical anthropology. Friedrich Nietzsche, Max Scheler, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Albert Camus, among others, have explicitly admitted that the works of Dostoevsky had a certain influence on the manner in which they learned to conceive of the nature of man and the world in which humans live. Our aim in this dissertation is to ask: what is there in the novels of Dostoevsky concerning the nature of man, of which certain philosophers could claim that in their philosophical conceptions of man they were positively influenced by him?

We shall try to substantiate our main thesis by turning to a careful analysis of four novels by Dostoevsky: Notes From the House of the Dead [Zapiski iz mertvogo doma], Notes From the Underground [Zapiski iz podpol'ia], Crime and Punishment [Prestuplenie i nakazanie], and The Brothers Karamazov [Brat'ia Karamazovy]. These novels were chosen partly because a careful study of Dostoevsky's entire oeuvre lies far outside the domain that can be covered in a doctoral dissertation. Moreover, I have come to the conclusion that these novels, more than others, concretely show in what sense the leading characters appear to have made themselves be what they had freely chosen to be under the circumstances in which they had to live, and that they were fully aware of the responsibility they had to bear for the implications and consequences of what they had thus decided. Before turning to the Dostoevsky novels, and their

conception of the free human, we must address the questions: What do we mean by philosophical anthropology? and, what can a philosopher learn from an artwork?

CHAPTER 1

ARTWORKS AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF MAN

The following chapter is composed of three sections. In section one, I will explain that the concern for the essence of man has always been and remains a fundamental part of every philosophy. The view that human freedom is constitutive of the essence of man is emphasized by many thinkers, but in a very distinctive way in the philosophical work of Scheler, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and in that of many other phenomenologists and "existentialists."

Section two concerns the relationship between literature and philosophy in their quest for truth. To what extent can artworks be said to contribute to the manifestation of truth? The approach of hermeneutic-phenomenology which considers the ontological perspective on the artwork guides this inquiry. In section three, "A Survey of Some Philosophical Issues Raised by Dostoevsky's Literary Work," I hope to explain that Dostoevsky's work has actually influenced leading philosophers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly with respect to their conceptions of man.

Notes on Philosophical Anthropology

The term "anthropology" arose in the eighteenth century, while the expression "philosophical anthropology" is most likely a twentieth-century creation. However, the philosophical inquiry which seeks after the essential meaning of being human is as old as philosophy. Even though every major philosopher has questioned the

essential significance of man, the subject matter was not thematized as a philosophical discipline until the 1920s.¹

In the pages that follow I shall remind the reader of the most salient points in the history of the philosophy of man, with the aim of locating Dostoevsky's thoughts about man within this large tradition and of showing its importance and creative novelty within this rich philosophical heritage.

Antiquity

Philosophy from the very start has been concerned with questions about the essence of man, about what it means to be human, about man's place in the cosmos, about his leading prerogatives, his freedom, his dignity, and his destiny. This concern is obvious in the philosophies of the pre-Socratics, Plato, and Aristotle. It is equally manifest in the philosophies of Augustine and many other medieval philosophers.

In antiquity man was always seen as having a privileged part in the cosmos as a link with the divine. Greek religion at this time centered upon a mythic cosmology and ritual enactment of sacred mysteries. A well-ordered priestcraft attended to a number of temples and altars devoted to a number of gods. Oracular interpretation such as Sophocles and Plato described gave man a medium through which to interpret sacred will. Philosophy grew up alongside the Greek religion, and through the use of reasoned argument provided an alternative or complementary naturalistic account or "logos" into the "phusis" or nature of things. The origin of philosophy in ancient Greece highlights a conviction that the world is well-ordered [kosmios kosmos] and that such order is knowable by humans. Man's place in the cosmos is that he is the

being capable of making meaningful statements concerning the order of the cosmos, and for giving, likewise, an honest account [ho logos] of his life. The essential Greek insight amounts to the wonder of wonders that man can say truthful things about the world and his place in it.

The Western philosophical tradition takes as its birthplace the Greek region known as Ionia, what is now the Mediterranean coast of Turkey with the sixth century B.C. as its birthdate. It finds its written origin in the fragments of the Pre-Socratics of the Ionian School, which included Thales (c. 624-546 B.C.), Heraclitus (c. 540-475 B.C.), and Parmenides (c. 530-544 B.C.). At the center of Pre-Socratic inquiry was the attempt to articulate a unified discourse concerning the underlying principle of "all that is." There was an attempt to find an underlying ground to account for all that manifests itself as nature.

From speculation concerning the intelligible ground of nature, philosophers turned their inquiry toward the nature of man.² From its origin in the fragments of the Pre-Socratics to its culmination in the teaching of Socrates which was recorded by Plato and corrected and refined by Aristotle, the origin of Western philosophy thematizes man's quest for understanding his place in the cosmos. In the Western Tradition which notes its inauguration in the ancient Greek desire for truth, the meaning of being human is given a concrete definition as zooion logon echon: a living thing that has reason, or a living thing that has language. It is an animal that thinks and speaks.

Socratic humanism as it is borne out in the Platonic dialogues places philosophy or dialectic at the center of the human inquiry. The dialectic provided Socrates (470-399 B.C.) with a means of

weeding-out mere conjecture and opinion [doxa] from a true account of a state of affairs [logos]. In contraposition to the Sophists, Socrates' teaching was not dogmatic, but an open-ended and ironic quest for the truth concerning man's place in the cosmos and his function as a moral agent. In his ethics he held the conviction that no man can do wrong willingly (knowingly). This is the doctrine known as "ethical rationalism." Socratic humanism places a premium upon education and honesty and introduces a basically optimistic view of man's potential for truth.

Socrates' disciple, Plato (427-347 B.C.), advanced the teachings of his master into a more systematic and global account of the universe. Plato introduces a psychology or doctrine concerning the human soul which relies upon a theory of reincarnation. The human being is for Plato a body and a soul. In The Phaedrus, Plato accounts for the soul's origin, its tripartite function, and its potential for illumination and ascent to divinity.

Plato's philosophical consideration of man advances Socrates' humanism and at the same time refines a theory of education whereby man optimizes his potential for divine intelligence. In Plato, man's happiness is connected with the divine Good.

In Aristotle, the human being may be approached in several ways, in philosophy of nature, in "psychology," and above all in ethics and political philosophy. In The Nichomachean Ethics, Aristotle systematically explores the potential virtue of man's actions and possibility of finding the middle (mean) between two extremes of human moral disposition. Human happiness is directly connected with a transcendent God. He mentions "ho theos," God, and not the divine order nor the gods. His treatise on human psychology entitled De Anima greatly influenced ensuing thinkers who sought to understand

the human mind. With regard to man's physical body, Aristotle reasoned that its functioning is much like that of other animals, apart from the function of its reason. Man is again defined as an animal that thinks [zoon ekhein logon]. Aristotle's Politics treats man as a social animal. Aristotle's contributions to the understanding of man's ethical, psychological, biological, and political character undergird the approach that thinking takes toward man in the ensuing millennia in the West.

The Christian Era

Three primordial streams flow into the understanding of man from classical antiquity. As seen above, there is the Greek Miracle or the birth of philosophy, which puts forward the conception of man as a being capable of speaking of the truth of his being in the cosmos which Socrates exemplified. The second stream is the Roman conception of the "civis" or citizen as subject to the laws and legislation of the all-powerful Roman Empire. Finally, there is the influence of the ancient stream of near-eastern Judaism brought into contact with the West through the teaching of the early Christian church. This Judaeo-Christian thought conceives of the human as a person, created from dust and the inspiration of an all-knowing and all-loving Father-God who created the world ex nihilo. As such the Western tradition is to a great measure the result of the influence of these three ancient streams. Its conception of being human continues to exert a power over Western man.

In the middle ages there were two fundamental approaches to the philosophical comprehension of man which derived from antiquity: the rational-naturalistic approach of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, and the illuminative approach of Augustine. Most anthropologies

written between the fourth century A.D. and the fourteenth century emphasize, to a greater or lesser extent, either a "rational" account of man's place in the universe, or an "illuminative" approach. The illuminative approach was derived from a mystical Neoplatonic element that infused Platonic metaphysical terminology into the writings of Christian theologians. Augustine (354-430) incorporated insights derived from the Neoplatonist, Plotinus (205-270), in order to account for the triune Godhead [trinitas] and its life in man [vestigium trinitatis].

Augustine inaugurates a "modern" way of knowing (anticipating Descartes' "cogito, ergo sum") that is primordially anthropological.³

The human being comes to understand the truth of objects in the world in a manner that is analogous to seeing objects in the world.

Man possesses intellectual sight.⁴ In order to account for the manner in which a fallible mind lays hold of immutable truth, Augustine refers to a process of illumination. The illumination theory resembles Plato's theory of reminiscence [anamnesis]; however, Augustine no longer depends upon a theory of the soul's reincarnation in order to provide a basis for what it understands as truth.

Corporeal objects come to be seen in the light which shines from the sun. The light of the sun makes possible the perception of for example a tree. There are forms, ideas, reasons and rules which allow knowledge of external objects to be recognized as true. Like the light of the sun, these rules are never seen in themselves. They are not innate in the soul, and are not perceived through sense perception. "They are "irradiated into" the soul, "participated" by created beings, and "illuminated" for the mind's perception by a divine light."⁵

As a Father of the Church, Augustine's thinking operated within the center of revealed truth and theology. Even so, in many ways he was a precursor of modern philosophy.⁶ He defined man as the image of God, hence indicating that man points to God for his completion and truth. God is a great magnetic center in which all truth coheres. In a contrary manner, that which seeks to move away from God, loses its truth and its being. The human will which aligns itself with God's will participates in moral goodness; on the other hand, moral evil is a privation of what an act ought to be. The movement toward true freedom is a movement toward God, and any freedom that does not move toward God is a "false" freedom. All of these applications stem from Augustine's metaphysical conception of evil as a privation of being.

In the Christian era man has always been seen as the center of God's creation. This is clear in Augustine and in anyone influenced by him. Man is also conceived as consisting of a material body which is mortal, and an immortal soul that is destined to be united with God in a life to come. An example of a Christian philosopher influenced by Augustine is Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). Although he emphasizes Aristotle's rational-naturalistic account, Aquinas' philosophical account of man also bears an Augustinian stamp. Man is a creature, but also a creature in the image of God. The rational approach goes a long way in accounting for man as a creature of nature, but faith also seeks an account of man's specific relation to God.

The Renaissance

Two or three monumental historical events commence the modern age: Christopher Columbus' discovery of the New World in 1492; the

protestant reformation spearheaded by Martin Luther; and the proliferation of the Faust Legend. These events led to a new way of conceiving man and his place on earth. The articulation of this new way of seeing things is central to the thinking of the Renaissance. During the Renaissance a renewed interest in man's place in the cosmos placed reflection on man at a premium. For example, in the Florentine Academy, an Italian humanist, Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494) attempted to return to the Greek thinking about man in an attempt to harmonize the thought of Plato and Aristotle. Man's place in the world is a "microcosmos" combining three spheres: immaterial angels; incorruptible heavenly bodies; and corruptible earthly bodies. Man is unfinished, and thus free to complete himself: "Other creatures were completed by God, but he left human beings incomplete and instead lent us a part of his own creative power. With it we complete ourselves."⁷ God has granted to man a degree of freedom such that man is capable of choosing a degree of life from the lowest unto the highest. In his treatise On the Dignity of Man [Oratio de Hominis Dignitatis], Pico relates the words that God spoke in creating man:

We have given to thee, Adam, no fixed seat, no form of thy very own, no gift particularly thine, that thou mayest feel as thine own, have as thine own, possess as thine own the seat, the form, the gifts which thou thyself shalt desire.⁸

Man's dignity consists in his nature being open and free. Man is capable of being that which he chooses to be. Further, since man is the center of the universe, he unites the cosmos with his knowledge.

Pico's man-centered view of the cosmos did not prevail. War, famine, pestilence intervened to show man's darker side. Within a century, skepticism concerning man's higher nature emerged. Michel

de Montaigne (1533-1592) lived nearly one century after Pico. He wrote Les Essais at the end of the French Renaissance period. Lacking in his work is the optimism of the Italian humanist. Man is prone to error in knowledge, and the very possibility of certainty is repugnant to Montaigne: "Il n'y a que les fous qui aient imperturbablement des certitudes ('De l'institution des enfants')."

The very title of his work Les Essais suggests that he is attempting to test and try knowledge rather than to definitively state it. Montaigne's preface indicates that the subject matter of his inquiry is himself, but himself as an inconstant, fluctuating being, prone to error.

The Modern Era

In the modern era most thinkers were still believing Christians; yet as philosophers they attempted to account for reality in terms of reason. The basic conceptions concerning man's freedom, his material body and his soul were framed in such a way that they were maintained on the basis of reason alone. The consequence of this way of thinking was a stress on the method of obtaining an unshakeable starting point with which to secure one's rational certainty. In the seventeenth century the origin of a "modern" conception of man commences with the Rationalists (Descartes, Pascal, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Wolff on the continent), and in particular with the philosophy of René Descartes (1596-1650). In contrast to Montaigne, the Cartesian philosophy begins with a quest for absolute, mathematical certainty.

The French philosopher believed that if he could establish an indubitable method for establishing knowledge he might arrive at the universal "mathesis" which underlies all that can be known in the universe. The idea of man's existence as a "thinking thing"

provides Descartes with the indubitable starting point for certain knowledge. His philosophy is entirely anthropocentric, as it begins with innate ideas in man's reason [ego cogito] as the foundation for deductions concerning God and the world. Descartes' conception of human being is that man is composed of two independent substances: mind (or soul); and body. The human being is on the one hand, a "thinking thing" and on the other hand a material body that can be conceived of as a very sophisticated machine.

At the beginning of his Ethics, Spinoza (1632-1677) advanced the idea of an infinite Substance that is the cause of itself [causa sui] which can also be called God. Spinoza introduces a pantheistic system of thought wherein the world is interpreted either as nature or as God [Deus sive Natura] depending upon the perspective taken. Accordingly, man too, is substantially indistinguishable in essence from God. Spinoza's philosophical conception of Substance is so all-encompassing that man cannot appear with his own unique, finite essence.⁹

After Descartes and Spinoza, the third continental "Rationalist" is Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716). Underlying his thought is the idea of "universal harmony," an idea which figures centrally in The Theodicy: Essays on the Goodness of God, the Freedom of Man and the Origin of Evil, a work which attempts to account for apparent evil in God's harmonious universe. The central problem which faced Leibniz was how to account for evil and suffering in the world that God has made. Leibniz accounted for the pre-established harmony and rationality of the universe and man's place in his work entitled, The Monadology. The "monad" is a force-substance which underlies all that is. It is not a physical entity, but is metaphysical having no parts, extension, nor figure:

In order to bring an infinite number of monads together in an overarching unity, Leibniz concludes, as did Spinoza, that the whole universe is in every part, and every part is in the whole universe, or, in terms of monads, the whole universe is in every monad, and every monad is in the whole universe.¹⁰

With his "monadology," Leibniz arrived at a thoroughly rational account of the universe. Like Spinoza, he was unable to avoid pantheism, and as a result man's place in the world could no longer be strictly distinguished from God.

In the middle of the eighteenth century at the spearhead of the French Enlightenment one finds L'Encyclopédie co-edited by Denis Diderot and Jean d'Alembert. This project was not intended as subversion of ancient ways of thinking but rather a reordering of human knowledge. Robert Wernick writes: "They never pretended to have invented the new way of thinking, they were only systematizing it, publicizing it, letting it loose to spread its rays of enlightenment and disperse the clouds of ancient superstition."¹¹ To consult the very prominent Tree of Knowledge at the frontispiece of volume one is to find a systematic topography of human understanding.

In this diagram science de Dieu (theology), science de l'homme (human science), and science de la nature (natural science) are clearly subordinated to reason. This ordering of knowledge indirectly resulted in a heretical conclusion. Robert Darnton writes, "The premises sounded pious, but the conclusions smacked of heresy because it seemed to subordinate theology to reason. . . ."¹² The Encyclopedists or 'les philosophes' initiated a way of seeing human knowledge which in turn redefined the objects of this knowledge. By classifying and ordering knowledge in such a manner that scientific, self-evidence assumed priority over revealed truths, the knowledge of human science found itself upon the same platform as the science of God. This does not mean that Diderot was an atheist,

but it highlights the fact that a "science of man" is central to the work of the Enlightenment. Philosophy inaugurates a description of the human being in a novel position with regard to God.

Another modern contribution to man's self-understanding was advanced by the Scotsman, David Hume (1711-1776), in his work, A Treatise of Human Nature (1739-1740). Hume ". . . tried to make his study of man as empirical as possible, and so labelled his 'philosophy' of man a 'science' of man" ¹³ In direct contradiction to Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz, he advanced the idea that perception underlies any and all human knowledge. The epistemology which relies exclusively upon perception furnishes the central dogma of Empiricism. The Empiricist school flourished in Great Britain and Scotland during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries under the influence of Hobbes, Locke, Berkeley, and Hume.

Both Cartesian Rationalism and Humean Empiricism reached an impasse for human thinking. Rationalism inescapably emerged into a doctrine of pantheism, since man, God and universe are essentially and ultimately indistinguishable. On the other hand, Empiricism, while attempting to combat the results of Rationalist philosophy, fell into the impasse of total skepticism. In particular, Hume's opus, Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding (1748), resulted in a doctrine of skepticism which undermines any human attempt to establish certain knowledge.

Hume's doctrine rejects the possibility of the mind possessing any ideas which do not first originate in sensate impression. The existence of the "self" is highly dubitable since it is never perceived as a sensate impression:

When I turn my reflection on myself, I never can perceive this self without some one or more perceptions; nor can I ever perceive anything but the perceptions. 'Tis the

composition of these, therefore, which forms the self
[italics in original].¹⁴

Personal identity for the Scottish empiricist is a "feeling" which accompanies the connection or coupling together of discrete sensate impressions.

Hume convincingly showed that the effort to secure an account for what-is in terms of reason is futile and doomed to skepticism. This skepticism alarmed Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who attempted to salvage a possibility for human knowing in the face of empiricist skepticism. His philosophy is best understood as an effort to overcome this skepticism. In so doing he had to relegate God and soul to the status of transcendental ideas which refer to entities we can think but never understand. This was the principal task of his first critique, The Critique of Pure Reason (1781). In his three critiques Kant carried through the revolution inherent in the emergent modern conception of the human being which Descartes had commenced. The first work was followed by a critical approach to ethics which establishes that the ultimate good is that good which the human being wills. The third and final critique, The Critique of Judgement (1790), establishes a framework for the interpretation of beauty and human judgement. It is the crowning achievement of Kant's critical philosophy and is foundational to the thinking of German Idealism.

Concerning human education, Kant was essentially optimistic. The employment of discipline would help to perfect the human being. He contrasted the animal instinct with the human lack of instinct in order to indicate the necessary role of reason in human life:

Animals are by their instinct all that they ever can be; some other reason has provided everything for them at the outset. But man needs a reason of his own. Having no instinct, he has to work out a plan of conduct for himself. Since, however, he is not able to do this all at

once, but comes into the world undeveloped, others have to do it for him.¹⁵

Reason fulfills man whose lack of instinct leaves him helpless before nature without education: "Man can only become man by education. He is merely what education makes of him."¹⁶ Man requires culture to fulfill himself; through the upbuilding of education man might improve.

German Idealism

In German Idealism one sees an effort to think man in God. Man has an essential place in the process in which the Absolute achieves full possession of itself in Absolute Knowledge. This raises the question of how man in such a framework could be free and how evil came to be. This problematic became the central preoccupation of Friedrich Schelling (1775-1854).

In German Idealism the concern for man came to the fore again in great force in the works of G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831) and Schelling. Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind established a philosophical idealism which articulated a vision of an underlying rational unity in lieu of the universal dichotomy Kant's philosophy had established:

For Hegel, the difficulty with Kant was the cul-de-sac in knowledge caused by so overloading the subject side of the subject-object relationship that there was no obvious vehicle for reaching the object.¹⁷

Hegel's thought moves in the other direction--seeing that the objects taken as appearances are in essence the "making known" of the Spirit. Man appears in Hegel's Absolute Idealism as a finite manifestation of Spirit, or the Spirit becoming conscious of itself in merely finite modes.

Schelling carried the doctrine of Idealism to the question concerning the essence of human freedom. He fell heir to a set of

problems concerning freedom and the human capacity to choose evil as opposed to a system of mechanical necessity wherein human freedom is an epiphenomenon either of the natural order or of God (pantheism). If God is in all and all is in God, then it becomes increasingly difficult to account for the presence of evil in the world and for the human capacity to choose evil over good. Human culpability emerged as the central concern of philosophical anthropology at the same time the theodicy failed to account for the problem of evil in a world created by an omniscient and benevolent deity. The emergence of philosophy of man as a specific discipline coincided with the lapse of theodicy as a branch of natural theology. The problem of the contradiction inherent in God's omnipotence in the face of real evil and human suffering transmuted into a philosophical concern for man as man, as a free being enmeshed in evil in a primordial way. But more, what is at stake is the nature of human choice, the philosophy of freedom.

Schelling maintained that the artist as genius is the revelation concerning the ground where freedom and nature are united. Schelling writes of the power of art in contrast to philosophy to reveal man:

Philosophy attains, indeed, to the highest, but it brings to this summit only, so to say, the fraction of a man. Art brings the whole man, as he is, to that point, namely to a knowledge of the highest, and this is what underlies the eternal difference and the marvel of art.¹⁸

Art is for Schelling the "universal organ" of philosophy, and has the potential to manifest truth. German Idealists established man as potentially divine where the divinity of man is announced in artworks of genius.

It fell to Schelling not only to account for evil in an Idealist Philosophy, but at the same time to work out a place for human freedom in the fall-out of Kant's Critical Philosophy. Hegel's

philosophy laid such a strong emphasis upon the inevitable self-becoming of the Absolute that ". . . the transmutation of God into the world must again become a problem."¹⁹ This is essentially a theological problem. Schelling attempts to account for this by the method of theosophy, a mystico-speculative doctrine. The Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom (1809) is a systematic attempt to justify personal free will for good and evil in a world created by God, and to account for the finite world as independent from absoluteness. Material things possess a metaphysical independence from God. This accounts for the human capacity to freely choose evil.

Schelling announces a system of freedom which offers a positive philosophy of the absolute. His system takes into account the negativity which was the fall-out of Kant's Copernican Revolution and, at the same time, puts forth a discourse of the absolute. Schelling retrieves the absolute, but in the aspect of its decomposition or "fallenness." He maintains that a more primordial fall grounds man's fall into sinfulness. This discourse is the only possible discourse concerning the absolute which can account for the ground of fallenness and the proneness of human beings to sin. Schelling's system of freedom takes the via negativa by accentuating nihilism to account for human freedom. "The survey of total negativity offers the only positive possibility for apprehending the Absolute seen in its fallenness."²⁰

As such, Schelling's system of freedom inaugurates a "philosophical religion" which accounts for human redemption metaphysically by establishing a discourse of the fall of the absolute. Such is the saving task that the philosophy of man bears. Be that as it may, it is worth noting that Schelling's work

challenges the practical result of the fall-out of the Critical Philosophy that funnels religion into the limits of reason alone. One must ask whether Schelling's "religion" is yet within the limits of reason alone. On the other hand, Schelling's treatise is somehow a working-out of the latent potential of the unthought in Kant's transcendental philosophy.

The Nineteenth Century

The philosophy of the nineteenth century announces a confidence in progress, inherited in part from the project of the Enlightenment. This progress is understood in scientific (positivism, scientism) and social terms (socialist, communist and utopian blueprints of revolution and an ideal society). The conception of man insofar as he is conceived socially and scientifically is optimistic. However, in contraposition to German Idealism, and in particular opposition to the absolute idealism of Hegel, the philosophical conception of man in the nineteenth century is largely characterized by a negative conception of man. A philosophical interpretation of man emerged which negates all that Idealism asserted about man. The attempt is made to think man without God, either making man God or denying God's Being. We find this humanistic atheism in several forms: Marx; Comte; Nietzsche; and Freud, to name a few. To a large extent, the contemporary philosophy of man finds its origin in this negative reaction to Hegel. Two principal streams of thought are worth considering: existentialism; and Marxism.

Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) is the first proponent of an "existential" philosophy. This thinking holds onto man's finitude and limitation in the name of Christianity against the self-

divinization of German Idealism. Kierkegaard's philosophical position is a patent negation of Hegel's absolute idealism. His attempt to salvage religion in an idealist framework failed, but later regained influence at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) was significantly influenced by Hegel, but he did not accept Hegel's idealistic conclusions. Marx was influenced by the negative theology of Ludwig Feuerbach, who emphasized a conception of man as a finite, dependent creature who projects an image of God as the antithesis or perfection of all that man is not. The nineteenth-century philosophical interpretation of man is characterized by atheism (i.e., God is a creative projection of man) and by nihilism (i.e., an emphasis on all that man is not, an emphasis on man's limitation and finitude). Feuerbach's negative theology influenced not only Marx, but also Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Sigmund Freud (1865-1939). Both Nietzsche and Freud theorized about man, employing this "negative" method. Such an a-theistic and man-centered conception of the cosmos is not entirely new, and bears traces of humanism. The applications of this thinking, however, are novel. If man is not a "creatio Dei" then he is a product of sociological or economical material forces in history. August Comte (1798-1857) sought to apply the insight that man and his beliefs are generated through the control of society in an effort to "engineer" society through entirely rational motives. Similarly, Marx argues that philosophy ought to transform the material and economic determinants of human life in order to facilitate the historical advent of dialectical materialism. In the nineteenth century, man came to be seen as a self-creator, hence inaugurating a fully anthropocentric conception of life.