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Commentary on Heidegger's "The Question Concerning Technology"¹

Mahon O'Brien

At the outset of this seminal essay Heidegger makes a series of claims that, *prima facie*, sound rather bizarre and catch us entirely unawares, not least, that the essence of technology is itself nothing technological.² Heidegger wishes to examine tech-

¹ The following is a draft of a lecture given at the *Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen*, Vienna, September 15, 2003. The lecture itself represents a rather condensed version of the first chapter of the second major section of my dissertation. The second section in its entirety constitutes an effort to unearth the deep seated connection between Heidegger's so-called 'early' and 'middle' periods. The latter parts of the second section characterize Heidegger's discussion of technology and related issues as a structural segue into his discussion of the notion of art as well as the purported mystical themes of his 'late' period. The lecture presupposes no prior philosophical instruction or familiarity with Heidegger's work, rather it is intended to function as something of a companion piece to Heidegger's famous essay – "The Question Concerning Technology." Heidegger's essay is easily one of the most influential pieces of work concerning the subject of technology (and related issues) but is also the victim of a myriad of misappropriations and misreadings. It is hoped that this essay will help ameliorate the current situation where so many non-philosophers view Heidegger's essay as another variant on the prevalent themes of cultural pessimism and anti-modernism which dominated the European intellectual scene during the early and middle parts of the twentieth century.

² One should be warned however, that Heidegger will not simply introduce his problematic and then present the solution, one has to follow the path which he weaves on the way toward coming to grips with the problem. Following this path is a rather arduous task and involves a significant level of patience and commitment from the reader. A number of thinkers have re-

nology, in particular, the *essence* of technology, yet in so doing he is going to distance himself from the anti-modernist diatribes and cultural pessimism which were the staple diet of early twentieth century European intellectuals. That is not at all to say that Heidegger does not share certain misgivings with respect to the rapid expansion of technology and the concomitant rapidity with which our worldly network of technical instruments and apparatus are collapsing distance and levelling the once mysterious, massive, and, at times, recalcitrant earth³ to a quite manageable global village. Heidegger is alarmed and dismayed to witness communities and parishes being replaced by global culture and global *Gemeinschaft*, where parish pump politics, for example, is now a relic of a bygone age. Heidegger's reservations do not, however, prompt an impetuous reaction, an outcry or tirade against the evils of technology, this is not the diatribe of yet another intellectual Luddite. Rather Heidegger resists the temptation to demonize technology and thereby propagate an even more sinister myth, and instead has chosen to meditate on the issue and pursue a line of questioning until he arrives at what he holds to be the source/*ur* of this notion. A notion, moreover, which seems so ubiquitous and prevalent in everything we say and do as the notion of *Sein* itself and thus enjoys the exalted and unmerited status of self-evidence.

It should hardly come as a surprise to any of us that anything which is taken for granted in this manner will become a major source of concern for Heidegger; generally what seem to have become unproblematic or self-evident are the particular *sache* which Heidegger inquires after with unrelenting zeal. In this case, there are a number of conventional ways in which technology is more or less taken to be exhaustively understood but Heidegger will find fault with all of them and show that among other shortcomings, their lowest common denominator is an inability to touch on or capture what he contends is the essence of modern technology.

sisted what they see as this recurring 'errant' method in Heidegger's philosophy, not least, Ernst Tugendhat who dismisses Heidegger's technique as merely "evocative" and thereby groundless. This is a serious charge but one which Heidegger himself was not unaware of. Part of the problem here is that Heidegger was not convinced that philosophical questions were already on solid interpretive grounds and that various traditional philosophical notions, such as correspondence theories of truth, were indubitable. However, critics such as Ryle and Tugendhat, either wittingly or unwittingly, perpetuate prejudices which Heidegger himself eschews and then proceed to criticize him for not endorsing the basic tenets (prejudices) of an analytical position which he dismissed as untenable. Their basic procedure and ensuing claims then obviously beg the question in an unacceptable way.

³ An Earth which Heidegger is keen to show was once the object of our reverence and awe, an Earth with which human kind co-operated yet deferred to in the hope that it would yield to them its precious gifts and afford them a year of modest plenty.

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In the opening paragraph Heidegger peddles some of what was to become his mature philosophical parlance insisting that his project is one of finding a way/*weg* – that he wishes through language to be *unterwegs*, that is, ‘on the way’, to the matter in question. This way is a path along which thinking proceeds and thinking is guided along this path through language in an “extraordinary” manner. Why should Heidegger use the word *extraordinary* when describing what, if we are to concur with Gadamer⁴, is the oldest and most endemic of human impulses, namely the desire to question after things, to satisfy our curiosity, in short the inception of the philosophical impulse which casts doubt on or at the very least interrogates what we ordinarily take to be the case? Perhaps we merely wish to have knowledge concerning something where previously we had none. These explanations in themselves, however, offer us a hint as to what Heidegger is trying to convey through his use of this adjective. In giving ourselves to thinking we do something which is on the one level quite an ordinary activity but at another level subverts much of what we take to be ordinary, it leads us to the *extra*-ordinary, the *extra*-mundane. This resultant tension is as old as some of the earliest records we have in the Occident of human cogitation confronting the world in which it found itself – the tension involved is *acutely* evident, treated with a breathtaking degree of philosophical dexterity and available for all to see in both Plato and Aristotle. Consider the specific word employed by Heidegger: “*ungewöhnlich*.” *Ungewöhnlich* normally translates readily as ‘unusual’; in English as with the German (*ungewöhnlich*) it involves the privation of the usual, of the normal, the ‘*un*’-doing of what we take to be usual. But we can go further here: the root of *gewöhnlich* is *wohnlich* which means “homely,” something we are at-home-with and familiar with. The root in turn of *wohnlich* is the verb *wohnen* – to live, to dwell, where we are at home. Thinking then brings us out of the region where we are at home and even should we remain in this region, thinking suddenly makes it *un*-homely, what in *Sein und Zeit* is described as *unheimlich*. This is a recurring theme/motif in Heidegger’s thought; we even find it expressly in a letter to Jaspers which dates from as early as November 19, 1922, number 12 in the *Briefwechsel*. In this letter Heidegger describes how even “world and life are unhomely [*unheimlich*] for the philosopher.”⁵ The world and life, the two most immediate, obvious and seemingly self-evident notions at our

⁴ Hans Georg Gadamer. “The Political Incompetence of Philosophy.” In *The Heidegger Case*. Ed. By Tom Rockmore and Joseph Margolis. Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1992.

⁵ My translation.

disposal as beings who *live* in a *world* are somehow strange, uncanny to the philosopher or to the thinker. The thinker is not at home in the *life-world*. Why, we might ask? Should it not be the task of the philosopher to burk or remove difficulty, to make the seemingly refractory and often numinous nature of existence and its concomitant enigmas more *amenable* to us?⁶ To these questions, Heidegger has repeatedly given the answer 'no'.⁷ The challenge, as he sees it, is not to make the world easier to live in and understand – we don't need further assimilation and reduction. If anything we find ourselves always and for the most part mere automata in a convenience culture where everything is laid on for us to such an extent that we are not even aware of the infinitesimal level of networking and organization which keeps the entire system afloat. Rather the challenge is to see through what seems to be given, the laid-on as it were, what we take for granted, and take it up as an issue for investigation. Rather than remaining docile in our *homely* unquestioning attitudes, Heidegger wants to awaken us into absolute fascination that things are as they are, that they even *are* at all. If anything, life and existence are far too easy, *homely* and familiar,⁸ which is not to say simple, but they are not an issue for us in important ways except at a *subliminal* level. Heidegger wants to make these things, *at the very least*, liminal.

Technology is one of the issues which he resolves to question to this end. In questioning concerning technology Heidegger hopes to "prepare a free relationship to it. The relationship will be free when it opens our human existence to the essence

⁶ It is worth reflecting on the etymology of the word "amenable" in this context. It is generally assumed that the word is derived from Anglo-French, in turn from the middle-French word *amener* 'to lead up'. This in turn can be traced to old French: *a* which comes from the Latin *ad* combined with *mener* which means 'to lead'. This in turn comes from Late Latin *minare* – "to drive" from the Latin *minari* "to threaten." We might then say that the showing of the instruments of torture was designed to make a prisoner or accused, such as Galileo for example, more 'amenable'. Precisely what Heidegger would say here is that in thinking that we drive and control these issues (technology especially) we fail to see the true nature of our comportment, our role, how thinking proceeds, how one can properly answer the call of thinking and the kind of resolve involved. Rather than deluding ourselves with the idea that we have bent the subject to our will, and led it or drove it somewhere, we should see that we can only respond appropriately to what it gives us when it opens itself to our reflection. The hubristic tendency of anthropocentric metaphysics is one which Heidegger was already keen to avoid even as early as *Being and Time*.

⁷ We even find in *Introduction to Metaphysics* the claim that philosophy is not a 'means' to anything. One cannot 'do' anything with philosophy. It is, in that sense, *use-less*. Heidegger insists of course that this is not a failure of philosophy. If one is disillusioned by such an admission, then one was labouring under an illusion that one should be pleased to be disabused of.

⁸ Anyone familiar with Heidegger's account of authenticity will recognize this approach.

of technology."⁹ Furthermore, technology is not to be understood as already meaning the *essence* of technology. The essence of something, Heidegger insists, is not the same thing as the thing itself. In thinking of the essence of a tree "that which pervades every tree, as tree, is not itself a tree that can be encountered among all the other trees. Likewise, the essence of technology is by no means anything technological."¹⁰

Any of the usual dispositions with respect to technology are either ineffectual or misleading but the worst of all delusions is to regard technology as entirely neutral since "this conception, to which today we particularly like to do homage, makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology."¹¹ Self consciously adhering to and taking his lead from the tradition, Heidegger looks to ask *what technology is* since this is the question¹², we generally believe, which apprehends the *essence* of something. The "what is it?"/*ti esti* question of course proves to be perhaps the question of all questions, we find it revisited in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* as, quite literally, the question *par excellence* as he attempts to both illustrate and exemplify the difficulty involved in trying to meet Socrates' challenge, an attempt which, according to Heidegger, shapes the destiny of Western thinking.¹³

There are two responses which Heidegger suggests will typically be given to the question: "what is technology?" First it will be propounded that technology is a means to an end and secondly that it is a human tool. The two answers of course are intrinsic to each other since the belief that technology is a tool at our disposal prefigures our conviction that it is a means to various ends which we envisage or have designs on. Tools already have an equipmental directionality inherent in the way we conceive of them, a point which Heidegger's analysis of tools and the ready-

⁹ QCT p. 3.

¹⁰ Martin Heidegger. "The Question Concerning Technology." p. 4. In *The Question Concerning Technology and other essays*. Translated by William Lovitt. Harper & Row, New York, 1977.

¹¹ QCT p 4. I am at a loss as to why Lovitt elected to translate *vorstellung* as 'conception'. His footnote, moreover, does not shed any light on the issue since he concedes that elsewhere he translates the word as "representation." Furthermore, not only does he fail to offer any explanation as to why he chose 'conception' in this instance, he also refers explicitly to Heidegger's desire to emphasize the root (*stellen*) of the word and the notion of representation as a setting-before – a *vor-stellen*. To my mind 'representation' is entirely more appropriate here than 'conception'. There is a level of agency involved in the presentation to oneself or others which evokes something of the notion of setting before which I just do not hear in the alternative 'conception' which seems to relate more to the 'taking in' of an idea.

¹² I mean of course, the "what is it?" or "*ti esti*" question.

¹³ Cf Was Heisst Denken?

to-hand character of our quotidian world of perfunctory tasks and routine movements has made patently clear.

Our initial response then to the question 'what is technology?' appears to be exhausted by a combination of the instrumental and anthropological definitions of the concept. Technology is indeed instrumental, we utilize various tools to expedite our objectives and remove all impediments. It is no less an anthropological term: technology/the technological denotes a network of tools and equipment at our disposal as was indicated above and, as such, signifies a human activity in the broadest sense. Both of these descriptions are correct, but, as we shall see and could already be forgiven for suspecting, Heidegger is going to insist that they are *merely* correct but not at all the *truth* understood as the essentially true nature of the situation. In fact the correctness of the instrumental definition of technology is *so* correct as to *perturb* us if we pay sufficient attention to it.¹⁴ The instrumental definition serves to conceal more than it reveals, it levels off differences which are fundamental under its equalizing view of what is essentially constitutive. One of the major differences it conceals, Heidegger argues, is the disparity between the old contraptions, devices and conveniences of primitive handywork (*handwerk*) and the products of the modern technological age. Hydroelectric plants, airplanes, and radar stations are of course all understood as 'means' to 'multiple' ends but this, Heidegger contends, hardly warrants the widespread conviction that they are different only in *degree* rather than *kind* from "the older handwork technology."¹⁵

In conceiving of modern technology as a means to an end we are duped into the utterly false assumption that it is something which we control, which we can master and bring under our sway as it facilitates our efforts to secure certain ends.¹⁶ Con-

¹⁴ It is worth remarking that Heidegger uses the word *unheimlich* to underscore the *un* – usual (*ungewöhnlich*) nature of this situation whereby we see no essential difference between modern technology and older forms of craftsmanship and agricultural methods. The instrumental definition of technology in a sense has blocked our access to the fundamental differences between modern machine technology and the older tools of farmers and craftsmen. This has happened as a result of Enframing/*Gestell*.

¹⁵ It is claims such as this, which we shall see recurring throughout the essay, which prompted Steiner to claim that Heidegger is a thoroughgoing agrarian. Cf George Steiner. *Martin Heidegger*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago, 1978. pp 147 – 150. This is something which Heidegger is frequently accused of along with charges of romanticism. It is crucial to the success of his enterprise however that we can demonstrate that it is not a piece of hopeless sentimentality to hold that there are substantial and essential differences between a spade and a JCB and that he is not simply regurgitating the anti-modernist invectives so much in vogue in the twentieth century.

¹⁶ One of the things which Heidegger will show is that the for-the-sake-of/equipmental character which is inherent in tools seems now to beget its own ends which we readily adopt as our

sider for a moment, however, the possibility that technology is precisely something that is *not* of our own design and is not ours to control. Is this not contradictory? Heidegger explains that though the very notion *might* appear to be inconsistent, the mere fact that technology involves securing various ends through means does not necessarily entail that we control or master it. The definition is *correct*, but it is not the "round, unvarnished," whole truth.

In order to proceed further then, we must begin with what we have available to us, examine it such that it becomes less than banal and generate a level of fascination which helps us uncover what is more primordial or essential. We have been given an anthropological and an instrumental definition of technology. Furthermore, they are reciprocal insofar as technology involves human activity and it seems to be specifically tailored to facilitate various human needs and desires by providing means to securing both which, in turn, involves *all* of human activity. It would be difficult to know where to begin to demarcate the field of inquiry pertaining to the claim that all technology is human activity in that it is too broad and vague a claim. Conversely, there seems to already be an implication to the effect that the anthropological definition must require an instrumental definition of technology since all human action seems to be for-the-sake-of something – it is teleologically oriented through and through. The possibility of a more manageable and concrete field of inquiry, therefore, lies latent within the instrumental definition of technology. This will lead to one of the first extended pieces of analysis in the essay as Heidegger undertakes to investigate the age-old question of 'causality'. It would hardly serve our current enterprise to rehash Aristotle's famous treatment of the four kinds of cause involved in any kind of human production – suffice it to say that Heidegger identifies Aristotle's as the paradigmatic account which shaped all subsequent inquiries on the subject. The important thing to note following his enumeration of the basic gist of Aristotle's account is the speculative and provocative remark: "But suppose that causality, for its part, is veiled in darkness with respect to what it is?"¹⁷

own without ever realizing that we are delivered over in a sense to the desire for these goals unwittingly and rarely see the vacuous character of the ends which we achieve through them. We shall return to this issue more explicitly later with the discussion of the fourfold causality and the loss of an originary sense of causality.

¹⁷ QCT P. 6.

It is a long-standing convention that we take the term 'cause' to simply mean the *causa efficiens*.¹⁸ In keeping then with the instrumental definition of technology, it is so broad, in one sense, as to simply mean something like the following: insofar as humans look at the world causally, we look to consequents and then look to the grounds or antecedents of those consequents, but only insofar as something is the *efficient* cause of something else/of effects. The other three causal categories identified by Aristotle have dropped out of our account somewhere along the way – we no longer speak of the *causa materialis*, *formalis* or *finalis*. Moreover, Heidegger claims, what later readers and thinkers sought and continue to seek under the rubric of causality is utterly removed from the original Greek word *aition* whose meaning is quite distinct from that of "bringing about and effecting."¹⁹ As always, Heidegger's highly innovative, if idiosyncratic, reading of the Greeks is bound to raise a few eyebrows and since I am not qualified to assess the legitimacy of Heidegger's etymologies in this instance I do not feel that it is incumbent upon me to offer any authoritative evaluation. However, from the consultations which I have had with Greek scholars concerning this particular essay, the etymologies here do not trespass as unashamedly beyond the boundaries of acceptability as some of his more radical interpretations. In any case, Heidegger is adamant that, for the Greeks, the notions of *telos* and causality are a far cry from the notion of causality as we find it conspicuously employed in both our conventional and theoretical language (to say nothing of our concepts, which also represent things as being part of a cause-effect coherence). Heidegger wishes to understand what it is that unites these four elements of events and production rather than simply considering them in isolation, what is it that coheres among them such that we refer to them all as parts of causality? A partial answer is immediately suggested: "The four causes are the ways, all belonging at once to each other, of being responsible for something else."²⁰ When anything occurs, it is *caused*, and the four elements of causality are collectively *responsible* for this event. But this hardly constitutes a sufficiently extensive response – as Heidegger himself queries: "What unites them from the beginning? In what does this playing in unison of the four ways of being responsible play? What is the source of the unity of the four causes? What, after all, does this owning and being responsible mean, thought as the Greeks thought it?"²¹ In order to truly understand cau-

¹⁸ Though even this is something which is fast disappearing under the holding-sway of the essence of modern-technology.

¹⁹ QCT p. 7.

²⁰ QCT p. 7.

²¹ QCT pp 8 – 9.

salinity, Heidegger claims, we need to uncover what was originally understood in the notion of *being responsible* for something.

Heidegger describes the process of causality as commencing with the starting of something on its way into arrival, *this*, above all else, is its principal feature, and it is in this sense that it induces "occasioning" and manifestation. *Occasioning* is now described as what the Greeks understood and heard as the essence of the word *aitia*/cause. Heidegger now speaks exclusively of the four modes of 'occasioning' and seeks their common feature, the feature which holds them in unison. Granted there has been precious little by way of argument for this series of interpretive steps, as such, we should take these claims provisionally, for the time being, as a series of promissory notes.

These four modes of occasioning are said to be "unifiedly ruled over by a bringing that brings what presences into appearance."²² This 'bringing,' Heidegger suggests, is explained to us by Plato in the *Symposium*, by way of Diotima, as her disquisition on love is recounted to the interlocutors by Socrates: "*He gar toi ek tou me onton eis to on ionti hotoioun aitia pasa esti poiesis.*"²³: "Every occasion for whatever passes over and goes forward into presencing from that which is not presencing is *poiesis*, is bringing-forth."²⁴ Heidegger's translation of this fragment is highly idiosyncratic and perhaps controversial. The context is important here, the rest of the clause runs something to the effect "...and all the processes in all the crafts are kinds of poetry, and all those who are engaged in them poets."²⁵ Poetry is identified with production in the sense that any activity which undertakes to *cause* certain effects and so on, with the avowed goal of a certain type of object in mind (production in general) is a kind of poetry/*poiesis* even if we do not usually think of such endeavours as *poetic*. Moreover, as shall become even more explicit when we look at some passages from Aristotle, poetry is the *process* whereby something that was not there, not *present*, is now created, brought forth, *pro-duced* and as such is something that is *present* for us. It has been made present for us through the modes of occasioning. The question which we might already sense gestating is whether or not there is something which precedes the actual process of occasioning and produc-

²² QCT p. 10.

²³ *Symposium*. 205b.

²⁴ QCT p. 10. Heidegger's translation of this fragment is highly idiosyncratic and perhaps controversial. A more conventional rendering of this fragment is the following: "Any action which is the cause of a thing emerging from non-existence into existence might be called poetry." Plato. *Symposium*. Translated by Walter Hamilton. Penguin Books, 1951. 205b/p. 85.

²⁵ *Ibid* 205b/p.85.

tion. Does there have to be a fore-conception, and not in a prethematic sense, which allows us to begin the *pro-duction*, the *poiesis*?

Poiesis, according to Heidegger, was essentially understood to be a kind of production, what he terms "bringing-forth"/*Her-vor-bringen*.²⁶ In the cited fragment, *poiesis* is taken to mean 'poetry', *precisely* in the sense of a bringing-forth, that is, in the sense of producing or creating. Diotima invokes a general notion of bringing-forth in her discussion with Socrates, and, this poetry, which in its widest sense means more or less production and creation, is the kind of production which causes one thing to become another or involves the production of a certain new object by some artisan or craftsman. As readers of Heidegger, and I would say any powerful thinker, we would be well advised to be refractory with respect to innovations, we should always look askance such that we can identify which creative etymologies are worth retaining and which are simply expressions of a personal philosophical phantasy, "a desire of the heart sifted and made abstract."²⁷ This particular discussion of causality utterly confounds us, it is astonishingly atypical and perplexing, and yet there *are* compelling reasons for the manner in which Heidegger interprets *poiesis*.

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The highest/most supreme form of *poiesis* Heidegger claims is *physis*:

²⁶ The word "produce" comes from the Latin *produco* which is a combination of *pro* and *duco*, literally to lead or bring forth, to lead forward or out, to bring before. The German "*hervorbringen*" may *sound* more literal than the English "produce" but it says precisely what the English word says and refers back to the notion in all of its richness in Latin. Lovitt chooses to translate *hervorbringen* as bringing-forth, yet in English, this is precisely what the word 'produce' means. Of course Heidegger is stressing the notion of bringing-forth as the essential feature of production, but Lovitt's move has the undesirable effect of suggesting to the reader that the English and Latin terms have already been corrupted or debased whereas any attempt at an etymology suggests that this is not the case at all. In fact the very word *poiesis* is generally understood to be any general kind of production in the sense of 'making' or 'creating' while at the same time enjoying a particular connection to poetry since this is the kind of production which is named by poetry/*poiesis*. When we look at the general meanings of the word *poiesis*, we notice that the Latin *produco*, which we translate as 'produce' and in German is translated as *hervorbringen*, seems to be very similar in meaning to what Heidegger intends through his use of *hervorbringen*. Lovitt explains in a footnote that *hervorbringen* has a panoply of meanings and that Heidegger intends all of these various nuances to be heard to which end he hyphenates the *her* and *vor* prefixes. He further suggests that the entire gamut of nuances which are evoked by the prefixes is not susceptible of translation. I would argue that the word "produce," understood as having its full and impressive array of meanings would be more than adequate and would sound a little less awkward at times than "bringing-forth," one could always hyphenate the word as pro-duce to emphasize the prefix and the

²⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche. *Beyond Good and Evil*. Translated by R.J. Hollingdale. Penguin Books Ltd., 1972. p. 18.(Aphorism no. 5)

For what presences by means of *physis* has the bursting open belonging to bringing-forth, e.g., the bursting of a blossom into bloom, in itself (*en heautoi*). In contrast, what is brought forth by the artisan or the artist, e.g., the silver chalice, has the bursting open belonging to bringing-forth not in itself, but in another (*en alloi*), in the craftsman or artist.²⁸

This kind of production is, in a sense, purer, Heidegger claims, since it is not artificially brought about but occurs *of itself*.²⁹ It is not the outcome of someone's intention and subsequent actions as an agent, the truth of such *poiesis*, therefore, is not at all tainted with any residual elements of human subjectivity or agency. Heidegger does not elaborate on this notion here but it seems profoundly problematic when thought through fully. If human artifice is distinguished from what happens independently of humans, upon what do we base our distinction? What exactly is the difference between insects in a garden whose instinctive industry is vital to the survival of particular plants³⁰ and the gardener who mows his lawns with an electric mower, trims his verge with a strimmer, prunes an unkempt shrub or rescues a plant smothered with dense grass and unable to receive sufficient sunlight for photosynthesis? We are continually thwarted if we attempt to base the distinction on something like a principle of nature for example, since it is impossible to suppose that man, an entirely natural being, as part of a universe which is governed by principles, which are immutable principles of nature, could ever manage to effect anything which is the privation or transgression of what is natural. Such a possibility would require something that involved the suspension of certain indubitable laws of nature, in short a "miracle"?³¹ The antecedent improbability of anything like that

²⁸ QCT pp 10 – 11.

²⁹ This would make it self-sufficient and thereby more complete if we are to take an Aristotelian line. Cf Aristotle's discussion of the virtues with respect to completeness and self-sufficiency in the *Ethics*. There is, in the end, only one non-relational virtue.

³⁰ I learned recently that there exists a particular insect which attacks the buds of a flowering plant. Their contribution however is far from deleterious since they manage to consume entirely the waxy covering which operates as a shield against the inclement winter conditions. If the seal was not removed, the flowers would never get a chance to bloom.

³¹ Of course, scientific laws and laws of nature are not strictly immutable and some of them may prove to be unfounded. However, when it comes to explaining various events, it will always make more rational sense to doubt the fallible testimony of humans, based on their unreliable and deceptive senses, than to suppose that well established laws of nature have been transgressed or to suppose that there was something wrong with our accepted law/laws. Whatever the case we do not have a miracle since the transgression of an erroneous law is not

ever occurring precludes any chance of seriously *believing* that there is a possibility of anyone ever effecting what would essentially amount to a supernatural action/miracle.³² But does this not require us to collapse all distinctions, to concede that the devastation caused by something like a nuclear bomb is at bottom, or *essentially*, no different from that caused by a tidal wave or earthquake? In a sense 'yes'! And yet, in a crucial sense, this is precisely the symptom of a dangerous malignancy that has infected human understanding and threatens many traditional mainstays of human existence under its growing aggrandizement. The instrumental definition of technology is correct, but we are often mistakenly taken in by the notion that this is somehow all there is to say on the matter. It is important to bear in mind here that Heidegger is keen to insist that there is no "demonry of technology" but that is not to say that there is not a grave danger; as we shall eventually discover, this danger relates to the essence of technology which is nothing technological. Perhaps a hint as to what the difference between our production and that of *physis* consists of can be gleaned from further meditation on the notion of *techne*. We might, for instance, say that all actions are equally 'natural', but some are not effected through the realm of bringing-forth as ordained by human *techne* and that there is a significant difference between actions which come under the rubric of *techne* and those emerging from *physis*. Our tendency to collapse the difference between these modes of bringing-forth or production is a symptom of the dominion of the hypnotic influence which the instrumental definition of technology has had over us under the aegis of, what we will later hear characterized as the essence of technology – *Gestell*.³³

The discourse which Heidegger has fashioned around the notions of 'occasioning' and 'bringing-forth' owes a certain debt of influence to one of his most famous philosophical discussions, namely, that concerning the Greek conception of truth/*aletheia*:

Occasioning has to do with the presencing [*Anwesen*] of that which at any given time comes to appearance in bringing-forth. Bringing-forth

in itself a miracle and the possibility of fallible human testimony being true at the expense of a scientific law is always less likely than the reverse from a rational standpoint.

³² This is of course Hume's position in *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (ed. by Selby-Bigge, Oxford, 1966) and it is one to which, in principle, I subscribe.

³³ It is this assimilative tendency which is also responsible for the belief that within the realm of human *techne* there are no substantial distinctions to be made regarding the common essence of all human activity. In other words, they are all examples, more or less directly of technological endeavour with differences only in degree and not in kind.

brings hither out of concealment forth into unconcealment. Bringing-forth comes to pass only insofar as something concealed comes into unconcealment.³⁴

I will spare the reader yet another lengthy exposition on Heidegger's notion of truth as 'unconcealment' for the Greeks, so perhaps a few cursory remarks both here and again later will suffice. Heidegger uncovers in the Greek word for truth something which he insists was lost in the translation of *aletheia* into *veritas* which we in turn translate as "truth," understanding the term as meaning something like "the correctness of an idea"³⁵ – truth as correct correspondence, a notion which admittedly finds its roots in Aristotle but also, Heidegger suggests elsewhere, a little more obscurely in Plato. The alpha privative, Heidegger argues, functions as the privative influence on what is concealed, the word *a – letheia* involves the *un – concealing* of something and this, Heidegger believes, is what the Greeks heard in their word for 'truth'. With this strategic step we have completed our examination of the first section of Heidegger's essay, which one can and perhaps *should* read as a tripartite investigation.

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Heidegger has already in the previous section woven the notion of *aletheial* truth, understood as unconcealment, into the fabric of his inquiry and this will be the motive force behind some of his most crucial developments. With this move, Heidegger, as it were, cements the inner logic of his investigation and affords himself some room to manoeuvre away from the traditional conception of truth as mere correctness or correspondence and instead to delve into the notion of revealing. For anyone still wondering as to how exactly the notion of 'revealing' is apposite in the current context, the answer is quite simple. Heidegger has, for quite original and profound reasons, introduced the notion of bringing-forth or *pro-duction* into his discussion of causality, which needed to be looked at with a view to getting some apprehension of the notion of instrumentality. Instrumentality was investigated since it was the most appropriate route available by way of getting a preliminary analysis of technology off the ground. With sufficient care and attention to what is still alive in the old words of thinking's heritage, we had the opportunity, through this preliminary analysis, to get to a more primordial understanding of causality, which brought us into the realm of *techne* and bringing-forth which were identified with 'revealing' which Heidegger takes as the essential feature of 'truth'. This philosophi-

³⁴ QCT p. 11.

³⁵ QCT p. 12.

cal approach is hardly novel for Heidegger, readers of *Sein und Zeit* will instantly recognize it as the strategy Heidegger employs to answer the question concerning the meaning of Being which involves beginning with a preparatory existential analysis before shifting on the basis of the insights garnered therein to a more fundamental, primordial ontology.

Bringing–forth then is obviously related to the notion of revealing since “every bringing–forth is grounded in revealing...If we inquire, step by step, into what technology, represented as means, actually is, then we shall arrive at revealing. The possibility of all productive manufacturing lies in revealing.”³⁶ Technology then is not simply a means to an end, it is a *way of revealing* the world we live in and this is the rationale behind Heidegger’s claim that the essence of technology is the realm of *truth*.³⁷ Furthermore, Heidegger concedes that this result is so bizarre and counter-intuitive as to require us to ask what the name “technology” itself actually means. Of course the word can be traced back to its origins in the Greek term *techne*. *Techne* is normally translated as art, craft, skill, cunning of hand, even technique. Heidegger goes so far as to say that “*techne* is the name not only for the activities and skills of the craftsman, but also for the arts of the mind and the fine arts. *Techne* belongs to bringing–forth, to *poiesis*; it is something *poietic*.”³⁸ It is *poietic* in the sense that through *techne* something is *pro–duced*. A more important observation Heidegger claims however, is that *techne* has from the Presocratics until Plato been connected with *episteme*: “Both words are names for knowing in the widest sense. They mean to be entirely *at home* in something, to understand and be expert in it. Such knowing provides an opening up. As an opening up it is a revealing.”³⁹ Heidegger goes on to argue that “what is decisive in *techne* does not lie at all in making and manipulating nor in the using of means, but rather in the aforementioned revealing. It is as revealing, and not as manufacturing, that *techne* is a bringing–forth.”⁴⁰ As it stands, this section requires a lot by way of justification since the

³⁶ QCT p. 12.

³⁷ Again, truth understood as unconcealment – the truth of something meaning something beings revealed or disclosed.

³⁸ QCT p. 13.

³⁹ QCT p. 13.

⁴⁰ Heidegger cites Aristotle’s discussion in Book VI, chapters III and IV on the difference between *episteme* and *techne*. Aristotle: [1140a] (1)IV. “The class of things that admit of variation includes both things made and actions done. [2] But making is different from doing (a distinction we may accept from extraneous discourses). Hence the rational quality concerned with doing is different from the rational quality concerned with making; nor is one of them a part of the other, for doing is not a form of making, nor making a form of doing. [3] Now

conventional translations of Aristotle would *seem* to contravene directly what Heidegger has claimed here. This result, if it is indeed a sound one, would prove disastrous since Heidegger's procedure would be denied one of its crucial elements, namely, that originally the notion of *techne*, understood as the precursor to modern technology, would be precisely to do with making and manufacture, indeed as *fundamentally concerned* with the proper comprehension of how to utilise means to secure ends. As Heidegger himself has stated above, *techne belongs to poiesis* and *poiesis* involves the production of something else, which can and often does entail manufacturing.

We are required therefore to examine the passages in question from Aristotle and see whether or not we can get some idea as to why Heidegger's analysis, *prima facie*, seems dubious. Aristotle begins chapter 3 of Book VI of the *Ethics* with the following remark:

The states by virtue of which the soul possesses truth by way of affirmation or denial are five in number, i.e., art, knowledge, practical wisdom, philosophic wisdom, comprehension.⁴¹

We either know or disbelieve the truth of things in five specific ways: *techne*, *episteme*, *phronesis*, *sophia* and *nous*. Aristotle spends the rest of this chapter specifying precisely what the character of *episteme* is. He firstly claims that what we know is what we hold to be necessarily the case, if it could be otherwise then we know nothing of it when we are not observing it, even whether it exists or not. Moreover, since it is necessary – it is eternal “for things that are of necessity in the unqualified sense are all eternal; and things that are eternal are ungenerated and unperishable.”⁴² Things which are not objects of knowledge in this way however include both things ‘made’ and ‘things’ done (*poieta* and *prakton*). These in turn are dif-

architectural skill, for instance, is an art, and it is also a rational quality concerned with making; nor is there any art which is not a rational quality concerned with making, nor any such quality which is not an art. It follows that an art is the same thing as a rational quality, concerned with making, that reasons truly. [4] All Art deals with bringing some thing into existence; and to pursue an art means to study how to bring into existence a thing which may either exist or not, and the efficient cause of which lies in the maker and not in the thing made; for Art does not deal with things that exist or come into existence of necessity, or according to nature, since these have their efficient cause in themselves. [5] But as doing and making are distinct, it follows that Art, being concerned with making, is not concerned with doing.” Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. 1139b15. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. (The revised Oxford Edition) Ed. By Jonathan Barnes. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984.

⁴¹ Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. 1139b15. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. (The revised Oxford Edition) Ed. By Jonathan Barnes. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1984.

⁴² *Ibid.* 1139b23.

ferent from each other such that "the reasoned state of capacity to act is different from the reasoned state of capacity to make. Nor are they included one in the other; for neither is acting making nor is making acting."⁴³ Aristotle is here distinguishing between the practical and the *poietic*, between simply carrying out a task and creating or making something which one has a conception of.

Since building is a *techne*, it is accordingly "a reasoned state of capacity to make." That is, *techne* involves having the requisite rational conception of what needs to be made and the understanding of how to make it which precedes the actual *production* of it; it reveals originally how the bringing-forth should *proceed*.⁴⁴ Furthermore, any such technical *savoir-faire* is such that it is identical "with a state of capacity to make, involving a true course of reasoning." *Techne* then is concerned with things that can come into being and with how they can be *made* to do so: "for art is concerned neither with things that are, or come into being, by necessity, nor with things that do so in accordance with nature since these have their origins in themselves."⁴⁵ And, we might add, do *not* have their origins in *techne*.

How then are we to reconcile the account given here, based on the Oxford translation, with Heidegger's own account? The attempt to do so, in short, involves a good deal of interpretation and analysis, which often will require us to struggle *with* Heidegger to get to what he finds so crucial here. It seems certain that the emphasis which Heidegger gives to the relevant passages is his own and not Aristotle's. To suggest that, however, is not tantamount to a criticism or rejection of Heidegger. It would be quite remarkable to find a thinker from Aristotle's day speaking directly to the problems we face with respect to machine technology. That does not mean, however, that we cannot learn something interesting and crucial concerning the original and perhaps definitive notion of *techne* from which the notion of modern technology is ultimately derived.

What is it that prompts Heidegger to argue that what is important in the notion of *techne* is not at all the notion of manufacturing? Why does Heidegger move against the notion of 'manufacturing' which, as a certain type of production, is *poiesis*? Well let's consider what Aristotle offers. *Techne* is the art which *allows* someone to actually manufacture something, it is the *logos* which accompanies the actual carrying out of the plan. It is concerned with revealing and bringing-forth insofar as it is a capacity of the soul for *aletheia* which is not epistemic since it looks to bring

⁴³ *Ibid.* 1140a3.

⁴⁴ Proceed is from the Latin *pro-cedo*: "to go *forth* or before, to advance."

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 1140a13.

things which are not already in existence into existence. In that sense it reveals something which has the potential to be there, in this case perhaps a building from a quarry of rock, but which is not already there within the unwieldy hunks of rock. It conceives of a house and provides the know-how requisite to get the manufacturing underway at which point *poiesis* begins. Of course, for Aristotle, *techne* and *poiesis* sound as if they are sides of the same coin, nevertheless, they *are* distinguished in the manner outlined above and as such Heidegger is not entirely wayward in his claim that *techne* belongs more to the realm of revealing, of truth/*aletheia*, the true course of reasoning needed to inform the *poietic* production. The question remaining is whether or not Heidegger is entitled to sharply distinguish between the processes involved in *techne* and manufacture since the word manufacture, properly construed, is simply another kind of *poiesis*, and involves being 'made with the hands' or 'made by human hand', indeed 'made by humans'. In Aristotle however, and Heidegger I believe would not deny this, the art and the making, *techne* and *poiesis* go hand in hand, if you'll pardon the pun. But 'manufacture' properly construed is precisely the notion of making in this Aristotelian sense, so they are intimately and deeply connected according to Aristotle's own account. As Aristotle says in chapter four "art must be a matter of making, not of acting."⁴⁶ Heidegger's equivocation here amounts to a failure to make clear that Aristotle is concerned in this chapter not with distinguishing between *techne* and "manufacture," indeed if anything he establishes the fundamental connection between these two notions. Instead Aristotle is distinguishing sharply between *techne* and simply *doing* things, *prakton*. How significant this turns out to be remains to be seen. One thing we can be certain of however, is that *techne* most certainly *is* deeply related to the notion of *poiesis* and thereby *manu-facturing*. *Techne*, in the relevant section of Aristotle's *Ethics*, is described as a reasoned state of capacity to make, which of course is to be distinguished from *pratakon*/the merely practical, which is merely to do things, carry out perfunctory tasks and so on. Conversely, *poiesis*, which in this context is connected with the relevant *techne*, is concerned with *making* things and these are seen by Heidegger to be fundamentally different enterprises. However, Aristotle quite explicitly states that all art is concerned with figuring out how something can be *produced*, that is, manufactured. Manufacture comes from the Latin *manu factus* which literally means to make with the hands, to make something into something else, to fashion(which like *factus* comes from *facio* which means to make) something into something else. It is even described as the 'art' or process of *producing* something,

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 1140a16.

which is *precisely* what Aristotle refers to. *Techne* is the 'art' of *poiesis* and specifically is within the domain of the notion of production and manufacture so construed.

But can this be the end of the matter? Is Heidegger simply *totally* wrong or is there more to the story? The line we find in Lovitt's translation is:

Thus what is decisive in *techne* does not lie at all in making and manipulating nor in the using of means, but rather in the aforementioned revealing. It is as revealing not as manufacturing, that *techne* is a bringing-forth.⁴⁷

Let us use 'manufacture' then in a quite specific and linguistically debased sense as referring to no more than the simple process of applying technically proficient apparatus to achieve some perfunctory task or other in the modern age of machine technology. If we consider it in *this* way, we see that Heidegger is in fact attempting to point to something more primordial and originary than this type of meagre, manipulative application. What he wishes to emphasize is not so much the manipulation of means so as to accomplish some routine task or other, nor is he so much interested in the actual work *effected* by the craftsman even when he carves an effigy – the productive/*poietic* aspect of the activity. Rather Heidegger is looking to preserve the most elemental/original sense of *techne* as suggested by Aristotle's discussion of the difference between *techne* and *prakton*. What gets everything underway is that *techne* is first and foremost a way of *revealing* something, of conceiving of something such that it *can* be brought forth as what it will eventually be when it is *present* to us as what it has become. Of course, Heidegger should also then have clarified that what he was in effect distinguishing between was *techne* and *poiesis* since Aristotle himself has already shown that simply acting/doing is totally unrelated to *techne* and made no such attempt to distinguish between *techne* and *poiesis* but rather described them as mutually constitutive ideas. It is not just a defunct or narrow sense of manufacturing which Heidegger has contrasted *techne* with, this was already clear from Aristotle's own account, rather he has shown that the *revealing* involved first and foremost belongs to *techne*, that it is *techne* which, as it were, gets everything under way and not *poiesis*. That does not mean however that the notion of manufacture itself is debased since *pro-duction* is the positive correlate of *techne*, rather merely practical thoughtless activity is to be contrasted with *techne* and *poiesis*. This hopefully sheds some light then on what Heidegger means when he claims that the "clue to what the word *techne* means and to how the Greeks defined it leads us into the same context that opened itself to us when we pursued the

⁴⁷ QCT p. 13.

question of what instrumentality as such in truth might be."⁴⁸ We are back in the region of revealing and bringing forth:

Technology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to presence [*West*] in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *aletheia*, truth, happens.⁴⁹

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Now that it has been established that technology is a mode of revealing, Heidegger wishes to focus particularly on this fundamental characteristic of *modern* technology, namely, that it too, in its own inimitable way, is revelatory. The manner in which it distinctly reveals is the only point of entry into the question available to us if we wish to discover what is unique to modern machine technology. What is the essential dissimilitude then between modern technology and all of the many and various strains of technology hitherto? The answer, Heidegger proposes, is the *manner* in which modern technology *reveals*. Modern technology does not look to avail of what nature already proffers or provides for us. Modern technology looks to manipulate nature, to impose upon it, to undermine its ontological and structural integrity in multitudinous ways such that we can demand more of it, extract more from it, set-upon it with the relentless zeal of a Grand Inquisitor where now our scientists are the inquisitors and also the henchmen/anatomists, vivisectioning every corner of the earth's structural integrity for no other reason but that it seems both feasible and possible to do so, a witless attempt to make the Earth more *amenable* with no visible objective in mind save that we are capable of making it more amenable.

But are these not the complaints of an unadulterated romantic? Is this not the rampant sentimentality of a peasant lover, bemoaning the loss of the 'good old days,' lost in the quiet, pastoral idyll of Todtnauberg? If one is to engage with Heidegger seriously at all, one must avoid such impetuous dismissals, Heidegger's thought is neither easily circumvented nor rejected as so naïve and primitive. One must ask oneself, is it really the case that Heidegger, one of the greatest philosophers of the twentieth century, but who some see as having an *occasional* propensity to fetishize the German peasant experience, is doing nothing more than that here? Are we just reading an idle piece of sentimentality, an overtly romantic and idealized view of times past? I would submit that to dismiss this particular essay and related ones on charges to this effect is to not understand Heidegger's thought at all.

⁴⁸ QCT p. 13.

⁴⁹ QCT p. 13.

It is a charge which many are wont to make and one which is facilitated by the widespread conviction that it is entirely reasonable to both bracket certain features of Heidegger's thought with a view to reappropriating them or to distinguish between *Sein und Zeit* and much of his subsequent work.⁵⁰ With respect to the revelatory capacity of modern technology, Heidegger is *not* simply bemoaning the loss of the world of yesteryear in misty-eyed sentimentality, this is not a doleful, nostalgic essay – “there is no demonry of technology” to begin with. Rather Heidegger is trying to discover what the exclusive feature of modern technology is which distinguishes it *essentially* from earlier types. To recapitulate, the difference pertains to the way in which modern technology *reveals*, the manner in which it allows us, and *seemingly* compels us, to *view the world* we live in and the Earth we live on.⁵¹ Where once a windmill relied on the wind for its operative success or lack of it, now energy is unlocked from air currents, “a tract of land is challenged into the putting out of coal and ore. The earth now reveals itself as a coal mining district, the soil as a mineral deposit.”⁵²

One might object that this is to ignore the various ways in which we traditionally, even in our capacity as agriculturalists, challenged the Earth to provide us with a bountiful harvest, a harvest which emerged through human manipulation and contrivance of a technological, though admittedly more primitive and rustic nature. Farmers reaped what they *sowed*, not what the Earth chanced to grant them through multiple windfalls. How then do we reconcile this claim with Heidegger's thoughts on technology? That is, where do we draw the line between earlier manifestations of technology, with their concomitant attempt to provide for ourselves in a way that required our very own peculiar intervention, and the modern technological attitude toward the world? In a way, the question will always resist any at-

⁵⁰ To adopt the former approach is perhaps useful from time to time, but it does little in the end to advance or enhance our appreciation of Heidegger's philosophy, it is no longer the thought of Heidegger when it has been surgically removed from its context and transplanted to a new environment. The new environment might flourish as a result and there need not necessarily be rejection but that is not the aim of our current endeavour. The latter approach, however, is simply wrong-headed in my view. Of course Heidegger's thinking vacillates in places and various different resonances and motifs take centre stage from time to time, but the basic problematic and the attempts to deal with them display a remarkable level of confluence with each other rather than anything else.

⁵¹ Heidegger will remark later in the essay that the way technology directs us to view the world is “never a fate that compels.” This is a crucial and yet ambiguous remark. How we are to resist being compelled by the *Gestell* which holds sway and develop a free relationship to the essence of technology are rather complicated and difficult issues.

⁵² QCT p. 14.

tempt to demarcate things rigidly – there will always be a penumbra where it is not yet clear if the transition has already been made in any genealogical account. That is not to say however, that along a spectrum we cannot notice degrees of difference which ultimately resolve into a completely new type or kind – a categorically different thing which at one end of the spectrum is easy to set in relief against the other end. Of course, part of Heidegger's strategy in this essay is to show that such problems stem from our inability to move out from under the shadow of Enframing and some of its more conspicuous offspring such as the instrumental definition of technology. With respect to agriculture for instance:

The field that the peasant formerly cultivated and set in order [*bestellte*] appears differently than it did when to set in order still meant to take care of and maintain. The work of the peasant does not challenge the soil of the field. In the sowing of the grain it places the seed in the keeping of the forces of growth and watches over its increase. But meanwhile even the cultivation of the field has come under the grip of another kind of setting-in-order, which sets upon [*stellt*] nature. It sets upon in the sense of challenging it. Agriculture is now the mechanized food industry.⁵³

What Heidegger seems very much concerned with is this *imposition* on the Earth, that the Earth is set upon in a way which is disturbing from the standpoint of the sheer scale of its intrusiveness, its lack of reverence for that which it dismantles. We no longer are part of the Earth but look to exploit it as a resource rather than seeing it as our wonderful, at times numinous home. We disassemble the natural configuration and look to manipulate and to *dis* – integrate until something is no longer the structural item it once was but is a collection of forces, reduced to nothing but energy and resource to be exhausted or stock-piled. There is a difference, not just in degree or intensity here, but in *kind* – what is revealed through modern technology is very different from what is revealed through older, cruder methods of, among other things, agriculture. For instance, Heidegger would almost certainly insist that there are important differences between the revealing which occurs within traditional planting and harvesting and that which is undertaken in genetic engineering and scientific intensive farming. Another feature which Heidegger believes is unique to the setting-upon which obtains within the essence of modern – technology is the fact that it stockpiles materials and resources:

⁵³ QCT pp 14 – 15.

The coal that has been hauled out in some mining district has not been supplied in order that it may simply be present somewhere or other. It is stockpiled; that is, it is on call, ready to deliver the sun's warmth that is stored in it.⁵⁴

The *world* around us is something that we *view* rather differently, Heidegger argues, than earlier peoples were given to perceive, our perceptual goggles, if you will, have radically different filtration systems.

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What is at work when we conceive of things in various ways is a type of revealing, the modern technological type is that of a *challenging* revealing, the unique kind of unconcealment at work in the twentieth century:

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. We call it the standing-reserve [*Bestand*].⁵⁵

This standing-reserve, Heidegger argues, is an "inclusive rubric" which designates the manner in which everything is made present by this "challenging-revealing." It is through this frame as it were that we are able to reveal and thereby see things. But who is responsible for this aberration which seems to hold sway as the essence of modern technology's revelatory directives? The answer on one level is of course: 'human beings!' Nevertheless, we are not the authors of our destiny or the Earth's nor do we control technological activity and development so much as we might like to suppose. We do not govern or control the unconcealing through which the real can appear to us or withdraw at any given moment. This might strike those unfamiliar with Heidegger's *corpus* as a peculiar claim but it is in fact a recurring theme in Heidegger's work and can be found explicitly stated even as early as *Sein und Zeit*. It is to be found again in *Introduction to Metaphysics*, in this essay, in the *Was Heisst Denken?* lectures – to mention some of the more notable instances. This belief on Heidegger's part concerning the manner in which we have access to truth and relate to the world around us is indicative of his more general attempt to move away from what he saw as the deadborn enterprise of Western metaphysics whereby the human subject is more and more exalted and used as a lever with which to get many epistemological and metaphysical investigations off the ground. It is a tendency, moreover, which he holds responsible for the defunct metaphysical mono-

⁵⁴ QCT p. 15.

⁵⁵ QCT p. 17.

lith which has stultified Western thinking with its hopelessly groundless claims to exactitude and certitude from detached, yet anthropocentric subjects, floating in some ethereal space privileged with a prejudiced view posturing as an Archimedean standpoint. Heidegger looks to avoid such excessive degrees of subjectivity by emphasizing the limits of our participation when it comes to the unfolding of truth and the revelation of what we take to be the real at any time. The image he often employs to illustrate this notion is that of a 'call', which, as we shall see shortly, is an image that recurs in this context. This is not of course to sponsor quietism or to suggest that we are irretrievably fallen under the sway of an oppressive heteronomy – we will begin to appreciate what the nature of our role is as we move toward the final third of the essay.

It is not simply that human beings uncover and direct things in a manner of their own choosing, this is not a description of mere decisionism or voluntarism. Rather human beings are "called" in certain ways, "called forth" to reveal things in ways which we do not conceive of in autonomous vacuums. The call which Heidegger discusses in his *magnum opus* is the call of conscience which he claims lies somehow *beyond* ourselves, while still emanating from within us. It comes from beyond us insofar as we cannot will the call, it is not subordinate to us in any way. We can no more determine the content of this call or summon it as an object of our determination than we can will our hearts to pump blood.⁵⁶ Already within *Being and Time* then, Heidegger was uncomfortable with traditional models of subjectivity. In "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger is invoking a similar theme. The question is then, to what extent are we responsible as active agents for the ordering of the real as standing-reserve? Heidegger's answer is entirely congruent with the discussion of the call of conscience and other related discussions:

But man does not have control over unconcealment itself, in which at any given time the real shows itself or withdraws... Only to the extent that man for his part is already challenged to exploit the energies of nature can this ordering revealing happen. If man is challenged, ordered to do this, then does not man himself belong even more originally than nature within the standing-reserve?⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Of course that is not to sponsor mere quietism. In the same way that we can be attentive to the needs of our heart as the receptacle whose existence depends on its co-operation, we can attend to the call which beckons to reveal the real as the medium which allows it to give expression to whatever will be shown at any given time.

⁵⁷ QCT p. 18.

We are now fast approaching the very epicentre of Heidegger's thinking. Modern technology, Heidegger is suggesting, is not simply a product of human agency conceived of as autonomous. All that we are responsible for when it comes to the challenging revealing manifested in modern technological activity is a *response* to "the call of unconcealment."⁵⁸ Any human activity, and by this we can take Heidegger to mean any activity by humans at any time in history, does not occur within the vacuum of a false sense of autonomy but rather involves humans being "brought into the unconcealed. The unconcealment of the unconcealed has already come to pass whenever it calls man forth into the modes of revealing allotted to him."⁵⁹ If we grant this, we are obliged to view any contemporary activity which we would associate with modern technological outlooks such as "investigating, observing" and so on, that in turn perhaps are such that they ensnare "nature as an area" of its own conceiving, as a response by humans which is guided and determined in advance by a claim which challenges us to "approach nature as an object of research."⁶⁰ It is not so much straightforward human progress which has led us to treat nature as a phenomenon to be investigated in this manner, rather there is something beyond us which seems to challenge us to *reveal* nature in this way:

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.⁶¹

The way we are constrained to reveal whatever we currently take to be real then needs to be understood from the vantage point of the actual manner in which what 'is' shows itself to us. We can see that what we are challenged into doing is to look to impose order everywhere as if it were already there before we imposed it and this ordering of what everywhere *is*, Heidegger refers to as "standing-reserve."⁶² The summons to allow the real to be revealed or uncovered in this manner exclusively,

⁵⁸ QCT p. 19.

⁵⁹ QCT p. 19.

⁶⁰ QCT p. 19.

⁶¹ QCT p. 19.

⁶² Standing-reserve translates "*Bestand*" which is typically understood as 'existence', 'continued existence' or 'stock'. Lovitt's use of "standing-reserve" seems quite appropriate here since Heidegger undoubtedly wishes to convey something like the notion of stock or stockpile and also seeks to emphasize the root "*standen*."

Heidegger famously names as "*Ge-stell*," a term that Lovitt translates as "Enframing." The word literally means something like "frame," "bookrack" or some kind of apparatus in English but Heidegger clearly means something less conventional than this.⁶³ He hyphenates the word to emphasize the active prefix "*Ge*" – represented in translation by the prefix 'en'. To summarise briefly: Enframing is the summons which enjoins us and cannot be ignored, that constrains us to "reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing-reserve."⁶⁴ Furthermore, this Enframing is the hegemonic force at the heart of the essence of modern technology which, as we now can appreciate, is itself nothing technological. Enframing is the manner in which the real is revealed by us such that modern technological activity is something which resembles what we now understand as modern technology. As such we have come full circle in that we are expanding on the outlines of our understanding of *techne* which was understood as a primordial kind of revealing from our brief discussion of the passages from Aristotle which Heidegger cites earlier. The essence of modern technology ordains, however, a very particular kind of revealing:

In Enframing, that unconcealment comes to pass in conformity with which the work of modern technology reveals the real as standing-reserve. This work is therefore neither only a human activity nor a mere means within such activity. The merely instrumental, merely anthropological definition of technology is therefore in principle untenable.⁶⁵

With this Heidegger has completed the second section of his essay.

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We are at last in the third and final stage of the essay. Heidegger now assigns himself the task of enumerating the possibilities available to human beings with a view to *responding* to the situation we find ourselves in. The question concerning technology is not answered, after all, by simply describing its essence. The real challenge is to try and discover what we can and cannot do from out of the situation we are thrown into. As Heidegger has already indicated, the revealing at work from out of Enframing does not happen "decisively" through humans, though it does happen exclusively through us. We are not in a position of authority whereby we can bend the real to our vision or will. Nevertheless: "Does this revealing happen somewhere

⁶³ "We dare to use this word in a sense that has been thoroughly unfamiliar up to now." *Cf* QCT p. 19.

⁶⁴ QCT p. 20.

⁶⁵ QCT p. 21.

beyond all human doing? No.”⁶⁶ *Prima facie*, it might seem as though we are tangled in an inscrutable paradox here. That need not be the case however. Heidegger wishes to intimate that there might be possibilities available to us whereby we could develop a *free*⁶⁷ relationship to the essence of technology rather than operating merely as subjugated pawns at every turn. That, in itself, is the first major step toward effecting a legitimate response.

Part of the immediate problem faced by humans in trying to take up a position with respect to Enframing is the simple fact that we can only assume any comportment to it subsequently, that is, *after* we have already articulated its manner of revealing the real. In other words, since we are always and ever beings who reveal, and given that there is only one way for us to reveal, our attempts to grasp that which allows us to reveal can only ever be subsequent to its actual appearance as the precursor to our activities or thoughts. That is not at all to resign ourselves to another form of quietism but as always, Heidegger is tempering his suggestions concerning our ability to respond with the caveat that we are not free and autonomous in the sense of having unbounded choice and limitless possibility in every situation. The parameters of our position at any given moment are already more or less fixed and have shaped the possibilities we have available to us for response or action. So what kind of response or questioning attitude do we have left to us?

Never too late comes the question as to whether we actually experience ourselves as the ones whose activities everywhere, public and private, are challenged forth by Enframing.⁶⁸

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger justified choosing Dasein/human being as the subject of inquiry in the existential analysis because of its ontological priority, that is, its unique access to Being. In a sense Heidegger is reaffirming this belief and suggesting that this is the key to identifying how our authentic response to the challenge of Enframing can actually materialize.⁶⁹ As the mediums of Enframing, we may not have control over it but we do have a privileged access to it insofar as its

⁶⁶ QCT p. 24.

⁶⁷ Granted, Heidegger has a very unconventional notion of freedom in mind here.

⁶⁸ QCT p. 24.

⁶⁹ The difference here is that Heidegger does not *begin* the analysis with Dasein, his strategy post *Being and Time* was to avoid beginning with Dasein since Being, among other things, could never really be spoken about without eventually relating back to Dasein again in the first place. Heidegger did look to investigate the question concerning the meaning of Being without orienting the discussion explicitly in terms of Dasein after his work in the '20s, rather he looked to organize things in reverse order.

designs can only ever be effected through *our* continual collaboration, activities and so on.⁷⁰ What this means for us is not yet clear but it is on the basis of this insight that Heidegger will argue that there *are* some kinds of positive possibilities available to human beings.

The essence of modern technology then pushes us in a direction, or as Heidegger puts it "starts man upon the way," with a view to constraining us to reveal the real everywhere as standing-reserve. To be so affected is in a sense to be delivered or "sent" by Enframing. But in the process of being so sent/delivered we are gathered up into effecting a unified and unidirectional course of action, we are galvanized and yet drawn together into a *course* of action, we are made to cohere, as what we are, as beings that reveal in *this* way. Heidegger calls this "sending-that gathers" *destining*. Enframing so construed then is "an ordaining of destining, as is every way of revealing."⁷¹ Even *poiesis/Hervorbringen* are *ordinances* of destining when we understand things in this manner. They ordain the manner in which we are 'sent' such that we tend to reveal the real in specific, predestined ways. That we reveal and are destined to reveal in quite specific ways has always been the case for humans but the destining we are subject to, so Heidegger argues, "is never a fate that compels."⁷² The reason that we are not utterly given over to destining as an ineluctable fate relates to the fact that, as the beings who are called forth in this way and, as such, are capable of *listening* to and *hearing* this summons, we are *more* than simply beings who are "constrained to obey"⁷³ but are beings who can *hearken*. In short then, though Heidegger stops short of suggesting that we can exercise a significant degree of autonomy, we are capable of more than blind subservience.

We *can* attain a level of 'freedom' with respect to the essence of technology yet this is a notion of freedom which is not at all conventional but quite idiosyncratic: "The essence of freedom is originally not connected with the will or even with the causality of human willing."⁷⁴ When speaking of freedom in this context Heidegger insists that it is freedom understood as that which "governs the open in the sense of the cleared and lighted up, i.e., of the revealed. It is to the happening of revealing, i.e., of truth, that freedom stands in the closest and most intimate kinship."⁷⁵ Hei-

⁷⁰ Collaboration, albeit in a rather qualified sense insofar as we are not exactly equal partners with the all ingesting function of Enframing.

⁷¹ QCT pp 24 – 25.

⁷² QCT p. 25.

⁷³ QCT p. 25.

⁷⁴ QCT p. 25.

⁷⁵ QCT p. 25.

degger first explains that all revealing fundamentally belongs within a concealing and harbouring. If we think for a moment of Heidegger's interpretation of *aletheia*, we can see that what was crucial to his conception of the notion was the alpha privative: *A-letheia* – literally dis-closure or un-concealing. It goes without saying that privation involves the privation of the opposite state, namely one of being closed/covered over or concealed and instead becomes *un*-covered, *dis*-closed, *un*-concealed. Similarly what frees, is itself concealed already and is perpetually concealing itself. If something is freed, then it had to come from the opposite state which preceded that event, namely, being confined or unfree. The happening of revealing occurs from out of the open "goes into the open, and brings into the open."⁷⁶ But freedom, as that which governs the open, has nothing to do with "unfettered arbitrariness" or the "constraint of mere laws."⁷⁷ Rather freedom is something that in concealing sheds light, opens up so that light can penetrate through to what was concealed, "in whose clearing there shimmers that veil that covers what comes to presence of all truth and lets the veil appear as what veils."⁷⁸ In short then "Freedom is the realm of the destining that at any given time starts revealing upon its way."⁷⁹

It is only now, once Heidegger is secure that he has demonstrated as much, that he is willing to distance himself explicitly from other prevailing intellectual attitudes, as well as those of the *hoi-polloi*, concerning technology. He argues that in conceiving of the essence of modern technology as Enframing, which belongs within a destining of revealing, he has offered something rather different to the harbingers of doom who treat of technology as our 'fate' where fate means nothing other than "the inevitableness of an unalterable course."⁸⁰ As I suggested above, Heidegger is not at all trying to sell us romanticism, unless of course one conceives of all of this as the work of a charlatan or an elaborate ruse to reinstate mysticism. Heidegger resists thinking of technology as simply bad or the privation of what is taken to be good or positive – such postures do not allow one to even come close to the crux of the problem. As he has said elsewhere, the investigations which peddle such positions are "laughable" in that they do not even come within firing range of the target, they are, as it were, an attempt to dress an amputated leg with a band-

⁷⁶ QCT p. 25.

⁷⁷ QCT p. 25.

⁷⁸ QCT p. 25.

⁷⁹ QCT p. 25.

⁸⁰ QCT p. 25.

aid. There *are* possibilities for human freedom even under the sway of *Gestell*, in fact, no place else but *under* the rubric of *Gestell* is this freedom to be discovered since the fact that it calls to us and that we can hearken as its mediums for the first time tells us what it truly *could* mean for a human being to exercise *true* freedom. Any other conception of freedom is an illusion, a fantasy which trammels us within the confines of blind servility to the Enframing which holds sway.

Due to the fact that we are always and ever delivered over to Enframing as the manner in which we reveal, there is a danger that as we continually approach "the brink of the possibility of pursuing and pushing forward nothing but what is revealed in ordering" we will derive all of our "standards on this basis."⁸¹ This has the adverse and very dangerous consequence of preventing us from seeing or having access to the other possibility available to us, namely, "that man might be admitted more and sooner and ever more primally to the essence of that which is unconcealed and to its unconcealment, in order that he might experience as his essence his needed belonging to revealing."⁸² As we have seen, this relationship of dependence is not quite one of mutually self-sustaining symbiosis, nevertheless, we are more than mere parasites, we are auxiliaries. In saying that, our precarious position between these possibilities is a dangerous one: "The destining of revealing is as such, in every one of its modes, and therefore necessarily, *danger*."⁸³

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It remains for us now to try and understand more precisely what Heidegger considers to be dangerous about the situation within which we find ourselves. In a way it involves the transition from what we might consider the last vestiges of modernity into the era of the post-modern whereby, the unconcealed is no longer even revealed for us as an object or objects but rather is revealed "exclusively as standing-reserve."⁸⁴ As those who allow the real to be so revealed we become nothing more than the orderers and organizers of the standing-reserve. We are, at that stage, on "the very brink of a precipitous fall" insofar as are now in a position such that we ourselves have come to be "taken as standing reserve."⁸⁵ Sustaining these precarious circumstances is the concomitant conviction that as the beings that reveal the real in this way that somehow it is *our* challenge to the Earth to yield up what we require of it:

⁸¹ QCT p. 26.

⁸² QCT p. 26.

⁸³ QCT p. 26.

⁸⁴ QCT p. 27.

⁸⁵ QCT p. 27.

Meanwhile man, precisely as the one so threatened, exalts himself to the posture of the lord of the earth. In this way the impression comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only insofar as it is his construct. This illusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: It seems as though man everywhere and always encounters only himself...*In truth, however, precisely nowhere does man today any longer encounter himself, i.e., his essence.* Man stands so decisively in attendance on the challenging-forth of Enframing that he does not apprehend Enframing as a claim, that he fails to see himself as the one spoken to, and hence also fails in every way to hear in what respect he ek-sists, from out of his essence, in the realm of an exhortation or address, and thus *can never* encounter only himself.⁸⁶

This somewhat turgid passage holds the key to some of Heidegger's most important insights regarding what our situation as humans in the era of modern technology really is and how we can proceed on the basis of that understanding. One of Heidegger's major insights concerns this notion that we are essentially in control of modern technology and that the way the world appears to us is entirely of our own choosing and making. This in turn has the effect of generating a further illusion, namely, that as lords and masters of everything on Earth, the only things we can encounter in any essential manner are ourselves since everything is more or less of our making or is under our control or subjugated to *our* heteronomy. Conversely, the truth of the matter is that, at present, the one thing which humans *never* encounter is themselves, that is as they are in their essence/essentially. We fail to understand what our essential situation is if we fail to attune ourselves to the manner in which we are determined in advance by Enframing and how this essentially dictates the way we comport ourselves toward reality.

This is not the ultimate danger however, "Enframing does not simply endanger man in his relationship to himself and to everything that is."⁸⁷ In the manner that it dictates us to reveal everything as ordered, it excludes all the other possibilities available to us with respect to how the real can be revealed. Enframing leads to the notion that there is nothing other than a monochromatic view of the world and this view is one which endures at the expense of all others. There is no longer the possibility of *poietic* revealing in the sense of bringing-forth for example, rather only a *challenging-forth* which "thrusts man into a relation to that which is, that is at once

⁸⁶ QCT p. 27.

⁸⁷ QCT p. 27.

antithetical and rigorously ordered...regulating and securing of the standing-reserve mark all revealing."⁸⁸ Not only that, this Enframing conceals its own "fundamental characteristic" namely that it is a revealing. As such, not only does it obscure from view former modes of revealing such as *pro-duction*/bringing-forth "but it conceals revealing itself and with it That wherein unconcealment, i.e., truth, comes to pass."⁸⁹ As such, Enframing ultimately blocks the advent of 'truth', again truth understood in this more primordial sense of revealing or unconcealment which is *the* ultimate danger. Technology itself is not what threatens us but rather "the mystery of its essence."⁹⁰ The fact that it blocks our access to "a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth" is what threatens the diminution of everything which was once valued and revered about ourselves and the Earth to a mere stockpile of forces to be ranked and ordered according to various schemes. The impending triumph of Enframing threatens to seclude us completely from the locus of *originary* truth, leaving us abandoned and forlorn on an Earth where contact with our essence as human beings is impossible and thereby denying any possibility of *true* human freedom.

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In the face of such grave danger, what are we as humans capable of? This is the question which has permeated and oriented the entire essay, even at times if the *path* was tenebrous. We have seen a number of allusions as to what the answer might be but nothing definitive as yet. The answer is at once astounding and nowhere close to what we might have intuited ourselves in the interim. The key to salvation, for want of a better term, lies somewhere within the fabric of a rich and rather antiquated Occidental understanding of "art." As one might have suspected at this stage, the route to this *prima facie* absurd conclusion is a little circuitous. Heidegger introduces the final stage of his problematic in rather romantic fashion quoting Holderlin's *Patmos*: "But where danger is, grows the saving power also."⁹¹ Heidegger's treatment of the arrogated⁹² lines is quite provocative. His first move is

⁸⁸ QCT p. 27.

⁸⁹ QCT p. 27.

⁹⁰ QCT p. 28.

⁹¹ QCT p. 28.

⁹² I use the word "arrogated" by way of acknowledging that some critics have challenged the legitimacy of and justification for Heidegger's use of Holderlin on the grounds that the poet's work does not sustain or even evoke many of the resonances Heidegger elicits from his work. This is not something which I can speak to with any degree of authority or insight however since I have scarcely a dilettante's facility for Holderlin's poetry.

to meditate on the meaning of the word "save." The word is conventionally understood as meaning something like "to rescue," "to seize hold of a thing threatened by ruin, in order to secure it in its former continuance."⁹³ Heidegger retrieves a further and perhaps a more profound meaning than this superficial definition. "To save," Heidegger argues, means to reunite something with its essence and in that sense to readmit something into its native region/homeland.⁹⁴ Heidegger does not offer any etymological support for this supposedly more primordial meaning so we are left to double verify this for ourselves. The best available resources maintain that "save" is derived originally from Latin though the only references I could find were from late Latin. The word in late Latin seems to mean more or less what it means conventionally for us today, it came down to us from Anglo-Norman influences through Middle-English and on through Late Middle-English. In any of these sources, "to save" seems to have meant more or less what it means for us today, nowhere is there any suggestion that "to save" denotes or even evokes any notion of fetching "something home into its essence, in order to bring the essence for the first time into its genuine appearing."⁹⁵ This in itself, however, does not quite necessitate a dismissal of this segment of Heidegger's account since his subsequent claim does not seem to depend on the cogency of his earlier assertion. He now looks to apply Holderlin's epigram to the extreme danger of Enframing, in other words, if *Gestell* is the extreme danger then the redemptive power must also lie therein: "the essence of technology must harbor in itself the growth of the saving power."⁹⁶ Heidegger now looks to discover how exactly the saving power grows from and thrives within the essence of modern technology. This endeavour in turn requires a more sustained and probing meditation on the notion of "essence" itself, more precisely, "in what sense of 'essence' is it that Enframing is actually the essence of technology?"⁹⁷ Heidegger's digression into this already rather hoary and perpetually re-emerging ques-

⁹³ QCT p. 28.

⁹⁴ We should remember the discussions above concerning un-homely and un-usual.

⁹⁵ QCT p. 28. One of the few contexts which *might* accommodate Heidegger's interpretation would be a theological one whereby the "saving" of one's soul from perdition occasions the admission to eternal bliss. To rescue someone's soul from the consequences of sin can thereby be seen as restoring it to its rightful comportment to the divine and, in that sense, allowing its essence to come to the fore and flourish in the conditions conducive to its proper state. At a stretch or if one were in a bucolic state of mind, we might say perhaps that the notion of "saving hay" would fit within this wider conception of the word "save" in a way that corresponds with Heidegger's interpretation.

⁹⁶ QCT p. 28.

⁹⁷ QCT p. 29.

tion is extremely obscure and convoluted, he wrests from certain words and concepts a notion of "essence" which does not correspond at all with either our pre-reflective or our more theoretical understandings of what "essence" means. Traditionally, we have understood "essence" as meaning "*Quidditas*" or "whatness." The essence of something is normally what we understand as "what something is," in other words, when we ask, "what is a tree?" we generally suppose that the question "what is the essence of a tree" will have an identical answer. The essence of a tree then is referred to as "treeness," and by that we mean the various characteristics which we gather together under the genus "universal." All trees then, will have the same essential characteristics that admit them into the inclusive category whose essence is defined as "treeness." The *essence* of technology under this taxonomy would be "the common genus for everything technological." Various types of technological apparatus, pieces of equipment and so on would each themselves be examples of Enframing. If the essence of a tree is "treeness" and something with this essence is a tree, by the same reasoning: if the essence of technology is Enframing (or "Enframingness" for the sake of pedantry), then a technological utensil or device is itself an Enframing. This outcome is obviously preposterous and, for this reason, Heidegger finds cause to undermine the conventional conception of the meaning of "essence." Enframing, which itself is the essence of something, namely technology, is not the "essence of technology in the sense of a genus."⁹⁸ Rather Enframing is characterized as a manner of revealing which destines, destines moreover in such a way as to challenge forth. Bringing-forth (*Hervorbringen/poiesis/production*), for its part, is also a kind of revealing which destines but these ways of revealing do not come under the same umbrella-concept of revealing:

Revealing is that destining which, ever suddenly and inexplicably to all thinking, apports itself into the revealing that brings forth and that also challenges, and which allots itself to man. The challenging revealing has its origin as a destining in bringing-forth. But at the same time Enframing, in a way characteristic of a destining, blocks *poiesis*.⁹⁹

Revealing is something which occurs with and through us, it is something which we are, in a sense, delivered over to insofar as we cannot fail to allow the revelation to come to pass since it is part of what it means to *be* a human at any given moment, we are continually challenged to operate exclusively in this capacity. We are constantly challenged then to bring things forth in accordance with the manner in

⁹⁸ QCT p. 29.

⁹⁹ QCT pp 29 – 30.

which the real at any given moment is revealed to us. Enframing, however, in a manner which is indicative of its destiny-ordaining function as a variant on revealing, rather than allowing for *poiesis* in the primordial and elemental sense, rather blocks bringing-forth, authentic production if you like, and instead challenges everything everywhere to stand as ordered and arranged under a constrictive taxonomy constraining all and levelling all variance under the aegis of the coherence of forces and resources.

Heidegger now argues that when we use the term "essence" we are not looking to apprehend a generic type to hold up for scrutiny. Instead when we speak of the "essence" of a tree we mean the ways in which the tree holds sway, endures as what we refer to as "tree," the way in which it [the tree] *essences*. At this juncture Heidegger weaves into his somewhat idiosyncratic philosophical tapestry another poet's phrase, in this instance, a very particular usage of a term by Johann Peter Hebel in "Ghost on Kanderer Street." The term Heidegger fastens on is *die Weserei*, which is an old German word for a city hall, a place which Heidegger argues is a city hall insofar as it is a place where the community gathers, where "village existence is constantly in play, i.e., comes to presence."¹⁰⁰ Heidegger's reasons for equating the notion of village life being "constantly in play" with its "coming to presence" are not really clear at all and one must assume that he considers his reasons at this point to be self-evident. It seems reasonable to suppose then that the reason should immediately suggest itself to us, and the most sensible reading I can propose is something along the following lines: insofar as this is a site where village existence as a whole is under way as a collected community, the community is in that sense present for us as something that has already or is continually coming to presence – as something *there* for us.

Die Weserei is an old German word derived from the verb *wesen* which we typically translate as "essence." From what I can gather, there is no English analogue for the German verb *wesen* which would mean something like "to essence." Of course the word essence has a long and chequered etymology coming originally from Greek, then Latin as *essentia*; it is related to *ousia* and is the *ont*-present participle stem of *einai*. All this notwithstanding, in English, by "essence" we only ever mean something like the 'most crucial, elemental and indispensable quality of something'. Heidegger is unearthing a connotation/nuance in the German verb-form of *wesen* for which there seems to be no counterpart in English. Furthermore, Heidegger

¹⁰⁰ QCT p. 30.

now insists that *wesen* as a verb means more or less the same thing as *wahren* (to endure).¹⁰¹

Heidegger has begun to speak in terms of essencing and enduring then more or less interchangeably. And, furthermore, since all essencing endures, the question emerges as to whether or not *Enframing* endures. And, if so, is it the case that *Enframing* endures in the sense of "the permanent enduring of an Idea that hovers over everything technological, thus making it seem that by technology we mean some mythological abstraction?"¹⁰² This notion of "permanent enduring" evokes, for Heidegger, the curious appearance of a strange word in a novelette by Goethe – *fortgewahren* – which means "to grant permanently," a word which he chooses, so Heidegger claims, in place of *fortwahren* – "to endure permanently." Goethe himself apparently hears in *wahren* [to endure] and *gewahren* [to grant] an "unarticulated accord," there is a tacit linguistic/conceptual symphony between these words which gives Heidegger licence to substitute "grant" for "endure." This provides the clue that was needed for Heidegger's new and more fundamental insight into "what actually endures and perhaps alone endures."¹⁰³ In effect, "*Only what is granted endures. That which endures primally out of the earliest beginning is what grants.*"¹⁰⁴ The obvious question then, if we were to follow the kind of sequence we have been observing, is whether or not *Enframing* grants? Heidegger immediately concedes that the question sounds counter-intuitive at best: "For according to everything that has been said, *Enframing* is, rather, a destining that gathers together into the revealing that challenges forth."¹⁰⁵ *Gestell* has been characterized such that it represents the very antithesis of "granting," the notion of *granting* as a vital component of *Enframing* would appear to be at variance with everything that has been established in the foregoing: "Challenging is *anything but* a granting."¹⁰⁶ Or so it would appear so long as we do not realise that "the challenging-forth into the ordering of the real as standing-reserve still remains a destining that starts man upon a way of revealing.

¹⁰¹ On the basis of this comparison, the essay digresses into a brief synopsis of the Socratic and Platonic treatment of "essence." It is a conspectus, moreover, which is based on extremely controversial and, some would argue, specious readings of selected passages from Plato's dialogues that are not rehearsed here. This infamous Heideggerian interpretation is an ongoing source of rather fractious debate and there is little in this essay with which to defend his view. In any case, it is a view for which I have little sympathy. I am quite content therefore to circumvent this rather thorny issue seeing as it has little bearing on the meat of the essay itself.

¹⁰² QCT p. 31.

¹⁰³ QCT p. 31.

¹⁰⁴ QCT p. 31.

¹⁰⁵ QCT p. 31.

¹⁰⁶ QCT p. 31. My italics.

standing-reserve still remains a destining that starts man upon a way of revealing. As this destining, the coming to presence of technology gives man entry into That which, of himself, he can neither invent or in any way make."¹⁰⁷ Granted, what is offered to us, and we are simultaneously subjected to, is what Heidegger has depicted as *the* "extreme danger." Nevertheless, one should remember the context which serves as the backdrop for this progression; Heidegger wished to demonstrate the veracity of Holderlin's words, namely, that where the danger is, the saving power also thrives and flourishes.

We have already flirted with the 'solution' then, for lack of a better term, to this perplexing conundrum a number of times in the essay, that is, wherein lies the key to understanding how we are to respond? In *Being and Time* we learned something from the fact that human Dasein has ontological priority over all other forms of existence, hence, we undertake existential analysis and fundamental ontology guided in advance by the clues afforded to us by Dasein, as we find it pre-thematically constituted.¹⁰⁸ We have, in short, a direct conduit to Being. Granted this is an overstatement of things for the later Heidegger, and most certainly there was a reorientation of sorts, but it was not a reorientation at Dasein's expense. Dasein was and is always required to be the hearkening medium, the conduit for what can be revealed. It is Dasein that can hearken to what can be revealed, we are the ones who are called forth, called to witness (if only subliminally) and effect what can be revealed or *produced* at any given moment. Human beings are the only entities that can hearken to the call of thinking, that are at the behest of thinking, we are subordinate to it yet are crucial to its continued sustenance, we are in that sense the shepherds of both thinking and Being, where the shepherd watches over and protects what he facilitates and is ruled by in turn. As a revealing, *Enframing* exclusively beckons, commands and determines humans such that we are perpetually and unwittingly yoked to its revelatory programme. There is, however a certain reciprocity involved to the extent that it can only ever manifest itself in and through us, which already suggests that we are *empowered*, to a certain extent, rather than entirely emasculated. This Enframing, this destining of revealing, which Heidegger has identified as a granting, grants us nothing less than the saving power. So long as

¹⁰⁷ QCT p. 31.

¹⁰⁸ Heidegger does not begin this investigation from the launching pad of human Dasein since he had already reoriented his thought in certain ways by the time he worked on this piece. Nevertheless, the 'ontological priority' of Dasein is a feature which remains since the revelation discussed here can only happen in and through Dasein, even if it is not something that we ourselves will.

it is considered a "granting," something that is given to us, then we can see it as initially conveying to humans:

that share in revealing which the coming-to-pass of revealing needs. As the one so needed and used, man is given to belong to the coming-to-pass of truth. The granting that sends in one way or another into revealing is as such the saving power. For the saving power lets man see and enter into the highest dignity of his essence. This dignity lies in keeping watch over the unconcealment – and with it, from the first, the concealment – of all coming to presence on this earth.¹⁰⁹

The crucial phrase here is "as the one so needed and used." With this phrase Heidegger endorses the emphasis we placed on the theme of Dasein's privileged ontological position as alluded to both immediately above and interspersed throughout this essay. The fact that any and all revealing ultimately has to come through and from us is the foundation for everything we as humans are capable of effecting authentically and it is for *this* reason that we are not resigned utterly to an ineluctable and unsavoury fate. That is *not* to suggest that we are free in the sense of "unfettered arbitrariness" or arbitrary wilfullness, we are quite comprehensively constrained, we have very much an ancillary status. Nevertheless, "it is precisely in this extreme danger that the innermost indestructible belongingness of man within granting may come to light, provided that we, for our part, begin to pay heed to the coming to presence of technology."¹¹⁰ This, in sum, is the saving power and our well being as humans depends on our continued vigil over what comes to presence in the essence of technology, as opposed to simply remaining in the thrall of the technological network of apparatus and equipment which litter our world. Furthermore, we shall remain in the current self-defeating rut of looking to *master* technology so long as we conceive of it as merely an instrument to expedite our everyday projects and thereby miss entirely our chance to pay attention to and develop a free relationship to the essence of modern technology. Enframing comes to pass then in a twofold manner and is in that sense very much a mixed blessing:

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

¹⁰⁹ QCT p. 32.

¹¹⁰ QCT p. 32.

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.¹¹¹

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We now understand the nature of the danger that threatens us with the imminent consumption of all that was once valued, with the very possibility of the annihilation or at least obfuscation of the coming to pass of truth, where truth is understood as revealing, and thereby with the loss of the last vestiges of true freedom available to human beings. Yet we are, in that same instance, offered the possibility of tapping the *redemptive* quality of that which threatens us in the form of the saving power which sustains itself therein since the degeneration or regeneration must in the end take effect *through* human Dasein. What are we to do with this remedial power, if all of this is to be more than mere whimsy, more than a rhetorical palliative with no transformative effect? The answer is less than a resounding call to arms, but then again, we should have expected as much. How are we to be saved if it is not only a god that can now save us from this “unholy blindness,” how can we harness or better, how can we *foster* conditions which will induce the proliferation of the saving power? The answer: “Here and now and in little things, that we may foster the saving power in its increase. This includes holding before our eyes the extreme danger.”¹¹² We begin the revolution then along byways and back-lanes, on and in the periphery. We effect this by remaining true and fast to our human *vocation* (*vocare*), the *calling* we all have as humans, namely, the behest and call from what is concealed and always concealing itself, to facilitate, as the midwives and shepherds of what grants and unconceals, the bringing-forth of the hidden into the open and in that sense to become again the site for the happening of truth/*aletheia*. Let us not underestimate the extreme danger that threatens all revealing, “threatens it with the possibility that all revealing will be consumed in ordering and that everything will present itself only in the unconcealedness of standing-reserve. Human activity can never directly counter this danger. Human achievement alone can never banish it. But human reflection can ponder the fact that all saving power must be of a higher essence than what is endangered, though at the same time kindred to it.”¹¹³

¹¹¹ QCT p. 33.

¹¹² QCT p. 33.

¹¹³ QCT p. 33.

The final pages of Heidegger's essay sketch briefly and, admittedly, somewhat vaguely, the manner in which "art" can be thought of as one avenue for 'authentic' response. On the basis of the foregoing, he hints at an understanding of art which allows us to supposedly respond in a genuine way and not merely from under the shadow of Enframing. I have elsewhere used this point of departure as the appropriate juncture to segue into a discussion of Heidegger's work concerning the notion of art during this 'middle' period. However to discuss it here would plunge us into a whole new, albeit closely related, realm of Heidegger's philosophy which the essay paves the way for but which we have neither the time nor the scope to investigate here. "The Question Concerning Technology" is in many ways a prolegomena for a new way of philosophising, and, for this very reason, is one of the most important stepping stones between the so-called 'early' and 'late' Heidegger. It builds on what was both latent and explicit in *Being and Time*, fills in certain gaps and incorporates elements of the reorientation which Heidegger had begun to hint at during the '30s. It is in that sense yet another building block within the shimmering Heideggerian edifice which, while seemingly amorphous and nebulous in the extreme, nevertheless has perduring structural elements. The fact that the backbone is not of the traditional metaphysical variety which Heidegger was so keen to avoid does not in itself entail that there is no backbone at all.