The Question Concerning Technology


William Lovett Introduction

“…call him always to abandon all superficial scanning and to enter wholeheartedly into the serious pursuit of thinking.” (xiv)

“For him both man and Being are finite, and their relationship never dissolves in sheer oneness.” (xii)

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“Finally, Heidegger is not a foe of technology and science. He neither disdains nor rejects them as though they were only destructive of human life.

The roots of Heidegger's thinking lie deep in the Western philosophical tradition. Yet that thinking is unique in many of its aspects, in its language and in its literary expression. In the development of his thought Heidegger has been taught chiefly by the Greeks, by German idealism, by phenomenology, and by the scholastic theological tradition. These and other elements have been fused by his genius of sensitivity and intellect into very individual philosophical expression.” (xiv)

“In approaching Heidegger's work the reader must ask not only what he says, but how he says it. For here form and content are inextricably united.” (xiv)

“Genuine thinking is, rather, man's most essential manner of being man. Rigorously demanding and but rarely attained, it manifests the relation between man and Being.” (xiv)

“Man in thinking is called upon to lend a helping hand to Being. Indeed, Heidegger can refer to thinking as handcraft.” (xiv)

“Being may perhaps best be said to be the ongoing manner in which everything that is, presences; i.e., it is the manner in which, in the lastingness of time, everything encounters man and comes to appearance through the openness that man provides. Hence for Heidegger Being is the very opposite of an abstraction fashioned by human thought. Rather it is "what is given to thinking to think. True thinking should not concern itself with some arcane and hidden meaning, but with "something lying near, that which -lies nearest," which, in virtue of that very nearness, man's thinking can readily fail to notice at all (WN 111)."” (xv)
“Being manifests itself continually anew. In keeping with this, thinking can never be for Heidegger a closed system. Rather it is the traveling of a road. Each thinker goes along a way that is peculiarly his own. In a fundamental sense it is the way and not the individual that assembles what is thought, that provides bounds and lets everything stand in relation to everything else.” (xv)

“Heidegger is primarily a teacher. He does not wish to travel alone and then report what he has seen, nor does he wish to go as a guide merely pointing out objects along the road. He wishes the reader to accompany him on the way, to participate with him, and even to begin to build his own way through thinking, and not merely to hear about what it is or should be.” (xvi)

“Yet Heidegger has hope for those who go with him. For the ground he seeks to achieve belongs fundamentally to man as man. Hence he calls each of us who reads to come and find it out. Heidegger's writing is intrinsically sequential always moving in some particular direction. Therefore one must discover meaning as one moves forward.” (xvi-xvii)

“Yet he must remember that, on each particular path, Heidegger himself never loses his way and never forgets in what direction he is going. He never abandons the sequence of his themes, never forgets what he has previously said, and never forsakes the pattern of his work. Everything fits, often with great precision, into that pattern. For Heidegger is always working out of the wholeness provided by the delimiting way pursued.” (xvii)

“Heidegger must build and is content to build finitely. However intricate the relationships to be expressed, however manifold the given meaning, he must set forth one facet at a time.” (xvii)

“For him the proper function of words is not to stand for, to Signify. Rather, words point to something beyond themselves. They are translucent bearers of meaning. To name a thing is to summon it, to call it toward one.” (xix)

“Heidegger finds Christian theology to be wholly dominated by metaphysics during the centuries after the beginning of the Christian era. In the medieval period men were preoccupied with the question of how they might be in right relationship with God, how they might be assured of salvation, i.e., how they might find enduring security. At the close of that period the overt theological, undergirding of these questions fell away, but the quest for security remained. Man needed a new basis for his self-assurance, his assurance of rightness. The work of Descartes, itself an expression of the shift in men's outlook that had already taken place, set forth that basis in philosophical terms (WN 88-90).” (xxv)

“The intricate system of techniques and apparatus that we call modern technology belongs essentially to this same realm. In it contemporary man's inveterate drive to master whatever confronts him is plain for all to see. Technology treats everything with "objectivity." The modern technologist is regularly expected, and expects himself, to be able to impose order on all data, to "process" every sort of entity, nonhuman and human alike, and to devise solutions for every kind of problem. He is forever getting things under control.” (xxvii)
“This simultaneous juxtaposing of the destining of Being and the doing of man is absolutely fundamental for Heidegger’s thinking.” (xxviii)

“Heidegger points out that, on the contrary, modern science and machine technology are mutually dependent upon one another.” (xviii)

“Man’s arrogation to himself of the role of subject in philosophy i his objectifying of nature, life, and history in dealing with them in the sciences and his calculating and cataloguing and disposing of all manner of things through machine technology—all these alike are expressions of that essence and of that revealing. Technology, so understood, is in no sense an instrument of man’s making or in his control. It is rather that phenomenon, ruled from out of Being itself, that is centrally determining all of Western history.” (xxix)

“The rule of such a way of revealing is seen when man becomes subject, when from out of his consciousness he assumes dominion over everything outside himself, when he represents and objectifies and, in objectifying, begins to take control over everything.” (xxix)

“Today all things are being swept together into a vast network in which their only meaning lies in their being available to serve some end that will itself also be directed toward getting everything under control. Heidegger calls this fundamentally undifferentiated supply of the available the, "standing-reserve" (QT 17).” (xxix)

“The challenging claim that now summons man forth, that "gathers man thither to order the self-revealing as standing-reserve," Heidegger calls das Ge-stell (Enframing) (QT 19). As "Enframing," that claim ceaselessly, brings both men and things to take their places in the stark configuration that is being wrought out through ordering for use.” (xxix)

“The dominion of Enframing as the essence of modern technology and the concomitant presence of the standing-reserve are most clearly seen in the realm of machine technology, where no object has significance in itself and where the "orderability" of everything, from energy and statistics to machines and persons, is all-important.” (xxx)

“For this reason, man does not know himself as the one who is being brought into relation to Being; that is, he does not know himself as man. Ruled in this way, man today, despite what seems true to him, I never encounters himself, i.e., his essence.” (xxxiii)

“Man needs above all in our age to know himself as the one who is so claimed. The challenging summons of Enframing "sends into a way of revealing" (QT 24). So long as man does not know this, he cannot know himself; nor can he know himself I in relation to his world. As a consequence he becomes trapped in one of two attitudes, both equally vain: either he fancies that he can in fact master technology and can by technological means by analyzing and calculating and ordering-control all aspects of his life; or he recoils at the inexorable and dehumanizing control that technology is gaining over him, rejects it as the work of the devil, and strives to discover for himself some other way of life apart from it. What man truly needs is to know the destining to which he belongs and to know it as a destining, as the disposing power that governs all phenomena in this technological age.” (xxxiii)
“For Heidegger such “truth,” the corresponding of a statement with a situation, would be mere correctness. Truth is unconcealment. That is not to say that it is something immediately accessible. Unconcealment is simultaneously concealment. Unconcealment, truth, is never nackedly present to be immediately known. The truth of modern man’s situation is a revealing that comes upon him, but it comes I upon him veiled.” (xxxiv)

“The danger is real that every other way of revealing will be driven out and that man will lose his true relation to himself and to all else. Language, the primal mode through which man may experience and think and know whatever is, in its Being, may be bereft of its power, to become only a mere instrument of information. And man may be divested of his true essence and become one who "manufactures himself" (Sem. 34; d. QT 26 ff.). Man himself, through whom the ordering characteristic up into the standing-reserve and may come to exist not as the "openness-for Being" ("Da-sein"). but as a merely self-conscious being knowing himself only as an instrument ready for use.” (xxxv)

“Surely Heidegger himself would say that whatever insight he has is not of his own discovering but comes to him from out of reality itself. Clearly he continually feels himself summoned to respond to the revealing that comes to him and to call others to the same path. Deeply conscious as he is of his place within a tradition, Heidegger doubtless regards what seems to some like the proud reinterpreting of others’ work as being, rather, the discovery in that work of far more meaning than those before him who accomplished it were given to see.” (xxviii)

The Question Concerning Technology

“In what follows we shall be questioning concerning technology. Questioning builds a way. We would be advised, therefore, above all to pay heed to the way, and not to fix our attention on isolated sentences and topics.” (3)

“Likewise, the essence of technology is by no means anything technological. Thus we shall never experience our relationship to the essence of technology so long as we merely conceive and push forward the technological, put up with it, or evade it. Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it. But we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception of it, to which today we particularly like to do homage, makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology.” (4)

“But this much remains correct: modern technology too is a means to an end. That is why the instrumental conception of technology conditions every attempt to bring man into the right relation to technology. Everything depends on our manipulating technology in the proper manner as a means. We will, as we say, “get” technology "spiritually in hand." We will master it. The will to mastery becomes all the more urgent the more technology threatens to slip from human control.” (5)
“Only at the point where such an uncovering happens does the true come to pass. For that reason the merely correct is not yet the true. Only the true brings us into a free relationship with that which concerns us from out of its essence. Accordingly, the correct instrumental definition of technology still does not show us technology’s essence. In order that we may arrive at this, or at least come close to it, we must seek the true by way of the correct. We must ask: What is the instrumental itself? Within what do such things as means and end belong? A means is that whereby something is effected and thus attained. Whatever has an effect as its consequence is called a cause. But not only that by means of which something else is effected is a cause. The end in keeping with which the kind of means to be used is determined is also considered a cause. Wherever ends are pursued and means are employed, wherever instrumentality reigns, there reigns causality.” (6)

“For centuries philosophy has taught that there are four causes: (1) the *causa materialis*, the material, the matter out of which, for example, a silver chalice is made; (2) the *causa formalis*, the form, the shape into which the material enters; (3) the *causa finalis*, the end, for example, the sacrificial rite in relation to which the chalice required is determined as to its form and matter; (4) the *causa efficiens*, which brings about the effect that is the finished, actual chalice, in this instance, the silversmith. What technology is, when represented as a means, discloses itself when we trace instrumentality back to fourfold causality.” (6)

“The principal characteristic of being responsible is this starting something on its way into arrival. It is in the sense of such a starting something on its way into arrival that being responsible is an occasioning or an inducing to go forward [Ver-an-lassen].” (9)

“Physis also, the arising of something from out of itself, is a bringing-forth, *poiesis*. *Physis* is indeed *poiesis* in the highest sense. 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.” (11)

“But where have we strayed to? We are questioning concerning technology, and we have arrived now at *aletheia*, at revealing. What has the essence of technology to do with revealing? The answer; everything. For every bringing-forth is grounded in revealing. Bringing-forth, indeed, gathers within itself the four modes of occasioning-causality-and rules them throughout. Within its domain belong end and means, belongs instrumentality, u Instrumentality is considered to be the fundamental characteristic of technology. 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.” (12)

“Technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing. If we give heed to this, then another whole realm for the essence of technology will open itself up to us. It is the realm of revealing, i.e., of truth.” (12)
“One is 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.” (13)

“The other point that we should observe with regard to techne is even more important. From earliest times until Plato the word techne is linked with the word 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.” (13)

“Whoever builds a house or a ship or forges a sacrificial chalice reveals what is to be brought forth, according to the perspectives of the four modes of occasioning. This revealing gathers together in advance the aspect and the matter of ship or house, with a view to the finished thing envisioned as completed, and from this gathering determines the manner of its construction. 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, and not as manufacturing, that techne is a bringing-forth.” (13)

“Technology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to presence [West] in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where aletheia, truth, happens.” (13)

“In opposition to this definition of the essential domain of technology, one can object that it indeed holds for Greek thought and that at best it might apply to the techniques of the handcraftsman, but that it simply does not fit modern machine-powered technology. And it is precisely the latter and it alone that is the disturbing thing, that moves us to ask the question concerning technology per se. It is said that modern technology is something incomparably different from all earlier technologies because it is based on modern physics as an exact science.” (13-14)

“What is modern technology? It too is a revealing. Only when we allow our attention to rest on this fundamental characteristic does that which is new in modern technology show itself to us.

And yet the revealing that holds sway throughout modern technology does not unfold into a bringing-forth in the sense of poiesis. The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging [Herausfordern] which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such. But does this not hold true for the old windmill as well? No. Its sails do indeed turn in the wind; they are left entirely to the wind's blowing. But the windmill does not unlock energy from the air currents in order to store it.” (14)

“This setting-upon that challenges forth the energies of nature is an expediting [Fordern], and in two ways. It expedites in that it unlocks and exposes. Yet that expediting is always itself directed from the beginning toward furthering something else, i.e., toward driving on to the maximum yield at the minimum expense. 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. The sun’s warmth is challenged forth for heat, which in turn is ordered to deliver steam whose pressure turns the wheels that keep a factory running.” (15)

“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].” (17)

“The forester who, in the wood, measures the felled timber and to all appearances walks the same forest path in the same way as did his grandfather is today commanded by profit-making in the lumber industry, whether he knows it or not. He is made subordinate to the orderability of cellulose, which for its part is challenged forth by the need for paper, which is then delivered to newspapers and illustrated magazines.” (18)

“Wherever man opens his eyes and ears, unlocks his heart, and gives himself over to meditating and striving, shaping and working, entreating and thanking, he finds himself everywhere already 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.” (19)

“Plato exacts of this word, however, utterly extraordinary: that it name what precisely is not and never will be perceivable with physical eyes.” (20)

“Enframing means that way of revealing which holds sway in the essence of modern technology and which is itself nothing technological. On the other hand, all those things that are so familiar to us and are standard parts of an assembly, such as rods, pistons, and chassis, belong to the technological. The assembly itself, however, together with the aforementioned stockparts, falls within the sphere of technological activity and this activity always merely responds to the challenge of Enframing, but it never comprises Enframing itself or brings it about.” (21)

“Always the unconcealment of that which is goes upon a way of revealing. Always the destining of revealing holds complete sway over man. But that destining is never a fate that compels. For man becomes truly free only insofar as he belongs to the realm of destining and so becomes one who listens and hears [Horender], and not one who is simply constrained to obey [Horiger].” (25)

“Enframing as a destining of revealing. In this way we are already sojourning within the open space of destining, a destining that in no way confines us to a stultified compulsion to push on blindly with technology or, what comes to the same thing, to rebel helplessly against it and curse it as the work of the devil. Quite to the contrary, when we once open ourselves expressly to the essence of technology, we find ourselves unexpectedly taken into a freeing claim.” (25-26)
“Yet when destining reigns in the mode of Enframing, it is the supreme danger. This danger attests itself to us in two ways. Soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but does so, rather, exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve, then he comes to the very brink of a precipitous fall; that is, he comes to the point where he himself will have to be taken as standing-reserve.” (26-27)

“Enframing blocks the shining-forth and holding-sway of truth. The destining that sends into ordering is consequently the extreme danger. What is dangerous is not technology. There is no demonry of technology, but rather there is the mystery of its essence. The essence of technology, as a destining of revealing, is the danger. The transformed meaning of the word "Enframing" will perhaps become somewhat more familiar to us now if we think Enframing in the sense of destining and danger.” (28)

“Thus Enframing, as a destining of revealing, is indeed the essence of technology, but never in the sense of genus and essentia. If we pay heed to this, something astounding strikes us: It is technology itself that makes the demand on us to think in another way what is usually understood by "essence." But in what way?” (30)

“The arts were not derived from the artistic. Art works were not enjoyed aesthetically. Art was not a sector of cultural activity. What, then, was art—perhaps only for that brief but magnificent time? Why did art bear the modest name techne? Because it was a revealing that brought forth and hither, and therefore belonged within poiesis. It was finally that revealing which holds complete sway in all the fine arts, in poetry, and in everything poetical that obtained poiesis as its proper name.” (34)

“Because the essence of technology is nothing technological, essential reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it. Such a realm is art. But certainly only if reflection on art, for its part, does not shut its eyes to the constellation of truth after which we are questioning.” (33)

“Thus questioning, we bear witness to the crisis that in our sheer preoccupation with technology we do not yet experience the coming to presence of technology, that in our sheer aesthetic mindedness we no longer guard and preserve the coming to presence of art. Yet the more questioningly we ponder the essence of technology, the more mysterious the essence of art becomes.
The closer we come to the danger, the more brightly do the ways into the saving power begin to shine and the more questioning we become. For questioning is the piety of thought.” (33)