

8 Technicity, Topology, Tragedy: Heidegger on "That Which Saves" in the Global Reach

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The technicity of modern technique follows from a mutation in the essential way to be of truth. [. . .] From *alétheia's* conflictual way springs the possibility and the necessity of "tragedy."

—M. HEIDEGGER, *Parmenides*

The organizers of the symposium at the same time raised and chased the specter of what one may call technological essentialism. In so doing, they placed themselves in good company. Michel Foucault wrote a *History of Madness* and later a *History of Sexuality*, only to tell us that neither 'madness' nor 'sexuality' designated enduring essences but rather problems that have their dates of emergence and their age of pertinence.

Likewise our hosts. They raised that specter inasmuch as the general title, "The Problem of Technology in the Western Tradition," suggests that we were invited to wrestle with a unitary issue that may have assumed various forms over the ages. In that, they have conventional wisdom on their side. Common sense would indeed have no qualms about distinguishing *kinds* of technology, for instance, pertaining to, or at least contemporaneous with—I quote from the titles of essays in this series—classical thought, Christianity, modern

philosophy, Romanticism, and American liberalism. We do speak of Stone Age technology and DNA technology. One is then perfectly justified in suggesting that technologies come in the plural, that is, in various species subsumable under one generic concept. At the same time, however, we were there to discuss the technological project for the control and mastery of nature, clearly an exclusively modern project. Here the problem of technology is pertinent to one age alone. Control and mastery as projected by Galileo and Newton are not pertinent to the premodern world. The caveman's club has its *specific* technology; so do the medieval crossbow and today's MX missile. **But the modern quest for mastery does not specify technology.** When Descartes conceived a method "to render ourselves masters of nature,"¹ and inasmuch as modern technology realizes that project, one is clearly no longer speaking of some universal concept specifiable according to kinds. Between the plural of, say, warfare technologies and the singular of modern technology there exists a mere homonymy, the same word being used with diverse semantic functions. The specter of essentialism is thereby chased.

I wish to show some implications of the distinction thus suggested between technology as, on one hand, the common name for innumerable techniques and, on the other, the proper name for modern universal *mathesis*. **A technique, the know-how that the Greeks called *technē*, is operative whenever humans make some goal-directed use of their hands.** As to modern mastery over nature via a universal mathematical project, this is something different from know-how. It is one **epochal project of truth, best described as 'technicity.'** Because I was asked to discuss Heidegger, I first develop a few traits of technicity so understood. Then I suggest that the discourse of epochal configurations, or stamps—diachronic topologies, such as Foucault's—cannot be Heidegger's last word about truth in technicity. As stamping our world today, **technicity reveals something that saves. It reveals a more originary truth: the tragic condition of being.**

AN EPOCHAL TRUTH

Heidegger's description of modernity as the age of global technicity is probably well known. I therefore remain content here with enumer-

1. René Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, pt. 6, *Oeuvres de Descartes*, ed. Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: Vrin, 1965), 6:62.

ating a few thematic points—not Heideggerian theses but short cuts connecting some of what he called his ‘ways’ of thought. He has indeed followed diverse ways of thinking about *technē* and technicity, as well as about technology (in the sense of the *logos*, that is, the peculiar mode of gathering proper to technicity) and about technocracy (the regime imposed by technicity on thinking and acting). From his most explicit text² about these issues the following reminders can be spelled out.

An essentialist difference. “Technique is not the same as the essence of technique” (QCT, p. 4). Any modern procedure based on quantification requires a technique. But the essence of such techniques—‘technicity’—is not itself technical. One may call this the technological difference, as quantification gathers (*legein*) phenomena into their way to be. The difference is clearly modeled, albeit for modern mathesis only, after the generic notion mentioned earlier. The essence (*Wesen*) of technique, Heidegger indeed says, is comparable to “the essence of a tree” (ibid.), which is not any particular tree. Likewise, **technicity is not any particular technique**, not this or that quantificatory procedure. The technological difference describes technicity in analogy with the subsumptive concept I began with.

A historical difference. “Enframing is destined to us as one mode of unconcealment” (QCT, p. 29). With this, modern technicity is now placed outside of generic descriptions. The displacement results from another sense of *Wesen*, other than Platonist: “Thus far we have understood ‘essence’ in the usual meaning it has [. . .] in the academic language of philosophy” (ibid.). The other sense of technicity, however, accessible to an ‘other thinking’—other than subsumptive and opening, as we shall see, an ‘other possibility’—inscribes our age within a concrete historical destiny. *Wesen* here is a verb. It designates the way epochs have unfolded in the West. In each, everyday stuff revealed itself situated within one finite constellation, one definite mode of unconcealment. Thus the crossbow does not belong in the age of technicity but in what Heidegger elsewhere calls the imperial-imperative epoch.³ The stamp (*Prägung*, *Gepräge*) that marks our own age is described as *Gestell*, ‘enframing’ or ‘positionality.’ It differs from

2. Martin Heidegger, “The Question concerning Technology,” in *The Question concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. W. Lovitt (New York: Harper, 1977), pp. 3–35, hereafter cited as QCT. I do not always follow this translation.

3. For the entire Latin-speaking age and beyond, the “fundamental relation to beings as such was administered by the sway of *imperium*” (Heidegger, *Parmenides* [Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1982], pp. 65–66).

things, not logically, as a species differs from the cases it encompasses, but phenomenologically, as one pervasive mode of manifestation differs from what it makes manifest. **Enframing is not a universal. Nor is it a particular, in any way subsumed or subsumable under some universal. It is our singular site.** By way of anticipation, let me add that tracing the epochal stamps by which the West has lived is one task incumbent upon topology.

Phenomenality. “Modern technicity [is] an unconcealing that requisitions” (QCT, p. 17). This answers the question of how, under the exclusive mode of manifestation that is technicity, phenomena are constituted. Modern phenomenality is due to a certain hegemonic trait in self-disclosure, which Heidegger calls ‘requisitioning’ (*Herausfordern*). Phenomena appear, summoned as it were by the all-encompassing regime of method in the sense of Descartes.⁴ Stated negatively, nothing can become manifest that does not conform to the project of global mastery. Nothing has being unless it enters into the system of quantification with its consequences, such as experimentation, production, circulation, consumption—in a word, unless it is objectified into “standing reserve” (*Bestand*; QCT, p. 17). This epochal requisitioning designates “the way in which everything comes to presence” (ibid.). **It includes therefore the subject as well, which is why in the age of hegemonic technicity man becomes properly a phenomenon to himself only via the human and social sciences.** Phenomenality no longer results from the intuitive grasp of an essence or species but from the probative grip on a specimen.

Truth as event. “In enframing happens the event of unconcealment” (QCT, p. 21). Throughout his writings, Heidegger sought to understand **truth as a process of unveiling** rather than a state of conformity. *Alétheia* is the originary condition beneath received normative notions of truth. Thus, when the norm is sought in ‘adequate’ propositions about data, or in the ‘agreement’ of a thing with its form, or again in some ‘assimilation’ of the soul to the true, the philosophical gaze remains riveted to things disclosed rather than moving back to the process of disclosure. With this step back from the manifest to manifestation, Heidegger steps out of the realm of metaphysics. As there have been various modes of manifestation in the West, truth has a history. The condition of that history is an event: truth always occurs as an unconcealing. This relation between condition and conditioned

4. See also Heidegger’s commentary on Newton’s First Law of Motion in *What Is a Thing?*, trans. W. B. Barton and V. Deutsch (New York: Regnery, 1967), pp. 76–80, 85–88.

in history was the one issue Heidegger kept pursuing in his middle period. It can be described as the difference between two disparate singulars: the unfolding of truth epochs and the ever-new truth event. **Contemporary technicity is one such differential configuration, one epochal figure of manifestation as it differs from everything manifest. In it happens our epochal truth.**

Conflictual Truth. "The essence of technicity is ambiguous in an elevated sense. Such ambiguity points into the mystery of all unconcealing, that is, of truth" (QCT, p. 33). Normative truth stands and falls with univocity. Indeed, received standards of conformity had to be unambiguous, simple. How else could they have normed performances of adequation, agreement, or assimilation? Understood as event of manifestation, on the other hand, truth is inescapably conflictual. A strategy toward concealment asserts itself in all modes of unconcealment. This ambiguity entails decisive consequences for the law as well as for being, affecting the very ultimacy of *Sein*. In terms of the law, a transgressive strategy works within every legislative strategy. In terms of the event that is being, an expropriating strategy (*Enteignis*) disperses all appropriating strategies (*Ereignis*) as they constitute constellations of phenomena. To render fully what Heidegger takes to be 'the Greek experience,' *alêtheia* then needs to be understood as unconcealment-concealment; the law, as legislation-transgression; and being, as appropriation-expropriation. The originary duality indicated by the privative *a-* and the verb *lêthein* (to dissemble) is in no way symmetrical. Despite their lexical parallelism, unconcealment is not the determinate negation of concealment. Unconcealment is of entities, but concealment is of being qua being. Truth and untruth therefore remain irreconcilable. The two strategies in truth, Heidegger adds, "draw past each other like the paths of two stars in the sidereal revolutions" (QCT, p. 33). With this disparateness at its very heart, truth loses its univocity. Again by way of anticipation: retrieving the event of disparate, conflictual truth will be the other task assigned to topology.

That which saves. "Where danger is, also grows that which saves" (QCT, pp. 28, 34, 42). In his investigations into technicity, Heidegger liked to quote this line from Hölderlin. What is that which saves? It can only consist in the express retrieval of truth's conflictual way to be. Hence this highly polemical either-or: *either* "pick up all standards" from among the unconcealed available stock, *or* "letting oneself be taken into the essential way to be of the unconcealed and of its

unconcealment" (QCT, p. 26). This either-or sets "the other thinking" apart from all normative, subsumptive, entitative, univocal thinking. It sets 'the other possibility' apart from technicity as today's actuality. The other thinking and the other possibility indicate that which saves, namely, that man place himself expressly within the double bind that is truth. "As yet unexperienced, but perhaps more experienced in a time to come, [man] may be needed and used to preserve truth's essential way to be" (QCT, p. 33). Since that essential way to be is conflictual (from *fligere*, to 'clash'), polemical (from *polemos*, 'strife'), agonistic (from *agonia*, 'contest'), there is agony in salvation. In the words of the epigraph quoted at the beginning, that which saves resides in the possibility and necessity of tragedy.

FROM TOPOLOGY TO THE TRAGIC CONDITION OF BEING

This is obviously not the place to propose a theory of Attic tragedy. Suffice it to say that it always displays a clash, a strife, a contest between irreconcilable laws: for example, between those of Antigone and those of Creon.

Tragedy traces out something like a path of sight. The hero sees the laws of the city and of the family in conflict. Then he blinds himself to one of them, keeping his gaze fixed on the other. Nations and other communities have lived and continue to live within the shadow of this blindness. All normative single binds result from such self-incurred blinding. Then follows a catastrophe that *opens the hero's eyes*. This is the moment in which tragic truth is recognized. The vision of irreconcilable differing among laws *takes his sight away* (even gouges his eyes, as was the case for Oedipus and, in another way, for Tiresias), and it singularizes the hero to the point that the city no longer has room for him. From denial to recognition, blindness is transmuted. His orbits empty, Oedipus sees a normative double bind. He sees tragic differing. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, he is shown embracing it, reduced to silence but granted apotheosis, that is, deification, and receiving tutelage over Athens.

Heidegger's topological inquiry into the epochal stamps by which the West has lived, and of which technicity is the latest, models its

itinerary after that tragic crisis.⁵ It looks back toward beginnings that have initiated epochs and discovers in them an ambivalence breeding hubris. Then it seeks to grasp—again in the words of the epigraph above—the mutations in the essential way to be of truth. Heidegger seeks to retrieve the critical ‘thrusts of time,’ as he also calls the reversals in the history of truth, which set epochs apart. Finally, topology finds its own task in keeping alive the question of a possible *there*, a possible topos in which humankind might prove experienced enough to sustain the tragic condition of being.

That topos would respond to the early Greek. Here are a few lines on the Greek beginning, as well as on the other beginning in which tragic knowledge might save us in—not from—global technicity: “All inceptions are in themselves what is complete, unsurpassable. They escape historicist recording not because they are trans-temporal and eternal, but because they are greater than eternity. As *the thrusts of time* they place the openness for being to conceal in. The proper founding of this time-space is called *being-there*” (BzP, p. 17).

Topology is an inquiry into topoi, places. In Heidegger, these are the epochs in our history as they have led up to the age of technicity. Topology shows the deep historical roots of today’s global reach. As it traces the places that have been ours, are ours, and can be ours, it is recapitulatory, critical, and anticipatory.

Recapitulatory topology asks, What has been the form of conflictuality—of the tragic—that in its Greek, Latin, and modern ministry the philosophical civil service⁶ had both to see and to deny? In this its retrodictive task, topology spells out the double bind marking epochal inceptions. These are ‘in themselves what is complete, unsurpassable.’ Yet they are never simple. In his more nuanced readings of the tradition, Heidegger tries to show how any instituting discourse remains faithful to the phenomena, that is, in his words, to the dis-

5. That model is most notable in Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie* (“Gesamtausgabe,” vol. 65 [Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1989]) cited hereafter as BzP. The present article is fully understandable only in conjunction with three related papers on BzP: “Ultimate Double Binds,” *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 14 (Fall 1991), pp. 213–36; “A Brutal Awakening to the Tragic Condition of Being,” in *Art, Politics, Technology*, ed. Karsten Harries (New Haven: Yale University Press, forthcoming); and “Riveted to a Monstrous Site,” in *The Heidegger Case: On Philosophy and Politics*, ed. Joseph Margolis and Thomas Rockmore (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), pp. 313–30.

6. “We are the functionaries of mankind” (Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Philosophy*, trans. David Carr [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970], p. 17).

parity of unconcealedness and concealment. Epochal institutions ‘place the openness for being to conceal in.’ They point up the legislative-transgressive double bind, analogous in this to the opening of the dramas of Creon, Agamemnon, Eteocles, and others.

Any instituted discourse, on the other hand, represses dissension. As Heidegger diagnoses it, such repression is the phantasmic work of ‘logic.’ Following his less nuanced readings of the tradition, the reign of logic repeats the hubristic moment in tragedy when the heroic edict brings the conflict between city and family under one law. The order so established, however, never fails to prompt the return of the repressed. In the same way, even as it sustains an epoch, every hegemonic referent unfailingly also calls for singulars to assert themselves against subsumption, whereby it calls for its self-destitution.

In its recapitulatory work, topology inquires about the places—the phenomena, the regions of experience—that philosophers have retained to the exclusion of others and that they have absolutized so as to deny originary strife. Among these topoi have figured mathematics (Plato), motion (Aristotle), the observation of consciousness by itself (Descartes), and many more. From the elevated position of these strongholds, like Creon settled in his royalty, the normative *chargés d’affaires* have been able to legislate. They have exalted one representation beyond measure, hubristically declared it the standard of all measurement, and thus turned singulars into particulars subjected to it.

Critical topology. Here one topos only asks to be situated and described. It is that caesura place from which speaks the topologist of the present who asks: How can the double bind once glimpsed (the repressed ‘having-been’ of Greek tragedy) today appear imminent (the ‘to-come’ that saves and is a matter to safeguard)? In this literally decisive place, phenomenology does not, to be sure, turn into yet another instituting discourse. Rather, it addresses a transition. What is at stake is how “the essence of technique [. . .] can be led into the transmutation of its destiny” (QCT, p. 39). In that *krisis*, some problems disappear, while others, and formidable ones, emerge. All have to do with the status of a discourse trying to remain faithful to the singular that is happening to us and that is not simple.

What disappears is the very possibility of obliterating originary strife. The hypothesis of an epochal closure gives to the tragic double bind that singular feature, never before seen, of archic-anarchic monstrosity. Such bifrontal character of our site results from a ‘thrust of time.’ The phrase answers to the perplexity before singulars, in which

historical thinking begins: things are one way, then suddenly in an entirely different way. In topological terms, we find ourselves inscribed within one horizon, one "time-space," and then suddenly reinscribed within another. This perplexity involves nothing but singulars: a *terra deserta* that is no longer ours, a *terra incognita* that is not yet ours, and a transition in which an entire collectivity lives as if holding its breath. No encompassing *nomos* governs this nomadism where allocations, assignments to discontinuous planes, follow one another without warning or mediation. Reinscription, however, institutes a possibility that remains to be seized upon. To whom can and ought the "proper founding" be entrusted? Not to any particular hero. The possible concerns precisely the way to be of the entire age of technicity. To the question, Who? the answer in Heidegger is a desubjectivized self, that is, a site (not a subject, which would answer instead to the question, What? What is man?). The transmutation of blindness about technicity, as described, cannot be forced. One can only let oneself be assigned to this conflictual site. Such an assignment may happen or not. It eludes willful conquering. When in a crisis, which may be ours, such allocation occurs, the originary condition of what we are living becomes thinkable. Univocal ultimates (*archai*) then appear as having covered up an an-archic originary condition; technical expertise proves to feed on the denial of tragic knowledge; global technicity reveals 'that which saves'; and in Heidegger's idiom of the mid-1930s, being-there (*Dasein*) comes to be. Since it is conflictual, the *there* of *Dasein* can only be tragic.

Yet the discourse of this historical crisis—critical topology—also encounters formidable difficulties. To trace the break between the univocally archic terrain and the tragically anarchic, it cannot but speak two languages. To think about the faultline (*de linea*) where epochal history terminates⁷ requires one discourse uttered from within, as well as another uttered from without, that closure. It requires an epochal bilingualism. Thus we have yet to become, Heidegger says, "dwellers along the [abyss] in the time-space from which the gods have fled" (*BzP*, p. 52). The age of global technicity is readily described as one of great destructions, and not to subscribe to this diagnosis would take a hopeless case of anorexia toward reflection. But if to think is to stop at the conditions of what one is living, then

7. "The history of Being is at an end for thinking in the event of appropriation" (Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh [slightly modified] [New York: Harper & Row, 1972], p. 41).

it is worthwhile asking, How did we get here? To this question, the topology answers by pointing out the *krisis* around which the history of being turns, which enables us to become the dwellers along the abyss that we are. Critical topology implies that in the twentieth century the double bind beneath every monofocal posit becomes obvious, which in turn implies that the tragic denial at the foundation of order makes itself all the more violent. Institutionalized brutality of a magnitude never seen before, error and errancy, an isomorphism in everyday life that stifles reflection; then the critical turning that moves outside of the same and its laws; lastly the lesson learned from devastations, the vision of empty sockets and the silent affirmation of originary differing: this tragic itinerary becomes accessible only to a bifrontal phenomenological thinking. The topology that frees dissension is a thinking, since Heidegger does no more than linger upon the site and its conditions; it is phenomenological, since it gathers what shows itself there; and it is bifrontal, since it looks back at the collapse of normative epochs (strictly speaking, a redundancy: an epoch always results from an idea that puts a stop to questioning, from a fixed idea, a half posited, a decree, and, in that sense, from a norm) and looks ahead at a constellation that is anarchic because it lacks simple ultimacy. What shows itself is the kenosis that makes possible, while deferring it, the tragic *there* of being-there.

The difficulties have less to do with the circular character of this topology (which surmises a transition at work and then discovers symptoms verifying the surmise). Not every hermeneutical circle is vicious. The difficulties arise rather from the fact that topology can be retrospective and critical only because it is essentially anticipatory. In the vocabulary of representation, the promoting agency behind all standards, both the meta-narrative instructing us about the stage whence we come and the semi-narrative about the possible *exit* we are living (semi-, since narration remains suspended as philosophy runs out of representables) have their condition in a discontinuous sense in which all actors today find themselves enrolled.

As this is a temporal discontinuity, the preeminence of the possible over the actual⁸ requires a "headway in order to reach our 'location' in being itself and thereby our history" (*BzP*, p. 501). We learn about our past and our present only via the contingent future, that is, via

8. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p. 63. The key section on the mathematical project as well as on the genesis of the theoretical gaze is sec. 69, trans. pp. 401–18.

the eventual, eventlike topos. As long as the tragic *there* has not been seized upon as our ownmost possibility, one will never "measure what has happened in the history of metaphysics: the prelude to the event itself" (BzP, p. 174). This prelude has from all time deferred the tragic *there*, as well as the differing whose possible site it is.

Heidegger is not saying that soon, perhaps in the year 2000, we shall reach our conflictual location in being and thus be saved from the global reach of technicity. He is saying that the tragic *there* is possible, that it always has been, that it has become even more clearly so in the age of worldwide cataclysms that is our own, and that there is no bearer of salvation (*salvus*, as 'whole' as tragic vision becomes after the crisis) other than that possible. With the deferred *there*, nothing gets postponed until later. Deferment, rather, describes originary differing itself.

Deferred in what way then? The question is one of anticipation.

Anticipatory topology. This deals with a possible historical locus: one already given, yet still to be occupied. Its description is first of all negative since topos here no longer signifies any region of entities whose relations can be maximized to produce some archic referent. "In the other beginning, it is no longer either some entity or some region and realm, any more than entities as such, that can set the standard for being" (BzP, p. 248). The difficulty consists in understanding anticipation without associating any utopian or millennial postponements. This requires some clarification of the negations in the lines just quoted.

Clearly what is being denied under their obvious apophatism is the hyperbolic use of one entity—proper (doubtless the Platonic 'good'), regional (doubtless Aristotelian 'physical' motion), or general (doubtless Leibniz's perplexity about why there are 'entities in general')—posited as normative. They are aimed against representational maximization. What is excluded is the transition to another genus as Hegel had described it. The "great men," Hegel said, "see the very truth of their age and their world, the next genus, so to speak, which is already formed in the womb of time."⁹

But what is thereby being denied more broadly is a certain phenomenology of simple manifestation, the kind one may be tempted to read into Heideggerian 'giving.' Such a phenomenology, answering the ancient question of being qua being, would run like this:

9. G. W. F. Hegel, *Reason in History: A General Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, trans. R. S. Hartman (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1953), p. 40.

Heidegger relates *geben* to the Greek *phain-* and *phy-*, the radicals for 'showing' and 'rising,' hence to manifestation; then he inverts the relations of grounding (as attested to by the lines quoted), anchoring not manifestation in one entity that shows itself most noteworthy but rather this entity as well as all others in manifestation. Being qua being would consist in simple giving (*Es gibt*) as underscored by these verbs in the middle voice: 'to show forth,' 'to rise.' To respond to the question of being, presencing would have to be retained as such, regardless of any consideration for present entities.¹⁰

This is all well and good. Still, reconstructions such as this say nothing about the *intrinsic contrariety* of being, nothing about the originary strife for the sake of which Heidegger never ceased renewing his idiom. Being is indeed showing, rising, manifesting, presencing, giving; but it is all that in a 'fissured' mode, in 'dissension,' as 'unconcealment-concealment,' 'appropriation-expropriation,' in the 'struggle' by which the No asserts itself against Yes and death declares itself against life. Whatever apophatism there remains in Heidegger, it does not hide some negative haplology (*haploon*, 'simple').¹¹ It puts simplicity out of operation. With their negations, the lines quoted do suggest that being alone is *maßgebend*, setting the standard. But "Yes and No are an essential property of being itself, and the No even more originally than the Yes" (BzP, p. 178). With essential properties like these, how would apophatic utterances ever exalt a simple standard, retrieve a simple condition beneath epochal regimes, prepare a simple dwelling site? The *thought* of the double bind that is being may indeed be simple (*einfach*, *schlicht*, etc.), just as the sight of Oedipus blinded alone could be simple, whole, safe.¹² But if, in the other beginning, it is no longer any entity that ultimately 'gives'—gives (sets) the standard, gives (provides food for) thought, gives (brings about) a site—nor any thesis about being that binds uniformly, then Heidegger's great awakening after the compromises of 1933–34 led him outside of all *simply normative* regimes. Anticipa-

10. Heidegger goes rather far in formulating this disregard: a "knowing seriousness" would "no longer be bothered by good and bad, by decay and rescue of the tradition, by benevolence and brutality" (BzP, p. 242). See also *On Time and Being*, pp. 2 and 24.

11. For one recent attempt to read into Heidegger just such a negative haplology, see Jacques Derrida, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and The Question*, trans. G. Bennington and R. Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), pp. 108–13; and *Psyché* (Paris: Galilée, 1987), pp. 535f.

12. Oedipus blinded "has one eye too many perhaps. . . . To live is death, and death too is a life" (Friedrich Hölderlin, "In Lovely Blueness," in *Poems and Fragments*, trans. M. Hamburger [modified] [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1967], pp. 603f).

tory topology leads toward a conflictual normativity, the knowledge of which is more ancient in the West than any theticism of the same—the theticism most effectively deployed with contemporary global technicity.

To speak of the deferred tragic *there* is to sustain the possibility that the denial of the transgressive other in what philosophers ascertain as ultimate may reveal itself exhausted. Such denial has provided the impetus to every figure of the legislative same, while its exhaustion has always secretly shattered normative power. To attempt the possible means here to destabilize affirmation, the firm, firmness, and to rehabilitate under the Yes the pull of the No. The possible undercuts the effects of positive, that is, thetic discourse. Hence the silence of the tragic hero fleeing into that *nonplace* for the ancients, the desert; a nonplace (*ou-topos*), not moving (like the island of some messianic society) into an ever-greater distance as a result of a poorly calculated arrival, but deferred under the mode of the possible and therefore differing with itself. No utopia here, and quite another apophysis. Negating and questioning are all that remain to anyone seeking to retain the disparate: for Heidegger, a negating that posits no dialectical nescience and a questioning that presupposes no maieutic prescience. The topology of the possible does not work with a theodolite. Like the desert where Oedipus wandered, the anticipated conflictual topos is closed to prospection. In the *Beiträge*, it is described through 'fissuring' (*Zerklüftung*), a word that stresses time more than space. To be deferred is the very temporality of the tragic *there*: the discord of phenomenal presencing and of a singularization always to come (see below). This is the originary strife whose vision blinds one and whose knowledge strikes one silent.

Now if such is the originary condition as Heidegger has come to view it after his brutal awakening from reliance upon univocal "originary rootedness,"¹³ then why state it in the future tense? Witness the proliferation of topical postponements: at present, we can at most prepare the "place of questioning" (*BzP*, p. 85), where "those to come" will prepare themselves, who in turn will prepare "new standpoints in being," from which alone can "the strife of earth and world be sustained" (*BzP*, p. 62), a strife out of which may issue the tragic *there*. This series of sites—*Frageort*, *Standort*, *Da*—has nothing to do with a speculation on happier morrows. In anticipatory topology, the

13. *Ursprüngliche Verwurzelung* (not "primordial roots," as the translators put it), *Being and Time*, p. 429.

emphasis remains on the possible site and its discontinuity rather than on actual terrains and their contiguity. Statements in the future tense concern a potential that is given now. They are not meant to put off indefinitely the other beginning, but to aggravate here and now the discontinuity between regimes of the same, whose institutionalized hypertrophia Heidegger had just helped in promoting, and the event of differing by which he henceforth understands being—to aggravate, in his words, the temporal difference between illusory full presence and fractured presencing.

PROVIDING A PLACE FOR THE ORIGINARY DOUBLE BIND

If topology is concerned with the place where the conflictual event can be sustained, at least one misunderstanding regarding Heidegger is excluded. One might indeed object: if he advocates express compliance with an originary strife modeled after Aeschylus and Sophocles, then what is there about his model that *saves*? Is such a possibility not more disruptive than even global subsumption under univocal standards?

The objection is meaningless. It reduces the guiding category of modality, the possible, to what derives from it, the actual. One worries about what will happen to public order if the legitimating referents were to turn out fractured. This amounts to misconstruing the status of the possible, since conflictual being already grips and breaks us, just as it has always gripped and broken us: "We are already moving, although still only transitionally, within another truth" (*BzP*, p. 18): within the other truth which, in the epigraph quoted at the beginning, was described as the very condition of tragedy. In hardening the reign of rule-governed technicity, we would merely be once again answering the possible with denial. Planetary totalitarianism—Creon's worldwide and ultimate triumph—would only extend and deepen the actual. Creon forces and enforces the public order by denying its transgressive other; but what would there even be to deny if the tragic double bind did not hold him always and already? The conflictual possible is *to come* only because it is our most ancient condition. It breaks with the actual as the event breaks with constant presence; as the singular, with subsumption; as originary strife, with any one focal meaning of being; and as the acknowledgment of what

is (letting the tragic *there* be) breaks with thetic repression (positing phantasmic figures of firstness).

In order to see in what sense the originary double bind "saves" in technicity, it suffices to ask, As opposed to all thetic ultimates, what is phenomenologically ultimate in everydayness? Ultimacy is the property of a condition that cannot be sidestepped or stepped behind. A condition is ultimate if it is not determined by some yet more originary condition. In everydayness, only our coming-into-being and out ceasing-to-be satisfy that requirement. What is phenomenologically ultimate are not precisely birth and death as two biographical facts, one having occurred and the other yet to occur, but two pervading traits—two pulls on the present—originating in them. Hannah Arendt called the first of these traits 'natality'; it is "the new beginning inherent in birth," "the principle of beginning" "in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted." Primal institutions are good examples of that originary trait, but so are drafting parliamentary legislation, founding the United Nations, sitting down to begin a book, or choosing a life partner. Arendt called the second trait, our being-toward-death, 'mortality.' It is what ties us to one definite sequence of events, bound eventually to lead to our extinction. Mortality is therefore a description of our utter singularization to come. Natality and mortality are what we all know, yet poorly. Since they are given only mediately, these two traits are what stand most in need of rigorous clarification. As phenomenological ultimates, they, more than any immediately given phenomenon, call for *diasozein ta phainomena* ("preserving that which shows itself," Eudoxus of Cnidus).

The double bind of natality-mortality is phenomenologically first in the sense of the *origin* of each and every experience. It is not first in the sense of *principles*, not foundational in any way. Principles and affiliated representations arise only from the subsumptive violence that turns whatever is the case into a case of whatever universal. Global technicity is the most effective translation of principal thinking into everydayness.

Now whenever philosophers ask, In the name of what? they refer facts and deeds to principles, which bear common names. Heidegger, for his part, seeks to step back from principal referents to what is originary and does not bear a common name. Natality and mortality, as mine, are *singular* traits. Topology is thus a discourse about singulars not only as it narrates the sequence of epochs in our history but more decisively as it seeks their condition in the originary double

bind of natality and mortality. The one great possibility never to become an actual economy—which is why there is no salvation *from* technicity—would be to comply equally with the claims of singulars and the phantasms of the common: to comply with the temporal difference. Topology does not legitimize facts by referring them to a name. It legitimizes the feasible in anticipating the one nameless possibility, the event of appropriation-expropriation. What common name indeed would fit differing laws? In Heidegger, the whole issue of legitimation gets transmuted. The site of norms is to become what it has always been: the locus of the event, a locus to which we have always been allocated already and whose evidence gains as principles collapse into the isomorphic: "Being happens as the event. This implies that a singular site has unexpectedly befallen us, alienating us toward the instant and only thus spreading" (*BzP*, p. 260).

It is true that the locus thus anticipated can no longer guarantee any tranquillity of order. Yet this is not to say that its topology justifies anything and everything. Its criteria of responsibility were set forth not only by Aeschylus and Sophocles but also by Heraclitus and Parmenides. It heeds other imperatives than do normative signifiers: "The things that are absent, behold them nevertheless as firmly present."¹⁴ In the thetic impulse of natality behold the undertow of mortality. In the site mapped out by the law behold the singularization to come, which no law can subsume and which alienates us from the lures of normative presence.

"Must we then not think otherwise, anticipate zones and yardsticks and modes of being that are entirely other, so as to belong to the necessities that are dawning here?" (*BzP*, p. 204). Such is the onus of anticipatory topology. It is a matter of belonging to the originary possible, more powerful than any actual denial. But in this possible, a 'not yet' stands out from the 'already.' The instrumental nature of normative single binds has become obvious at least since Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, but there is 'not yet' a readiness to acknowledge tragic double binds. Hence: "The locus of decision still remains to be founded" (*BzP*, p. 187). But also: "To think this way already requires, to be sure, a standpoint where it will no longer be possible to be lured by all the 'good' and the 'progressive' and the 'gigantic' that are being achieved" (*BzP*, p. 140). In what passes for good, progressive, gigantic—which probably means: in the technological gigan-

14. Parmenides, in *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, 6th ed., ed. Hermann Diels and Walter Kranz (Berlin: Weidmann, 1951), frag. 4.1.

ticism that passes for progressive and hence for good—arise necessities that compel one to think otherwise. The everydayness that breaks with the cluster 'good' (again, Platonic), 'progress' (early modern), 'giganticism' (late modern) is already ours, already a necessity in the sense that everyone is living it, but it still remains for us to seize. The possible always grafts some *not yet* on an *already*, thereby breaking the order of proper temporal sequence. To say a cataclysm is possible is to say that at present things are holding up, but that the conditions of their collapse are already there. Heidegger: the conditions—the zones and the yardsticks and the modes of being—are there for the illusion to collapse due to which values, progress, and technicity appear to us as pregnant with normativity. Insofar as they remain still to be grasped, these conditions are situated ahead of us (*ante*), whence anticipation. They fissure the subjectivist topos that continues to pass for rock bottom, whence topology.

To establish oneself expressly on the fissured ground is what in the mid-1930s Heidegger understands by 'being-there.' Such establishing marks the other beginning. Its implications appear from a disjunction—a twofold disjunction—that Heidegger was to attempt ever anew over the forty years to follow.

On the one hand, the *fundamentum concussum* remains to be disjoined from any foundation seeming *inconcussum*. That disjunction devolves on a recapitulation, or an archaeology, which frees plateaus in collision from under the numerous foundations posed since the Greeks; which frees, he says in some texts, the strife between world and earth. On the *world* map of phantasmic dominions he traces out especially the modern enclosure, freeing under the discourse established since Descartes and Kant the *earthbound* dissensions that have torn each of the great founding discourses. This labor of archaeological disjunction is incumbent on historical critique. It has its site and its hour: the 'thrust of time' making us, the subjects of technicity, feel the collision of plateaus that are presupposed beneath every foundation posed.

On the other hand, the forces in collision themselves remain to be disjoined. Heideggerian responsibility consists in a response to that destabilizing thrust in which normative posits suffer their deposal. The 'thrust of time' brings into light the disparate beneath every referential construct. To respond to what is happening to us then means to lay bare forms of the originary double bind: appropriation-

expropriation in the event; the strife world-earth; the conflict gods-humans in history; that of unconcealment-concealment in truth; the discord of phenomenalizing-singularizing in manifestation . . . These polemological disjunctions fall upon anticipatory critique. It separates the dislocating strategies so that being-there can belong to its originary locus, that is, (Heraclitean) *polemos*.

The self-incurred stultification in technicity shows just how far away we still are from responsibility belonging to the originary locus so understood. Whence the appeal to "found the historical place for the history to come" (*BzP*, p. 60), to "create that space-time, the site for the essential instants" (*BzP*, p. 98). Later Heidegger was to describe the instant that founds history in an abbreviated form as the "entry into the event"¹⁵ (abbreviated, since the phrase does not say the event results from mutually hostile pulls). This entry would be as compact as all beginnings have been. What interests the topologist in this compactness is the conflictuality glimpsed, then infallibly repressed, at the inception of every single epoch in our past.

Stultification gets squared in the consumer of ideas who has seen and read everything. There may be something charming about a blasé gymnasium student; later, it is better to have learned how to read. For example, on truth and its site. "The truth of being [has still] to find a site that comes to be in being-there" (*BzP*, p. 90). Having leafed through Heidegger, one may vaguely recall that, at least when read in translation, he liked to speak of authenticity; that this doubtless has something to do with truth; and that there were decades when fashion required that one 'be true.' Speed reading may, however, make one miss the essential—here, the conflictuality without sublation which is truth. Unconcealment-concealment has yet to find its site. 'Being true' then means something more disquieting than genuine or veridical existence, as it may seem at first reading. It means the condition for which both Hölderlin and Nietzsche "had to leave prematurely the clear of their days" (*BzP*, p. 204). The site of truth is "the there in its abyssality" (*BzP*, p. 240). Thus the conflictual *provides the place* for the abyssal.

Such places are imparted rarely. It is one thing to describe the conflict that broke tragic heroes first, Hölderlin and Nietzsche later. It is another thing entirely for an age to find itself allotted the double bind. Topology carries out the description; the event, allocation.

15. Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, p. 41 (translation modified).

Providing a place is then not primarily a human achievement. Here again, misconceptions lie in wait for the reader of Heidegger. One of these has to do with the desire for favor. To 'provide a place' (*verstaten*, e.g., *BzP*, p. 278) means, to be sure, to impart, assign, permit, grant. But to *what* does the event accord a place? If it is to unconcealment-concealment, and if the event is itself appropriation-expropriation, then our site (*Stätte*) is never accorded to us in a mode other than that of discord. To allow oneself to be charmed by the Heideggerian 'there is' and 'favor' amounts again to reading poorly. Each place is allotted with grace, but never without disgrace either.

Another misconception has to do with the desire for a solid ground. Heideggerian nostalgia would want to attach the people to its soil, as the Athenians were attached to Attica. And, indeed, does he not celebrate rural rootedness? Yet the history of being knows no privilege: no *lex priva*, no law that is private, that is, deprived of its transgressive other. The 'there is' occurs always, and always the giving is taken back as well. Always the *Es gibt* sunders one's dwelling site. Metaphysics was born from a desire wishing away allocation-dislocation as unbearable. Since the classical Greeks, denial has intervened normally, equipped with the apparatus of norms and the normal. In Aeschylus and Sophocles, undoing it took an act of parricide or fratricide. To us, it seems, even a world of technicity on the way to self-destruction does not suffice to undo tragic denial.

These two misconceptions suggest the difficulty of the topology. It is again a matter of desire, as Heidegger's 'other thinking' is being challenged to succeed where theticism could only fail. Having heard of metaphysical closure, one expects an investigation of contiguous historical spheres; and, remembering his exhortations to keep oneself ready for a 'gift,' one expects the demonstration of an entry into the good graces of fate. But Heidegger describes laws that always fracture the unconditioned. Gift, granting, grace, 'that which saves,' and so forth are thus to be thought of other than as healing. The thrusts of time bring no therapy to the truth of being, which is tragic strife.

Remaining riveted to a monstrous site (in accordance with the very hypothesis of closure), one expects at bottom a 'philosophy of the one' capable of edifying. Heidegger shows, however, that—and how—edification has proved hubristic and the floor it presupposed anything but solid. This is, as it were, the advantage of our epochal monstrosity: coming from afar, taken already by the polemical truth of being, how can we persist in the tragic denial from which were

born all normative posits, including that of global technicity? Just like any other force of repression, the force of denial that sustains theticism works destruction. Its illusory edification is built upon the ruins of singularity.

What remains to be seen now is how the earth can be thought of other than as standing reserve for technicity; how, in other words, a singularizing pull always breaks up any pull of phenomenal contextualization into a world. "Why does the earth remain silent in this destruction? Because it is being denied the strife with a world as no place is provided for the truth of being" (*BzP*, p. 277f.). (Heidegger's suggestion in these lines that the earth's destruction would become utterable only with the recognition of originary strife should guard one from co-opting him for some ecological cause.)

THE TRAGIC CONDITION OF BEING: CONTEXTUALIZATION-DECONTEXTUALIZATION

What is, when the struggle for standards is dying out?
—*BzP* 28

If technicity, today's epochal stamp, obliterates originary strife even as it hardens it to the extreme, then 'providing a place for the truth of being' does not amount to as obscure a program as it may sound. Nor does it amount to that all too familiar program, dialectics: as if, speaking of what saves, Heidegger were expecting that positioning (or enframing, *Gestell*), when pushed to its extreme, would prompt its own negation. He is not claiming that the oppositional logic of the world spirit will grant some remedial antidote to theticism. In the mechanics of determinate negation, theticism triumphs.

What is being asked of our age for the sake of 'salvation,' it seems, is to *undeny* a twofold pull in whose grips technicity places us more brutally than has any other epoch. Technicity contextualizes things and humans under the most efficacious universal ever seen, yet it also singularizes them without world or context. Such is the conflictual condition by which it functions. Knowing that condition is what saves. Technicity can instruct us in being's law,¹⁶ which is ultimate

16. "In enframing we glimpse a first, oppressing flash of the event" (Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. J. Stambaugh [slightly modified] [New York: Harper & Row, 1969], p. 38). We glimpse the *event*, namely, of appropriation-expropriation; we glimpse it in a *flash*, since technicity pushes both subsumptive universalization and dispersive singularization to

without being simple. It can teach us that to rely on univocal ultimates is to cover up contextualizing-decontextualizing. These two strategies account for being qua event. How do they function?

Isomorphic contextualizing. If the task of the philosophers has been to ensure subsumption of all possible phenomena under one universal thesis of being, then today we have all become functionaries in Husserl's sense: all experts, that is, in treating whatever is the case as one more case to be subsumed under the modern primal institution (*Urstiftung*, which for Heidegger always results from a 'thrust of time' establishing a new focal sense of being). Such is the scientific a priori by which we live. As Heidegger views it, modern science is never a disinterested inquiry. It is the tool for a highly interested posture we cannot avoid epochally in all our moves. Turning outward, we find but natural resources to be harnessed, and turning back upon our past, only cultural curiosities to be marketed. Turning inward, I no longer find, as did Augustine, the immutable light of truth, but rather neuroses awaiting treatment; and turning upward, more resources—perhaps uranium on Mars—awaiting exploitation.

As an epochal project, contextualization through technical-scientific mastery leaves no residue. When that project instituted the modern age, why indeed did substances facing the subject need to be termed 'extended,' if not to make them all equal (*iso*) in their forms (*morphé*), that is, uniform, isomorphic? According to Kant, the uniformization of phenomena is obtained through the inner sense. This means that only what can be temporalized is a datum and that only what can be ordered in calculable succession or simultaneity is temporal. As for the acts of the understanding, there are powerful reasons why the first of these acts must concern what can be measured and calculated. Since the subject knows only perceptions that are measurable in their spatial and temporal extendedness, the first Kantian category has to be that of quantity. Thus the uniform and the quantifiable must not be considered more consequences of the modern 'Copernican revolution' toward the legislating subject. Quite the reverse: only because every phenomenon has to be accessible to calculation—because its phenomenality is summed up in its calculability—does the subject have to occupy the place of central legislator. Establishing itself as the spontaneous source of the laws of being, the subject will be certain that these laws are the same everywhere.

their extremes; that flash is *oppressing*, as technical universalization institutes global violence; yet the glimpse is a *first*, hence there is salvation in global technicity.

The modern regularity of phenomena results, then, from an act of anticipation, from an a priori positing, a thesis. For Heidegger, the spontaneous subject is defined by this very theticism alone. "Positing a rule ahead" (*BzP*, p. 161) is the one posture that constitutes both the autonomous agent and the datum uniformed by him; both the self and its other. Now a rule prescribing what ought to be is called a 'norm.' The isomorphic is the *normal*. To the Baconian and Cartesian institution of the project of normalization responds its full-blown success in the twentieth century. To Heidegger's question "What is, when the struggle for standards is dying out?" a first answer is obvious: struggles, for example, ideological ones, belong to the past, as there remains only one standard, contested neither East nor West—universal isomorphism. This is what being-in-the-world has come to mean in our age. The contextualization of phenomena, that is, the way they become phenomenalized, is everywhere the same.

Dispersive decontextualization. Yet as that every mode of phenomenalization, technicity also singularizes them without any agent of reconciliation. Be they phenomena of nature or of culture, subjective or objective, encountered outside or inside, they have lost their respective worlds. Natural resources, neuroses, archaeological or literary curiosities *are* inasmuch as they answer the question: What can be made with this? And making, *poiesis*, is always of singulars.

The point is decisive. As long as one does not see the enduring strategy of *making* at the heart of the age-old mechanics of subsumption—at the heart, therefore, of 'logic'—the counterstrategy of singularization is bound to remain incomprehensible, and with it the originary double bind that Heidegger seeks to rehabilitate.

This can be shown with regard to the ancient notion of *phusis*. Just as the English 'nature,' Greek *phusis* means two things: on one hand, a certain region of phenomena and, on the other, a principle of production. It designates the region of things not made by human hands, and it is the principle by which the things belonging in that region—plants and animals—are produced. The semantic ambiguity can be illustrated by a nasty two-sentence joke that circulates in London about a member of the royal family: "Princess Anne likes nature very much. That is astonishing if you consider what nature has done to her." She likes nature, namely, that region of phenomena where she finds trees, meadows, and horses, not buildings, streets, and cars. As to what nature has done to her, she, like every other biped, is also a product of that principle of production by which trees, mead-

ows, and horses grow, a cause whose products can be more or less attractive. In Aristotelian terms, *phusis* denotes both a kind and a cause: the kind of things other than artifacts and the cause other than art (*technē*).

For Heidegger, this ambiguity shows that being has always been understood in terms of making, producing, causing. *Phusis* has all along been conceived according to its polar opposite, *technē*: first rather covertly, designating the sum of "those beings that produce themselves out of themselves," later overtly, *natura* designating beings in their totality as "the created" (BzP, p. 126). Throughout our history 'to be' has meant, in one way or another, 'to be caused.' By what? By such ultimate representations as "the Suprasensory World, the Ideas, God, the Moral Law, the Authority of Reason, Progress, the Happiness of the Greatest Number, Culture, Civilization," all standards qua causes. Heidegger adds that in the age of technicity these representations have "lost their constructive force and become nothing" (QCT, p. 65). At the moment when making remains the sole standard, all standards for making whither. The global reach so unfettered is what Heidegger calls "operational machination" (*Machenschaft*, BzP, p. 126).

To the question, "What is, when the struggle for standards is dying out?" the answer now is: there are only singulars, as each object for operational machination sets its own procedural standard. In the mid-1930s that assertion of singularity was understood by Heidegger as having brought about 'the highest danger,' precisely operational machination in America, the Soviet Union, as well as Nazi Germany, and at the same time 'that which saves,' namely, the knowledge of the originary differing of contextualization-decontextualization. "Being—the remarkable erroneous belief that being should always 'be.' . . . Being is what is most rare because most singular, and no one guesses the few instants in which it founds a site for itself and unfolds" (BzP, p. 255). Being is ultimate, yet singular and rare, as the event of contextualization-decontextualization (Heidegger says 'appropriation-expropriation,' *Ereignis-Enteignis*) is not simple. Its site is the tragic *there*. Hence this other question: "Entering into being-there, its instant and its place: how does this occur in Greek tragedy?" (BzP, p. 374).

The double bind that saves. Heidegger neither deplores nor applauds the loss of enduring standards in global technicity. He reads that loss with the eyes of a symptomologist, and it reveals to him the self-

assertion of the singular within, against, and at the basis of all normative posits. The analysis of technicity thus allowed him to translate into the ultimate condition of being what had earlier appeared as *man's* condition: the double bind of natality-mortality.

To the question, "What is, when the struggle for standards is dying out?" he gives this answer: in every normative posit the strife of singularization against universalization is the standard.

Suggestions for Further Reading

- Heidegger, Martin. *The End of Philosophy*, trans. J. Stambaugh. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.
- Pöggeler, Otto. *Martin Heidegger's Path of Thinking*, trans. D. Magurshak and S. Barber. Atlantic Heights, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1987.
- Schürmann, Reiner. *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.