



[Text of a lecture based on the Preface to *Heidegger and Marcuse: The Catastrophe and Redemption of History* (Routledge, 2005)]

Heidegger, Marcuse and the Philosophy of Technology

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Heidegger is often considered to be the most important continental philosopher of the 20th Century. He is certainly one of the most controversial. Despite his politics, Heidegger had four Jewish students who went on to brilliant careers as social philosophers, Hannah Arendt, Hans Jonas, Karl Löwith, and Herbert Marcuse. I had the good fortune to study with Marcuse and have been influenced by his thought, although I am by no means a "Marcusean." Several years ago I decided to investigate the links between Heidegger and Marcuse more closely and discovered to my surprise that they share a common interpretation of Aristotle, an interpretation that seems to originate in Heidegger's early courses which Marcuse attended. I have followed up this connection in a book entitled *Heidegger and Marcuse: The Catastrophe and Redemption of History*. This lecture will review some of the main themes of this book.

I arrived in La Jolla, California in the fall of 1965 as a graduate student in philosophy. One of my reasons for coming was what I had heard of Herbert Marcuse. He was not yet famous but he was well known and what was known about him intrigued me. I was interested in phenomenology, but a philosopher wild enough to synthesize Marx and Freud was wild enough for a young graduate student looking for an alternative to the positivism then dominating American philosophy.

At the first opportunity I asked Professor Marcuse to help me study Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*. He accepted my proposal and we spent many Tuesday afternoons debating the meaning of obscure passages in this book which, unbeknownst to me, had inspired Marcuse to leave Berlin for Freiburg 38 years before.

One afternoon as we left Marcuse's office a magnificent sunset appeared before us. Standing on the balcony of the Humanities Building dazzled by the spectacle of nature, Marcuse turned to me and said, in his deep, heavily accented voice, "Make me a phenomenological reduction of this!" I was unable to reply. I remember feeling the demand to be unfair, sarcastic.

Zen Buddhists are supposed to achieve sudden enlightenment meditating on an unsolvable problem called a koan. Phenomenology seemed to collapse in the face of Marcuse's stunning koan, but sudden enlightenment did not follow. It could not possibly have occurred to me then that the rejection of a phenomenological reduction that late afternoon confirmed yet again Marcuse's decision to abandon Heidegger's mentorship in 1933. He had found another way to understand beauty and its promise of happiness.

A few months later, my fellow graduate students and I created a magazine to publicize our anti-war views. Recall that this was early in the Vietnam War and the American public was still supportive. Dissent was the act of a small minority to which we belonged. We asked Marcuse for an article to start us off. He contributed "The Individual in the Great Society" This article described the suppression of individuality under the impact of technological advance. It ends with a convoluted passage I want to quote here as it offers a clue to my koan and the agenda of Marcuse's later work.

Under both aspects, the traditional concept of the individual, in its classic-liberal as well as Marxist form seems to be untenable — canceled (aufgehoben) by the historical development of productivity....Authentic individuality would remain the distinction of the creative artist, writer, or musician. The idea of making this creative potential general among the population at large militates against the very function and truth of the artistic creation as a form of expression ...because it [art] implies dissociation from, and negation of, common sense and common values: ingression of a qualitatively different reality in the established one. In the case of the second alternative (fundamental transformation of the society), individuality would refer to an entirely new existential dimension: to a domain of play, experiment, and imagination which is outside the reaches of any policy and program today.

This article was composed in 1965. It accurately foresaw the shipwreck of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society on the rock of Vietnam. What it did not, could not foresee was the rise of the New Left and the counter-culture. At that time demonstrations against the war in Vietnam on most campuses, including ours, attracted students by the dozens, not the thousands who would soon be mobilized by the anti-war movement.

Marcuse believed that the elimination of true individuality in "one-dimensional society" explained the absence of opposition. Individuality requires mental independence and a standard, a vision of a better world. The arts have always represented such an alternative. (Our magazine was called *Alternatives*.) In modern times a limited form of individuality became widely available. The Enlightenment opened a public sphere within which political ideals sustained a critical stance. Now the space of public debate was closing down. Once again individuality was to be found primarily in the aesthetic realm. For it to emerge from behind its old artistic borders, Marcuse claimed, it would have to take a far more radical form than in the past. The new individuals would realize the negative, critical content of art in the real world, overthrowing its common sense and

devaluing its values.

Aesthetics as the form of a new consciousness and sensibility! The generalization of the oppositional force of beauty as social critique! What strange notions! I had no idea that in 1918 Marcuse participated in the German Revolution as a member of the Berlin Soldiers' Council and shortly afterwards wrote a thesis on novels featuring artists in conflict with society. For him the unity of political and aesthetic opposition was no mere fantasy. But I also recall this personal detail from my student days: on the wall of his dining room in California he had a large print of Breughel's Fall of Icarus which he kept as a permanent warning against romantic idealism.

The full implications of Marcuse's ideas on individuality unfolded finally with the rise of the New Left. In France the May Events of 1968 demanded "All Power to the Imagination," a slogan that refuted his gloomy prognostication in the passage quoted above. He was only too happy to be refuted. We witnessed the beginnings of the movement together in Paris. Returning to his hotel in the Latin Quarter he was accosted by a group of students who had just occupied the Ecole des Beaux Arts. They recognized him from his picture in the newspapers where he was celebrated as the "Guru of the Students in Revolt."

We entered the Ecole and Marcuse addressed the hundred or more young artists gathered in the main assembly hall. It is easy to imagine the excitement of the author of a thesis on aesthetic resistance at the podium of this monument to "affirmative culture." He was warmly received. French students celebrated the grandfathers of the revolution in preference to their fathers who they blamed for social ills. Marcuse made a short speech in French, greeting the students in the name of the American student movement and congratulating them on challenging "consumer society." They seemed impressed by this echo from the depths of history although the Maoists in the audience were visibly puzzled by the reference to consumption.

When *An Essay on Liberation* appeared a year later it was dedicated to the French "militants," the students and young workers in revolt. "The radical utopian character of their demands," Marcuse wrote in the preface, "far surpasses the hypotheses of my essay". That book explored in some detail the generalization of aesthetic resistance that the earlier article had dismissed. The boundaries of art had burst and aesthetics had become a new kind of politics with the transformation of the technical base of society as its goal. The young resisted not merely because they disagreed with government policy but because their sensibility rebelled at the waste and violence of the society around them.

An Essay on Liberation and the several books that followed attempted to explain the new forms of opposition emerging in one-dimensional society. Although this was a topic that fascinated me during this same period, I was never fully convinced by Marcuse's approach. The emphasis on aesthetics did not quite correspond with my experience of the movement. I would have said its core impulse was revulsion at the conformist pressures of the culture of the 1950s in which we had all grown up rather than an aesthetic vision of the future. In any case, what I took from Marcuse was his critique of technology which I have developed further in my own books over the last 15 years. My doubts about the aesthetic interpretation of the New Left were widely shared. Marcuse's last writings had diminishing impact and eventually contributed to the decline of his reputation.

Now, looking back on Marcuse's work, I am still not convinced. But I see his

thought in a very different light today. When Marcuse left Heidegger he rescinded the phenomenological reduction for all situations and occasions, sunsets included. But rereading him, I find the traces of Heidegger's thought everywhere in his writings and in the most surprising places. And I miss reference to Heidegger there too, in the most problematic of Marcuse's speculations where phenomenology might have been helpful.

Those speculations are a development of ideas already present in his earliest publications under Heidegger's tutelage. These early works constitute a unique philosophical position that has been called "*Heidegger-Marxismus*." Marcuse arrived at this position by a twofold path: on the one hand he concretized the concept of authenticity in *Being and Time*, on the other hand he developed a new interpretation of the Hegelian and Marxian dialectics of "real possibility" or "potentiality." Marcuse did not quite follow these paths to the point of intersection but we can project a likely unification of his thought at which he would no doubt have arrived had he remained under Heidegger's influence for a few more years.

Heidegger's concept of authenticity continues a philosophical tradition that begins with Rousseau and Kant. In their thought the essence of the human being is freedom. This marks a break with substantive notions of human nature such as Aristotle's that define the human in terms of definite qualities and virtues. Human nature, insofar as there is such a thing for a philosophy of freedom, consists of formal properties of the subject rather than a repertoire of attributes. But the logic of freedom in Rousseau and Kant is bound to a notion of rationality that ends up determining the telos of human development much as had earlier substantive theories of human nature.

For existentialists – and despite his denial Heidegger is a kind of existentialist – freedom is illusory unless it escapes every rationalistic conception of its end. This Heidegger accomplishes by defining human "Dasein" as a self-questioning and self-making being "thrown" into a world without rhyme or reason and destined to discover its own meanings there. But inauthentic existence, average everyday existence, consists in conformism and refusal of self-responsibility. The insight into freedom represented by Heidegger's philosophy is too hard a lesson to be commonly lived. To be fully human – authentic – is to acknowledge the groundlessness of human existence and nevertheless to act resolutely. By resoluteness Heidegger does not mean arbitrary decisions but rather "precisely the disclosive projection and determination of what is factually possible at the time," that is, the response called for by the historical situation. In resoluteness the human being intervenes activity in shaping its world and defining itself, as opposed to inauthentic conformism. Unfortunately, Heidegger's philosophy offers no means for determining criteria of what is "factually possible" and so leaves the question of action in the air.

There is, however, a hint which Heidegger himself does not follow up. The first chapters of *Being and Time* connect making and self-making in the concept of being-in-the-world. As I will explain later, Dasein's answer to the question of its being is bound up with the technical practices through which it gives meaning to and acts in its world. This connection suggests a way of giving content to the idea of authenticity. Perhaps a specific type of technical activity could figure in it. But, strangely, production drops out when Heidegger explains authenticity in the second division of his master work. There he focuses on the heroic retrieval of the past instead. This ambiguity disappears as Heidegger develops his later critique of technology. Technical practice ends up unmaking

worlds and the reference to self-making, and with it the whole problematic of authenticity, simply disappears from Heidegger's discourse.

Marcuse took over the theory of authenticity in his early writings, but he rejected Heidegger's abstract formulations. What is this "situation" in which the human being is "thrown," and what are these "possibilities" so vaguely invoked by Heidegger in *Being and Time*? The emptiness of such categories invites revision. Heidegger himself filled in the blanks with Nazi ideology for a time. While several recent studies argue that this was an inescapable consequence of his early thought, I do not believe it could have been quite so evident as it now appears in retrospect to these commentators. The leap from Heidegger's abstract formulations to the lower depths of nationalism and racism represented by Hitler came as a shock to his Jewish students who, after all, were right there on the scene and certain to spot the obvious. In any case, Marcuse turned in the opposite direction from his teacher toward Marxism. The self is thrown into a capitalist society where the alienation of production is the source of the inauthenticity that must be overcome. Now authenticity becomes the "radical act" of revolutionary refusal of the existing society.

Marcuse first introduces the Marxist idea of revolution in a two-sided formulation that encompasses the transformation of both individual and society. As he describes it, the central concern of "the Marxist fundamental situation...is with the historical possibility of the radical act — of an act that should liberate a new and necessary reality as it brings about the actualization of the whole person". Marcuse soon turns to the Hegelian idea of labor as an objectification of the human spirit to join Heidegger's phenomenological analysis of production with his abstract conception of human self-making. Labor is an engagement with possibilities actualized through struggle with nature, possibilities which belong to the human being as well as the object. The "possibility" required by the "situation" is thus neither the determined outcome of objective processes as orthodox Marxists supposed, nor an ineffable intuition with dubious results as in Heidegger himself, but a free appropriation of the human essence in a socially concrete form through the liberation of labor.

In Marcuse's view, all this is implicit in Heidegger's own analysis of Dasein, but Heidegger fails to achieve the level of concreteness implied by the notion of being-in-the-world. The world cannot be understood without reference to the divisions within the community through which each Dasein is situated socially. In one early essay Marcuse asks, "is the world 'the same' even for all forms of Dasein present within a concrete historical situation? Obviously not. It is not only that the world of significance varies among particular contemporary cultural regions and groups, but also that, within any one of these, abysses of meaning may open up between different worlds. Precisely in the most existentially essential behavior, no understanding exists between the world of the high-capitalist bourgeois and that of the small farmer or proletarian. Here the examination is forced to confront the question of the material constitution of historicity, a breakthrough that Heidegger neither achieves nor even gestures toward".

Marcuse believes he can achieve this breakthrough with a Hegelian-Marxist interpretation of the dialectic of life. Life resembles Heidegger's Dasein in seeking its unity and wholeness through a future oriented construction of its own potentialities. It does not have a prior essence but must create itself under the given conditions. In this sense it is "historical," a being that relates its past and future. Yet Marcuse's concept of

life differs from Heidegger's Dasein. The expression of its "care" in work and world leads to objectification and mutual recognition, themes entirely absent from Heidegger's existential analytic. Marcuse conceives the notion of the human "essence" in Hegelian-Marxist terms, as self-conscious unity of self, community and world, and on this basis he argues that it can only be realized through overcoming the alienation of the worker under capitalism.

Marcuse never articulated the relation between his theories of authenticity and possibility quite as clearly as this. The radical act and the dialectical interpretation of history are the two sides of an arch awaiting the keystone to join them. I argue in my book that that keystone is the later critique of technology through which Marcuse returned to these themes in disguised forms. In the process, he again encountered Heidegger's thought which in the interim had become a critical philosophy of technology.

Like Heidegger the later Marcuse saw technology as more than technical, as more even than political; it is the form of modern experience itself, the principal way in which the world is revealed. For both philosophers "technology" thus extends its reach far beyond actual devices. It signifies a way of thinking and a style of practice, indeed, a quasi-transcendental structuring of reality as an object of technical control. Release from this form of experience can only come through another form of experience, an aesthetic form. In Heideggerian terms, as Hubert Dreyfus explains them, Marcuse calls for a new disclosure of being through a transformation of basic practices. Marcuse's critique of technology does not just introduce humanistic criteria of technological reform into radical political judgments, but describes the a priori form of a new type of experience belonging to a new social order.

While the later Heidegger no longer calls for resoluteness in the face of the inauthentic world of technology, Marcuse remains committed to something like "authentic individuality". In his last works an authentic human existence is to be achieved at the level of society as a whole through the transformation of technology into an instrument for realizing the highest possibilities of human beings and things. Marcuse argues now that this cannot be achieved on the basis of the existing capitalist technology regardless of the prevailing property and political relations. The very general notions of labor and possibility with which he worked in his early writings covered over the awful gap between making and self-making in a world organized around modern technology. A further concretization is necessary to distinguish the type of technology that can join them. But *Heidegger-Marxismus* long since abandoned, Marcuse lacked the theoretical means to articulate his new position coherently and persuasively. His last works are inspiring gestures at a theory at which he no more than hints. How then are we to understand the concept of a new technology in which these works culminate?

A possible solution to the enigma of Marcuse's later thought came to me three years ago when reading Heidegger's 1931 lectures on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. These lectures, which Marcuse attended as Heidegger's assistant, present a strange reading of Aristotle which is decisive for the later technology critiques of both Heidegger and Marcuse. The 1931 lectures were anticipated by an earlier lecture in 1923 in which its themes were more crudely expressed. Aristotle's greatest achievement according to this lecture is his analysis of kinesis, movement, but movement in a sense no earlier interpreter of Aristotle had ever conceived. It is the movement of "factual life," later called "Dasein," that

Aristotle is supposed to have grasped for the first time. This movement consists in practical engagements with the world and these are interpreted in Aristotle's theory of *techne*. Thus in Heidegger's account, Aristotle's conception of being in general is derived from the Greek practice of technical making.

Techne is the model of "revealing" for the Greeks, that is, the form of Greek experience of the world. The fundamental *kinesis* is the realization of the true essence of things in earthly existence. While we tend to interpret these categories through their scholastic degeneration products as objective facts, Heidegger shows them to be rooted in Aristotle's analysis of the technical practice of the craftsman, who enables the potential of the artifact to enter the world through appropriate actions. Heidegger here approves the Greeks' focus on production but he claims they, and especially their successors, grasped it inauthentically as an object in the world and not as the original disclosure of a world. In its role as an ontological model, *techne* must not be treated objectively, but phenomenologically described from within on its own terms.

The study of *kinesis* in this sense leads directly to an ontology of practice. In this interpretation Aristotle appears to anticipate Heidegger's own theory in *Being and Time* according to which everyday instrumental activity offers the basic access to reality. Exaggerating only slightly, one could say that Aristotle is presented here as a phenomenological philosopher of technology who anticipated Heidegger's own thought.

Theodor Kisiel sums up Heidegger's view at this early stage in the development of his thought: "The field of objects which yields the original sense of being is that of the produced object accessible in the course of usage. Accordingly, it is not the field of things in their theoretical reification but rather the world encountered in going about our producing, making, and using which is the basis, the according-to-which and toward-which of the original experience of being...Being means being produced, and as produced, begin accessible for use and disposable, meaningful in regard to one particular way of getting around".

However, as he develops his later critique of technology, Heidegger begins to argue that the Greek production model is the remote source of modern technological thinking and therefore fundamentally misguided. In some of his later works the Greek concept of production is redefined by Heidegger as a purely ideal process of manifesting entities. Production is cut loose from its common sense roots in the making of artifacts and becomes a synonym for revealing. Interpreters often project this later negative attitude toward production back on the early work, with confusing results since Heidegger never entirely breaks with his own phenomenological account of it. "The Question Concerning Technology" contains an analysis of the making of a Greek chalice based on Heidegger's early Aristotle interpretation. Greek *techne* appears here implicitly as a model of an emancipatory technology, contrasted favorably with modern technology insofar as it is respectful of human beings and nature. *Techne* realizes the inherent potentialities of things rather than violating them as does modern technology.

Modern technology does not realize objective essences inscribed in the nature of the universe as does *techne*. It appears as purely instrumental, as value free. It does not respond to inherent purposes, but is merely a means serving subjective goals. For modern common sense, means and ends are independent of each other. Technology is "neutral" in the sense that it has no preference as between the various possible uses to which it can be put. This is the instrumentalist philosophy of technology that is a spontaneous product of

our civilization, assumed unreflectively by most people.

Technology in this scheme of things encounters nature as raw materials, not as a world that emerges out of itself, a *physis*, but rather as stuff awaiting transformation into whatever we desire. This world is understood mechanistically not teleologically. It is there to be used without any inner purpose. The West has made enormous technical advances on the basis of this understanding of reality. Nothing restrains us in our exploitation of the world. Everything is exposed to an analytic intelligence that decomposes it into usable parts. In the 19th century it became commonplace to view modernity as an unending progress.

But for what ends? The goals of our society can no longer be specified in a knowledge of some sort, a *techne*, as they were for the Greeks. They remain purely subjective, arbitrary choices, and no essences guide us. Reason now concerns only means, not ends. This has led to a crisis of civilization from which there seems no escape: we know how to get there but we do not know why we are going or even where. The Greeks appear to have lived in harmony with the world whereas we are alienated from it by our very freedom to define our purposes as we wish. So long as no great harm could be attributed to technology, this situation did not lead to serious doubts beyond the usual literary protests against modernization. But the 20th century, with its effective propaganda machines, world wars, atom bombs, concentration camps and environmental catastrophes, has made it more and more difficult to ignore the strange aimlessness of modernity. Because we are at such a loss to know where we are going and why, philosophy of technology has emerged in our time as a critique of modernity. The focus on technology gives rise to several different kinds of critique. Situating Heidegger and Marcuse in this field correctly proves important for interpreting their thought.

The most important forerunner of modernity critique is Max Weber. Weber distinguishes between "substantive" and "formal" rationality in a way that corresponds roughly to the distinction between *techne* and technology. Substantive rationality, like *techne*, begins by positing a good and then selects means to achieve it. Many public institutions are substantively rational in Weber's sense: universal education is a good which determines appropriate means such as classrooms and teachers. Formal rationality is concerned uniquely with the efficiency of means and contains no intrinsic reference to a good. Modernization consists in the triumph of formal rationality over a more or less substantively rational order inherited from the past. The market is the primary instrument of this transformation, substituting the cash nexus for the planned pursuit of values. Bureaucracy and management are other domains in which formal rationality eventually prevails.

Heidegger's diagnosis of our time resembles Weber's superficially but it is basically different. Weber assumed the ultimate subjectivity of goals, as we all tend to in a modern society where there is no universal rational consensus on meaning and value. For Weber as for us, modern society is right to rely only on facts. The Greek faith in an objective *logos* has long since been refuted by modern science. Heidegger too believed that the triumph of value neutral technical means over objectivistically goal-oriented thinking is the necessary consequence of our modern condition. But he saw this condition as itself historically relative. Our inability to take meaning and value seriously, our prejudice in favor of factual knowledge, is precisely the mark of that relativity. It is this which makes us overlook the ontologically fundamental character of being-in-the-world. As a result,

we see Greek *techne* as prescientific. But can we find a way of understanding it that is not internal to modernity? This is the task Heidegger sets himself and he believes it can be accomplished with a phenomenology of everyday human existence.

Heidegger's account of *techne* is thus quite different from the Weberian approach sketched above. He starts out from the assumption that the world is initially revealed through *techne* and does not pre-exist it in the form of a collection of present-at-hand things taken up by human technical activity in a contingent manner, for example, on this or that occasion to fulfill this or that passing need. Every aspect of being he uncovers in the study of *techne* is thus originally posited by *techne*. This even includes the raw materials of technical work. These materials are understood from out of their place in production rather than as pre-existing objects.

Heidegger attributes to the material a quality he calls "bearance." Bearance is not merely the absence of resistance, but signifies the essential availability of the material for form. The clay is not simply there to be formed into a jug; insofar as it is part of the process of production, it demands the achievement of form. "With the transformation of the clay into the bowl, the lump also loses its form, but fundamentally it loses its formlessness; it gives up a lack, and hence the tolerating here is at once a positive contribution to the development of something higher".

There is something like a phenomenological reduction at work here. The "natural attitude," in which things are given objectively is suspended to allow them to appear as they are originally revealed to human activity. *Techne* itself is considered ontologically, as a relation of *Dasein* to world, rather than as a causal interaction with things. Although this reverses our usual perspective, it is not arbitrary. After all, every human society known to us, with the exception of our own, has notions equivalent to the Greek idea of *techne*, notions that describe the meaning or essence of things in objective terms on the basis of the practices underlying the society's relation to its world. Of course each society assigns these meanings without a scientific basis in our modern sense. But they all do assign meanings; that is the important fact that we overlook in our enthusiasm for the objective scientific view. Something is going on in the traditional relationship of society and world we conceive as arbitrary and subjective but which Heidegger takes for the founding act in which worlds are revealed. There must then be some equivalent founding of our modern world too, and indeed Heidegger identifies this equivalent with modern technology. But we moderns are uniquely ignorant of the very idea of "world" as it appears to all other peoples and is theorized by the Greeks. We can learn from them to grasp the process of revealing that is at the basis of our existence too.

Considered as a phenomenology in this sense, Aristotle's *techne* analysis displays an original unity underlying the dichotomies of objectivistic thinking. Heidegger's theory of revealing appears to justify a return to a concept of essence, but it specifies no content to that concept. Much as we might like to revive the ancient concept of essence, it rests on an outdated ontology with socially conformist implications. For example, Heidegger's famous example of the chalice has a predetermined form laid down in the culture and accepted uncritically as essential by the craftsman and the community. Greek philosophy betrayed an unconscious fidelity to historically surpassable limitations of its society in treating conventions as essences. Modern philosophy cannot proceed in this naive fashion.

Marcuse continues the early Heidegger's production centered concept of being.

Although Heidegger himself never proposed a revival of *techne*, his description of its structure anticipates Marcuse's own theory in which an emancipatory technique that respects the essence of its objects is projected into the future rather than found in the past. Heidegger's early Aristotle interpretation thus influences him profoundly although its presence in his thought is soon masked by references to Hegel and Marx. Marcuse's early book on Hegel is a study of this very same problematic of *techne* as movement central to Heidegger's own early philosophy and is based on an interpretation of Hegel's debt to Aristotle. And Marcuse's Marxism remains linked to the idea of *techne* through the emphasis on the disalienation of labor he discovered in the Paris Manuscripts of 1844 while still a student of Heidegger.

Marcuse accepts the usual modern view that essences can neither be based on tradition and community standards nor speculatively derived in an a priori metaphysics of some sort. But what he calls "one-dimensional thinking" plays out that modern skepticism by rejecting the idea of essence altogether and remaining at the empirical level. It thereby avoids tradition-bound conformism and outdated metaphysics but only by treating the logic of technology as an ontological principle. Today we can design our technological "chalices" any way we wish and this seems a liberation. But liberation has a price: one-dimensional thinking cannot recognize inherent potentialities and so can offer no guidance to social reform. To what can we appeal for criteria? What, for example, are the grounds for preferring respect for nature to its ruthless exploitation, freedom to domination?

The core of the problem is once again the concept of essence. Like Heidegger, Marcuse dismisses any return to Greek metaphysics. But unlike Heidegger, he refuses to reduce all essential thinking to the contemplation of the process of revealing. Instead, he seeks to reconstruct the concept of essence historically. Ancient philosophy joined *logos* to *eros*, theoretical abstraction to striving toward the good. But it lacked historical self-consciousness. The temporal dynamic it found in things was specific to an individual or species. Each type of thing had its own essence, and, although these essences were objects of striving, they themselves did not exist in time. Hence ancient philosophy arrived at a static conception of eternal ideas. The fixed nature of its essences corresponds to its own lack of historical self-consciousness, its inability to conceive of becoming as the fundamental ontological determination.

Today such an unhistorical conception of essence is unacceptable. We have learned that human beings make themselves and their world in the course of history. Not just individual things are caught up in time, but essences as well. If we are to revive the language of essence today, its conceptualization must therefore be historical. Marcusean historicism is rooted in the materialism of the Marxist tradition. Dialectics, as a logic of the interconnections and contexts revealed in historical strife, offers an alternative to ancient dogmatism and modern positivism. Hegel's dialectic is in fact an attempt to achieve the very reconstruction of essence Marcuse requires. Hegel's *Logic* dissolves the traditional distinction between essence and appearance. Things do not have fixed essences separate from their manifestations because things are not themselves stable and fixed. Rather, they belong to a field of interactions which establishes their inner coherence and their boundaries. These interactions are a source of tensions that drive things forward toward their developmental potentialities. For Hegel, potentialities are inscribed in things but do not constitute them as independent Aristotelian substances.

Instead, the constellation of their present connections gives a direction to their development.

Once Marcuse joins the Frankfurt School, this original Heideggerian Hegelianism is overlaid with a messianic concept of the future derived from Walter Benjamin. Now the future is not simply a human creation but a redemptive possibility interrupting the continuity of history. The essential potentialities, while remaining rationally grounded in social analysis and critique, delineate this redemption, revealing the world in its truth. As Adorno writes, "The only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption....Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world, reveal it to be, with its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will appear one day in the messianic light....Consummate negativity, once squarely faced, delineates the mirror image of its opposite".

All this determines the shape of Marcuse's later critique of technology. He is neither hostile nor indifferent to technology but calls for its radical reconstruction. Marcuse remarks that in a liberated society "certain lost qualities of artisan work may well reappear on the new technological base". And he refers to "The Greek notion of the affinity between art and technics" to illustrate his thesis that technology can be redeemed by the imagination. Although Marcuse does not use the term, the idea of *techne*, now reappears as the basis for a new type of world relation, grounded in a life affirming "sensitivity," or existential project. This project would instill technology with the mission of realizing the potentialities of human beings and things. Reason itself would be transformed, recovering the progressive promise of the Enlightenment against the present catastrophe. Thus redeemed, reason would transcend the opposition of technique and values, just as does *techne*.

Like Adorno, Marcuse turns to aesthetics for some trace of negativity in the face of the success of capitalism at integrating its opposition. This turn belongs to a long tradition, particularly strong in Germany, of aesthetic opposition to the status quo. In *Eros and Civilization* he identifies beauty with that which is "life-enhancing." "For the aesthetic needs have their own social content: they are the claims of the human organism, mind and body, for a dimension of fulfillment" denied by the established society. The "ugliness" of modern societies is not merely unsatisfying to the senses of sight and hearing but offends against the "life instincts," i.e. against a wide range of needs that cannot be channeled into profit-making and war.

An Essay on Liberation develops this position in a surprising way. Marcuse's argument there is rooted not in the study of anti-capitalist struggle but in the history of the artistic avant gardes. His aesthetic theory attempts to recapitulate the turning point in the development of modernism when radical experiments in overcoming the split between art and life proliferated in the first years of the century. On Marcuse's view, technological civilization can only be released from the bind it is caught in by a return to the promise of those early avant gardes. This aesthetic transformation is now possible, Marcuse argues, because the very wealth of modern societies has rendered their repressive organization obsolete.

Marcuse's argues that once increasing wealth releases society from the struggle for existence, perception can transcend the given toward unrealized potentialities foreshadowed in art. Art has anticipated the realization of these potentialities in

imagination for thousands of years. They “cannot possibly be given in the immediate experience which prevails in repressive societies. They are given rather as the horizon under which the immediately given forms of things appear as ‘negative,’ as denial of their inherent potentialities, their truth”. In such societies, the aesthetic imagination produces images that serve as the normative context of what is revealed in sensation. Now, in an advanced society, the sheer technical possibility of the realization of these norms destabilizes the structures of class rule and the underlying forms of experience and individuality on which it is based. At this higher stage of economic and technical development, the aesthetic ceases to be a “horizon” of appearance and begins to structure perception itself. In the emerging “aesthetic *Lebenswelt*” the senses take on the utopian function of art. With this “new mode of experience” “the imagination [turns] into a meta-political power”.

The earlier Hegelian-Marxist argument that establishes the “second dimension” of essence theoretically now becomes practical, existential. Sensation itself has a normative aspect inseparable from its truth value. Marcuse writes that the violation of nature “offends against certain objective qualities of nature — qualities which are essential to the enhancement and fulfillment of life. And it is on such objective grounds that the liberation for man to his own humane faculties is linked to the liberation of nature — that ‘truth’ is attributable to nature not only in a mathematical but also in an existential sense. The emancipation of man involves the recognition of such truth in things, in nature”.

The use of the term existential here, like Marcuse’s references to an “aesthetic *Lebenswelt*,” invites a phenomenological interpretation he does not elaborate. Instead, he leaves us in suspense, wondering precisely what he means. Clearly, the existential truth is not rationally validated in scientific research (“mathematically”). What makes it an *existential* truth must be its experiential character. Marcuse seems to intend a truth that is revealed in experience rather than one that is proven by experience. But in what modern philosophical framework other than phenomenology does this make sense? By failing to draw on that framework Marcuse appears to advocate a naïve reenchantment of nature rather than the existential ontology he actually intended but did not develop.

How would all these changes rung on Heideggerian themes have appeared to Heidegger himself? He never commented on Marcuse’s later work but we do have one hint of his view of *Heidegger-Marxismus*. In 1969, Heidegger met with a group of friends in Le Thor, Provence. The record of their discussions has been published in a volume entitled *Four Seminars*. Here we find the only reference to Marcuse in Heidegger’s published writings. He notes that production is defining for the “world” in Marx, and further, that production is a type of praxis. “Reversing Hegel’s idealism in his own way, Marx requires that being be given precedence over consciousness. Since there is no consciousness in *Being and Time*, one could believe that there is something Heideggerian to be read here [in Marx]! At least Marcuse had understood *Being and Time* in this way”.

What is implied in this derisive remark about Marcuse? Marx claimed that the fundamental relation to being is not consciousness but praxis. *Being and Time* similarly describes the human relation to the world as fundamentally practical. In his student days, Marcuse noted the parallel and read *Being and Time* as the key to Marx. But Heidegger himself goes on to dismiss productionist metaphysics. Being, he argues in his later work, cannot be understood through the model of technical making. This is the stance consistently maintained by the later Heidegger which he projected back onto his early

work.

The Aristotle course gives the lie to this self-representation. Heidegger was not a consistent critic of productionism. In fact much of *Being and Time* was inspired by Aristotle's account of *techne*. He told his class in 1931: "We have to clarify for ourselves what it signifies that man has a relation to the works that he produces. It is for this reason that a certain book called *Sein und Zeit* discusses dealings with equipment; and not in order to correct Marx, nor to organize a new political economy, nor out of a primitive understanding of the world". Thus Marcuse was not mistaken in interpreting *Being and Time* as a productionist text, and hence also in finding Heidegger relevant to Marx. Marcuse remained true at some level to an earlier Heidegger the later Heidegger rejected and concealed.

Marcuse's aesthetic radicalism in his own later work is intricately intertwined with these repressed themes in Heidegger. In my view, there remains much in Marcuse that is theoretically incomplete precisely because he refused either to drop these phenomenological themes or to develop them phenomenologically. Marcuse's aesthetics of technology introduces a fatal ambiguity in his thought. At first it seems that he follows the usual Marxist formulations in which potentialities are objective properties of society. But in the late Marcuse potentialities are revealed aesthetically, that is, to an attuned subject. Such a subject, technically engaged with the potentialities of its objects, is analyzed for the first time not in Marx but in Heidegger's phenomenological interpretation of Aristotle. Only a phenomenological account of values in action can make sense of the notion that aesthetics provides the normative basis for the reconstruction of technological rationality. And when Marcuse imagines aesthetics incorporated into everyday sensation as a critical force, he implies a phenomenological conception of experience. It is not unreasonable to suppose that such a conception of experience could be reconciled with the sort of objective considerations brought forward in Marcuse's social theory. But he does not pursue this line and falls between the two alternative interpretations of potentiality, an existential-aesthetic interpretation and a Marxist notion based on an evaluation of social forces.

Why did Marcuse fail to explain the links between his early work under Heidegger's influence and his later work? He could not go back to his existential roots after the "Fall of the Titans of German philosophy". Heidegger's betrayal stood as an absolute barrier between Marcuse as a Marxist and the other great trend of 20th century European thought, phenomenology and existentialism. The split between these trends now appears less significant than it did before they were both overshadowed by postmodernism and poststructuralism. Perhaps they were not opposites but frères ennemis with too much in common not to be in rivalry. Sartre's later work represents the one great failed attempt to synthesize the contending trends in the framework of a philosophy of consciousness. I believe that philosophy of technology could have offered another possible synthesis that was never developed to its logical conclusion. To demonstrate this, I attempt in my new book to break through the barrier between these trends and make explicit a remarkable theory of *techne* initiated by Heidegger, continued by Marcuse, and suppressed in the end by both.