

Arrogance or Salvation

HDSP and the Irrationality of Enlightenment

In *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente* (or *The Dialectics of Enlightenment*) Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno elucidate the ways in which enlightenment has failed. To quickly sum up their main point: They understood the process of enlightenment as having failed, not only that but it had turned into the opposite of what it intended, namely the opposite of liberation: slavery, fear and the twilight of the 'enlightened mind'.

'Der Furcht wähnt er ledig zu sein, wenn es nichts Unbekanntes mehr gibt.' (Adorno & Horkheimer) Since Antiquity, the goal of enlightenment has always been the dissolution of mankind's fears, i.e. destruction of myths, superstition and its ilk, and since then, experts have sought out everything which we earlier knew nothing about¹ and conquered it in the name of rationality and enlightenment, conquered in the sense that it has been made operational for mankind.² Mankind wants nothing from nature, inner and outer, except control over it. What has been the outcome of this is nothing short of an illusory relationship to the world, because we now know nothing of the world *in itself*, except that which we tell ourselves we know. This is an example of anthropocentricity in its widest sense; the Kantian undercurrent is implicit.

Furthermore, since enlightenment has shown that it is extreme in its goal, man's alienation toward the world, and himself, will continue to unfold, or better still, close up our minds. Operationality has reached its pinnacle in capitalist society.

Der Mythos geht in die Aufklärung über und die Natur in bloße Objektivität. Die Menschen bezahlen die Vermehrung, ihrer Macht mit der Entfremdung von dem, worüber sie die Macht ausüben. Die Aufklärung verhält sich zu den Dingen wie der Diktator zu den Menschen. Er kennt sie, insofern er sie manipulieren kann. Der Mann der Wissenschaft kennt die Dinge, insofern er sie machen kann. (Ibid.)

Where the idea had been to liberate man from his fears, a de-mythologization, the goal has become next to total alienation of man toward his surroundings, a re-mythologization.

Enlightenment, science and capitalism integrated in a new form of rationalisation, has now become a second nature to man and a continuing alienation is ensured.

Into this umbral world steps a single individual with a grand plan. Hornsleth writes in his HDSP-concept, 'Will we have problems with saving the human race as such?' His intention: To save 1000+ of our species plus animal and plant life in a container, to store it for posterity. Goal: To have, at least, future beings (aliens or terrestrials) animate/clone/revive the project participants, i.e. an eternity project.³

Firstly, one might inject the argument that the concept of eternal life is in itself a product of the all-consuming alienating Enlightenment project of our society. The understanding of life and creation is still seen from a one-dimensional instrumental point of view. How are we to know what life (Being in itself) is, when we employ an extreme anthropocentric (in the Kantian sense) methodology?

¹ Outwardly, nature and the universe, inwardly, human nature and the structures of the mind.

² What logically follows in its wake is the antipathy towards anything that does not, in any way, conform to this credo, e.g. metaphysical thought. Heidegger spoke of how we have turned nature into a thing, into an object at our disposal. Nature has been stripped of any possibility of transcendental value.

³ I am deliberately foregoing the whole angst-dimension to the project due to the limit scope of this article.

Secondly, the participants (i.e. donors) may all be of the same persuasion as the artist, born, as he was, into a world of cerebral re-mythologization and therefore (inadvertently) guilty of the same arrogance of power over or blindness to Being.

Lastly, HDSP spans the world, gathering participants from West to East, North to South. One might infer that this is a sign that what Adorno and Horkheimer prophesized eventually came to be: the fulfillment of the terrible Enlightenment-project on a global scale, leaving the world of the early 21st century in perpetual darkness, figuratively speaking of course, the schism Man – Nature completed. On the other hand, also being the opinion of this writer, HDSP has actually become a catalyst of hope, but not because of the possibility of eternal life, at least not isolated. Rather, since we *are* living in a time of shortage when it comes to transcendental values, since we *are* living in a one-dimensional world of productivity, operationality and the wealth/growth fixation of urban-capitalist *logic*, and since we, consequently, might be witnesses to the destruction of nature, physically as well as value-wise, could HDSP not be seen as a beacon of hope?

Who is to say that we will not develop away from this excruciating Enlightenment? The future holds hope, ergo HDSP might hold hope, the hope that humanity will evolve beyond rationality in its most extreme anthropocentric sense. In a nutshell, HDSP is a wish for the donors to potentially live to see a new dawning for *the world*, not just for man.

Kent Oluf Hytten, lecturer of English and philosophy and proud HDSP donor.