

Rationalizing Annihilation: “Machination” and “Technology” in the Black Notebooks (II-XI)

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The recent publication of Martin Heidegger’s *Black Notebooks*¹ [*Schwarze Hefte*] has enlivened scholarly and philosophic debate around numerous aspects of his thought, most notably questions regarding the extent of his anti-Semitism and the nature of his commitments to National Socialism, questions not unimportant to the legacy of the man who is often considered to be the best philosopher of the 20th century. In these available notebooks, written from 1931-1941, but which Heidegger is believed to have kept until the mid 1970s, one can see that Heidegger’s commitment to Nazism, and its inherent anti-Semitism, runs far deeper than some have tried to claim (Lilla 2003). In fact, one can now recognize that Heidegger viewed himself to be the Nazi par excellence.

In these early notebooks, Heidegger articulates specific political goals in tandem with his philosophic project, goals inherently linked to National Socialism. For instance, in the second notebook, Heidegger attempts to formulate what he calls a “*logic*” of National Socialism or a logic of the Nazi way of being, which he hoped would be taken up by the burgeoning political movement (BN II.71,83). However, as he became disaffected with political Nazism in the mid 30s during his Rectorship at the University of Freiburg, Heidegger moves towards devising a form of what he calls “spiritual Nazism” (BN III.72) or “metapolitics” (BN III.29) in contrast to on the ground political Nazism. Finally, disillusioned with both attempts, Heidegger moves towards “meditation” [*Besinnung*] on “beyng” and “facticity” in preparation for what he sees to be as “the second beginning

¹ In this paper, I cite Richard Rojcewicz’s recent English translations of the first ten existing Black Notebooks (II-XI), including the spellings of “being” or “beyng,” along with the dashes used. Hereafter, I cite these works as BN followed by book number and paragraph citations.

of philosophy,” an endeavor he claims to have been working up to and one that transcends mere politics of the nation-state (BN IV.280).

While these select notebooks not only provide us with direct evidence of much stronger links between Heidegger’s philosophy and its political import, they also provide readers with a new perspective on the development of Heidegger’s thought, thought which covered a wide range of subjects such as art, modern science, and technology. This latter category has made Heidegger’s writings of interest to many diverse readers as of late, especially as we denizens of modernity find countless aspects of our lives entangled with technologies that are advancing, in large part, beyond our control. However, as I will attempt to demonstrate in this paper, there is a specific historical and apocalyptic understanding of the essence of technology, modern science, and modernity itself that underlies Heidegger’s thought, an understanding that is problematic, in both moral and political terms, to say the least. Therefore, in reading Heidegger on technology, and specifically in his famous 1954 essay “The Question Concerning Technology,” which offers many penetrating insights on technology and its relation to modernity, I argue that we must be cognizant of the concepts and assumptions that underlie Heidegger’s thought, especially as they relate to a method of justifying the great horrors of the 20th century, and perhaps additional horrors yet to come in the 21st. Without so doing, it seems that we may be unable to adequately understand Heidegger’s thinking on technology and the future consequences it facilitates, or that we may be susceptible to fall prey to naively accepting many troublesome assumptions that help justify annihilation in ecological, cultural, as well as human terms. In this way, the recently published *Black Notebooks* can assist us in perceiving the depth and development of Heidegger’s reflections on modern technology, showing us what he truly believes to be at stake today while compelling us to grapple with his vision on its own terms.

This paper is organized in three main parts and will focus centrally on the *Black Notebooks* or “Ponderings” [*Überlegungen*] from 1931 to 1939 while also considering additional writings during this

period such as “κοινόν. *Out of the History of Beyng*” and “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” as well as the later essay “The Question Concerning Technology.”² First, I intend to sketch out the narrative Heidegger provides in this period regarding the history of philosophy and how it leads to the manifestation “machination” [*Machenschaft*], or what he will later call “enframing” [*Gestell*], in modernity, concepts which one might say symbolize “the technological essence of modernity” (Malpas 2016, 14). Second, I attempt to show how underneath this description and analysis of modern technology and “machination” is an apocalypticism that can serve as a justification for a radical annihilation of the earth and contemporary humanity. Lastly, I will argue that this apocalyptic understanding of “machination,” “enframing,” and technology in modernity must be taken into account when engaging all of Heidegger’s writings on technology, particularly his famous 1954 essay, for one to apprehend the full implications of his thought.

Heidegger’s Historical Narrative

The story Heidegger initially tells regarding the history of philosophy is a simple one; yet, it is one that carries lasting consequences. As he suggests at the outset of *Being and Time*³ (1927), this history revolves around our forgetfulness of the question of Being, a fundamental question and “*a theme for actual investigation*” that was taken up by Plato and Aristotle at the starting point of Western philosophy but inadequately interrogated ever since (BT 2). Typically, he claims, “Being is, and has been, held to be either the most universal concept, simply undefinable, or purely self-evident” (2). However, to revive this fundamental question, Heidegger embarks on the project laid out in *Being and Time* as a philosophic endeavor to recover the question of Being by using the analytic of Dasein,

² For the “κοινόν,” I will use the translation of both the essay and the draft in *The History of Beyng* (hereafter cited HOB). For “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” I will use the translation published in *Pathmarks* (hereafter PDT). Lastly, I cite the translation of “The Question Concerning Technology” by William Lovitt in Heidegger’s *Basic Writings* (hereafter QCT). All citations will be followed by the page numbers of these editions.

³ Here, I use the Macquarrie and Robinson translation of *Being and Time* (hereafter BT).

a being that questions its Being and is oriented towards its death through the recognition of its temporality (27). At the core, philosophy's fundamental oversight since Plato and Aristotle, Heidegger claims, has been the consideration of beings as objects, stating in his essay "On the Essence of Truth," that "What is thus opened up, solely in this strict sense, was experienced early in Western thinking as "what is present" and for a long time has been named "being."⁴ In this way, beings are viewed to be always "present at hand" and defined in large part by this presence and their appearance. Yet, this characterization, Heidegger suggests, has not only been transferred to humans as well but that it is an inherently flawed way to determine what something actually is, especially human beings who are finite, and thus not continually present at hand, but, rather, fundamentally mortal. Therefore, the history of what he calls "metaphysics" and "ontology" is viewed to be both insufficient and self-deluding; what must be done then is philosophic work that can tear these conflation apart, the focus of the first division of *Being and Time*.

Nonetheless, Heidegger declares shortly after the publication of his first major work that this attempt to both recover the question of Being, and thus overcome the contemporary influence of its primordial answers, in *Being and Time* was itself inadequate. As he states in his second notebook, "it was a mistaken view that *Being and Time* could overcome 'ontology' directly" (BN II.14). Therefore, in order to pose and pursue the question of Being once more, Heidegger determines that he should not interrogate beings first in order to get to what Being means, as he attempted to do in *Being and Time*, but that he should instead interrogate Being in order to understand beings, what is often cited as Heidegger's "turn" (Coyne 2017). This radical transformation and crisis in his thought is something we can see Heidegger trying to work out in his early *Black Notebooks*. During this period, he focuses much more on what he will characterize as "the first beginning of philosophy" by

⁴ Martin Heidegger. "On the Essence of Truth" trans. by John Sallis in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 141. Hereafter referenced as EOT.

the ancient Greeks and how many of the fundamental assumptions and positions these philosophers embraced went on to influence the history of Western metaphysics, a history that Heidegger believes culminates with Nietzsche but continues to persist in a hollowed-out form into the future (BN V.103, see IV.82). It is clear that Heidegger pursues an understanding of “the first beginning” for its overcoming, seeking “to plant the action back into the powers of what is incalculably ineluctable” and working to get a “great *running start*” in order to “take a *great leap*” into “the second beginning” (BN II.164; IV.93).

In thinking through the first beginning of philosophy, Heidegger focuses on what became to be notions of “truth,” as originally formulated by Plato and Aristotle, and demonstrates how these notions led to the formation of modern metaphysics. For example, in his essay “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth,” Heidegger interprets “Plato’s allegory of the cave” to illustrate “the basic outline of metaphysics,” specifically seen in the transformation of a conception of truth as *aletheia* to truth as *idea* or *orthotes* (PDT 180).⁵ As he claims, “[t]he essence of truth gives up its fundamental trait of unhiddenness” in Plato’s description in “the process whereby the gaze [of the man emerging from the cave] becomes more correct” and thus focused on the highest ideas (176-7). By focusing on “the correctness of the gaze,” Heidegger claims that Plato moves away from a conception of truth that is more in accordance with *aletheia* or “unconcealment” to one that is more in line with correspondence (177). With this move, Heidegger claims that “the priority of *idea* and *idein* over *aletheia* results in a transformation in the essence of truth” whereby “[t]ruth becomes *orthotes*, the correctness of apprehending and asserting,” a transformation he characterizes as “the “movement of [the] passage” whereby *aletheia* is discussed but *orthotes* is “posited as normative” (177). Through this positing, truth can no longer be considered as “unconcealment” – where truth itself is acknowledged to be “concealed” even in its “unconcealment” – but as correspondence or correctness (see OET

⁵ The text quoted includes the original Greek, I have rendered these words as transliterations.

137-150). The consequence of this change, Heidegger claims, is that by “getting yoked under the idea, truth has become correctness, and henceforth it will be a characteristic of the knowing beings” whereby humans are now oriented towards “achieving a correct view of the ideas,” which will be understood to be philosophy, or the pursuit of “the truth” (PDT 179, 180). It is within this change, whereby being is interpreted as *idea* or *orthotes*, that Heidegger argues we can perceive the origin of Western metaphysics.

For Heidegger, it is in the birth of metaphysics and its positing of a particular relationship between human beings and beings that is most significant. As he claims, it is “concern with human being and with the position of humans amidst beings entirely dominates metaphysics” (181). Therefore, what Plato does in the Allegory of the Cave is to establish a specific way in which the human being is understood. As Heidegger says, what is “always at stake” is “to take “human beings,” who within the sphere of a fundamental, metaphysically established system of beings are defined as *animal rationale*, and to lead them, within that sphere, to the liberation of their possibilities, to the certitude of their destiny, and to the securing of “life” (181, see also BN V.159). As a result of this new understanding of humans and their relationships to other beings, Heidegger will argue that man can now view nature, and in fact life itself, as something to be mastered or conquered. This pursuit of mastery is “a certain will to power,” seen in the human attempt to both understand and direct the natural world (BN II.77). Further, it is in this particular view, which is carried throughout Western history, that leads all the way to the development of our modern sciences and their pursuits: “*Science*,” as the decisive beginning of modernity, was a certain “will to power” – in the sense of the master of nature – as “world” over and against the anxiety before the mystery of forces – a determinately directed mode of revealing, a mode that maintains a determinate level” (BN III.77). In this way, Heidegger suggests that the modern world and its thinking is fundamentally linked to an understanding of being and truth that originated almost 2,500 years ago.

According to his telling, as a result of the Greeks, and Plato specifically, man came to be understood as the *animal rationale* and began to believe that his “liberation” or “security” would be achieved through a proper understanding of nature; hence, for Heidegger, this makes “Plato’s doctrine of “truth” not something which is past but continually present, as it informs the way we understand human beings and thus their relations to other beings” (PDT 181). Consequently, Plato’s “change in the essence of truth,” Heidegger contends, “is [then] present as the all-dominating fundamental reality – long established and thus still in place – of the ever-advancing world history of the planet in this most modern of modern times” (181-2).

For Heidegger, the highest expression of this ancient conception of “the essence of truth” is modern scientific and technological thinking as well as the particular societies it creates. This specifically modern thinking, which has its origins in ancient Greek thought, is what Heidegger characterizes as “machination” [*Machenschaft*]. “Machination” is a key term and concept that is featured throughout the early *Black Notebooks* and defined as a thinking that is rooted in subjectivity and centrally focused around the pursuit of endless “calculation” (see BN V.158, VI.142).

“Machination” as well as “technology,” for Heidegger, are concepts and types of thinking that pervade all modern “worldviews,” philosophies, and political ideologies, whether it is Communism, Americanism, or even what he calls “*vulgar National Socialism*” (III.81; see also HOB 171-180).⁶ This is because the main concerns of these outlooks are productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness; these ideas all relate back to a position where man takes up the task of mastering nature and views beings in terms of a truth rooted in correspondence. This idea is most explicitly

⁶ While Heidegger’s views on National Socialism change throughout the course of his early writings, as was mentioned in the introduction, it is interesting to see that he criticizes the Nazis for falling into a biological politics that he views to be in line with his conception of “machination” and “technology”: “*The new politics is an intrinsic essential consequence of “technology” since “in itself this politics is machination organization of the people to the highest possible “performance,” whereby even people are grasped with regards to the basic biological determination in an essentially “technological”-machinational way, i.e., in terms of breeding*” (BN VI.87).

addressed in “Ponderings V” where Heidegger argues that ““The will to be immediately “effective” seems “natural” in the sphere of the usual human comportments, tasks, and machinations”” (BN V.107). Here, the main point is that, for Heidegger, “technology” and “machination” is seen to be a specific type of thinking that is a consequence of a certain position towards being, and thus beings, in the world, a position that has its origin in the Greek answer to the question of Being and its truth. As he says, “We should not appraise technology according to the obvious forms in which it has been carried out but, instead, must grasp it as the peculiar configuration of the modern essence of truth (certainty) and as grounded in the essential determination of | beingness as machination” (BN VI.58). Therefore, “technology,” and thus machination, “has its root in a collapse of the essence of truth”; the “collapse” defined as the modification of the essence of truth from *aletheia* to *idea* and *orthotes*, as seen by his inclusion of “certainty” within parentheses in the quote above (BN VI.12). It is in this collapse that Heidegger perceives the intellectual origin of technology and its inherent danger; yet, he also views “machination” to be manifested or most fully expressed at a certain historic moment, specifically at the culmination of Western “metaphysics” and the end of “the first beginning of philosophy,” a moment he believes to be commencing in the late 1930s.

“Machination,” Technological Annihilation, and Its Problematic Politics

By understanding “machination” as a specific product of the history of philosophy as well as the highest manifestation an important but ancient decision, Heidegger seeks to demonstrate to his readers the consequences of the original position towards being and thus the effects resultant from the collapse in the essence of truth. As was said above, this is done explicitly for the overcoming of “the first beginning,” addressing his esoteric writings and reflections in these notebooks to “the few (who alone could have the ability) [to] be able to master the massive and the machinational” and also overcome it, ending “the first beginning” while grounding “the second” (BN V.80, IV.1-2). What

starts as a supposedly simple story on the history of philosophy told by Heidegger, based on a forgetfulness towards a philosophic question, which he continually calls the “abandonment of being” or “abandonment by being,” turns towards apocalyptic argumentation that both rationalizes and justifies the cataclysmic destruction of the earth, all of our contemporary notions of thinking, and thus all of our moral-evaluative schemes (see IV.247). Such justification of destruction, and in fact its celebration, I argue, is fundamentally tied to Heidegger’s understanding of the essence of “machination” as well as that of “technology.”⁷

In Heidegger’s writings of the late 1930s we can perceive a shift in the focus of his reflections. During this period, a time in which the second World War was just emerging, Heidegger begins to contemplate the eventual war, its philosophic implications, and its historical significance, and it is here that the themes of radical destruction and violence are presented as inevitable events in “the Western history of being” (HOB 174). During this time, Heidegger concentrates on particular principles and actions in which he finds the most explicit expressions of “machination.” In these reflections, specifically in “Ponderings VII-XI” as well as in the essay and draft of “κοινόν,” we begin to perceive more clearly the apocalyptic and annihilative character of Heidegger’s thinking on “machination,” “technology,” and his problematic politics.

What the “essence of modernity” represents to Heidegger is the highest expressions of “machination”; yet, its highest expression is also its own self-destruction. Accordingly, he believes that the emerging war is an event that helps facilitate this self-destruction of “machinational” thinking, representing a historic moment which he argued needed to be understood. Therefore, in Heidegger’s sixth notebook, most likely composed in 1938, he describes to his readers what he sees

⁷ Unfortunately, we do not yet have the English translations of the next series of available notebooks which include Heidegger’s writings into the mid 1940s. It is in these later notebooks that Heidegger celebrates the war and technological annihilation even more emphatically than he does in the 1930s (BN XIV; see Tawny 2015, 8-17; see also Malpas 2016).

to be ‘the apocalyptic essence of modernity’ and how it relates to the history as well as the future of the West. As he says, “The present age in the West is the onset of the decisive phase of *modernity*: the unfolding of the essence of modernity into its essentially proper gigantic and compulsory commandeering of all realms of beings as institutions of being qua machination” (BN VI.107). Continuing, he claims that this will be “the onset of the longest and most enduring pause of Western history *prior to* the downgoing into the other beginning” (BN VI.107). Here, it seems that Heidegger suggests that he recognizes what must first occur during the culmination, which he continually suggests will include “violence” and “destruction” (BN VII.3).

Although Heidegger believes that “machination” can be seen in all the contemporary “worldviews” listed above (Communism, Americanism, and vulgar National Socialism), he claims, in his posthumously published essay and draft of a piece written in 1939 entitled “κοινόν. On the History of Being,” that there are two explicit expressions of the ending of the essence of modernity; these are the principles of “communism” and the practices of “total war” (HOB 153-4). As he says, “The metaphysical token of the consummation of modernity is the historical empowering of the essence of “communism” into the constitution of being belonging to the epoch consummate meaninglessness” (HOB 171). Within communism, he argues, “Beingness has dissolved into pure machination, in such a way that through this machination, beings attain unlimited power and being’s abandonment of beings assumes its concealed “rule” (HOB 171). In other words, communism can be seen as the most entrenched form of machination; it is a political system where all beings are viewed in terms of their power and utility or their ability to be exploited and manipulated in order to service predetermined ends. Consequently, “machination” is viewed as a self-reinforcing feedback mechanism that Heidegger will argue leads to its own demise.

The self-destruction of “machination” in modernity, Heidegger will suggest, is a result of its particular ignorance to its relation to what he continually refers to as “the abandonment of being”

and “the plight” associated with this abandonment (see BN IV.219).⁸ Understanding this abandonment can only begin, Heidegger argues, through meditation [*Besinnung*] on “beyng” and “facticity” (see BN IV.280, IV.138-9). However, the essence of “machination” doesn’t allow for such meditation; rather, it is “meditationless.”

Modernity – the age that is more and more sure of its essence the more exclusively it thinks only of what it does. But “it does” only what the fullness of subjectivity must do – preserve itself in meditationlessness – perhaps | to the point of self-destruction. Meditationlessness, however, is not mere blindness; on the contrary, it is gigantism in calculation, and precisely that is what requires gigantism in the unleashing of the drives to violence and to destruction. (BN VII.30)

Therefore, it is this ignorance, or refusal to meditate on “the abandonment of being” that facilitates, and often accelerates, the destructive character of machination. “Machination,” then, he argues, is not able to set and establish “goals”; rather, it is confined to its feedback mechanism (HOB 175, see BN V.50). It does not question its rationale or the supposed reasonability of its own practices since it is caught up in the logic of machination which is referred to as “the gigantic” (VI.142).⁹

Through being entangled in the internal logic of its own ends, ends which are groundless and without specific “goals” beyond their self-inflation, Heidegger argues that machinational thinking such as “communism” and “total war” allow for the common distinction between war and peace to begin to become obscured. This is because what is really occurring is the ending of a history that was defined by a metaphysical decision; further, as “total war” and “World Wars” occur as historic events, they begin to simply display the consequences of this decision (HOB 154). As he says, “The distinction between war and peace becomes untenable, because both, with increasing

⁸ The “abandonment by being” that Heidegger continuously refers to throughout these notebooks is rooted in the conception of truth and the interpretation of beings resulting from the first beginning. Thus, the abandonment is defined by our lack of acknowledging our “plight” by the fact that we have been led astray. Again, this is most clearly addressed in BN IV.219.

⁹ It should be noted that “goallessness” and “the gigantic” are related to racialized ideas he associates with specific cultures and peoples, “the Occidental” in this case (see BN V.50).

obtrusiveness betray themselves as equally valid, indifferent manifestations of one “totality” (HOB 154). “War,” he claims, understood as the mobilization of all resources to its service, spreads throughout the world, “leaving no place untouched” or unaffected by the logic “machination” and its exploitation (154). As a result, “communism” and “total war” for Heidegger “[spring] from the *unleashed machination* of beings,” becoming “a *transformation* of “politics” and *revealer* of the fact that “politics” and every pursuit of life by means of planning have themselves only been a way of accomplishing unmastered metaphysical decisions in a manner that no longer has power over itself” (177). Yet, this metaphysical “decision”, he argues, “has already taken place in terms of the history of being and that makes the self-annihilation inevitable” (177).

Nevertheless, Heidegger makes the argument that this inevitably is not to be understood by everyone. Instead, as he suggests, there is a certain divided line. It appears that “the *ending* of the history of the great beginning of Western humanity,” which he believes “*is now* happening,” can only be perceived by “the few” whom Heidegger frequently addresses, inspiring them to “meditate” and develop futural thinking – a “thinking in advance” – that awaits and prepares for the coming of “the last god” (BN VIII.4, IX.26). Such thinking is what Heidegger claims to be part of the “*German Future*” and can only be understood, I argue, in comparison to the thinking which he considers to be unhistorical as it merely carries out the past and its decision. This thinking, for Heidegger, and problematically so, is Judaism (IX.26). As Heidegger suggests, ““The Knowledge of what is now happening as this end remains therefore denied and last precisely to those who are selected to start this ending in its most final form (gigantism) and to pose the a-historical, in the guise of the historiological, as “*the*” historical” (BN VIII.4). By continuing to read this aphorism, it becomes more apparent that those who are both “selected” and thus denied the knowledge of the end and its final form are Jews and Jewish thinking, since he describes Judaism to be “not being bound to anything,” and thus “avails itself of everything” (BN VIII.4). Such availing is characteristic of the

“groundless” and “worldless” essence he assigns to Judaism as well as machination (VII.4-5). Yet, this “selection” of Judaism, and a specific people, Heidegger refers to represents an assignment or a task that is to be carried out during the end of the first beginning of philosophy. It is in this role and its function that we must see the most troubling and problematic aspects of Heidegger’s philosophy.

For Heidegger, Judaism is to be understood as a principle, a worldview, and a people that help facilitate the end of the first beginning of philosophy and its violent self-annihilation. As he says infamously in eighth notebook, “what is groundless excludes itself because it does not venture beyng but always only reckons within beings and posits their calculations as what is real” (VIII.4). What “excludes itself” here, for Heidegger, is clearly Judaism, as one can see from looking at the following aphorism where he describes “the wordlessness of Judaism” and its function as one of “the most concealed forms of the *gigantic*” (VIII.5). Yet, what is to be understood as exclusion is self-annihilation. In effect, what Heidegger suggests is that by being “one of the most concealed forms of the gigantic,” Judaism represents ‘the essence of modernity,’ much like ‘machination,’ based on the fact that its constant “calculating [and] manipulating” will lead to its own destruction (VIII.5).

This description of Judaism is clearly seen in “κοινόν” as well, where Heidegger, as was discussed above, describes “the essence of communism” and its role as the “metaphysical token of the consummation of modernity,” through bringing about its own annihilation (HOB 171, 177). As he says, “The definitive annihilation [...] can only take the form of an essential self-annihilation, which is prompted most forcefully by one’s own illusory essence becoming inflated into the role of savior of morality” (177). Such an “illusory essence” that leads to one’s “self-annihilation” must be considered Judaism’s essence as described in the notebook quoted above where “what is groundless [i.e., Judaism] excludes itself because it does not venture beyng but always only reckons within beings and posits their calculations as what is real” (HOB 177, BN VIII.4). This is confirmed by the

fact that in “*χοινών*,” Heidegger constantly refers to “the few” who he believes to be behind all Soviet policies. As he says, “this nationalization of “society,” which communism represents, “signifies little, insofar as the state has become only a subordinate tool of the one and only party; the party itself, however, the tool of the Soviets, and the Soviets the forum of the few” (HOB 172). These “unnamed few” Heidegger suggests are really those who are pulling the strings as “the oft-named (Stalin and his publically active entourage) are in each instance tolerated only as the front men” (HOB 172).¹⁰ In effect, what Heidegger effectively suggests is that it is Judaism and its thinking that is behind, and in fact the root of, the self-destructive nature of modernity.

By now blaming the Jews in large part for the violent destruction that will inevitably occur in modernity, Heidegger provides an additional narrative on the history of philosophy, the essence of modernity, and the end result of “machination.” This is a narrative that covers a wide variety of times and expands on many topics; but, at its core, it is a narrative that can provide a rationale for inhumane actions, ecological destruction, and pure ideology. As one can see, Heidegger even seemingly provides a logic that excuses events as horrific as the Jewish Holocaust by suggesting that the essence of Judaism is its own self-annihilation (See VIII.4-5 and HOB 177). Furthermore, he seems to suggest that it is only through following his philosophic vision, as only a select few can, that there will be any hope to bring about a better world, a more authentic human experience, and thus a new beginning. It is in this power of his logic, its scope, and its argumentative style that we must confront. It is a specific type of reasoning that is able to justify the most expansive ideas of what we commonly consider to be radical evil. And this, I argue, must be seen as central to Heidegger’s analysis and reflections on technology.

¹⁰ The “few” Heidegger refers to here are not the same as “the few” who are frequently addressed in the notebooks and encouraged to follow Heidegger’s philosophy and his thinking.

The True “Essence of Technology”

By first describing the place of “machination” and “technology” in Heidegger’s historic narrative of philosophy as well as within his early *Black Notebooks*, I now intend to turn to a later work – “The Question Concerning Technology” (1954) – in order to reinforce what I think has to be seen as the core of Heidegger’s writings and reflections on technology. As I attempted to demonstrate above, Heidegger’s analysis of “technology” and “machination” in the 1930s develops into an apocalyptic outlook that can justify the most inhuman cruelty; yet, it is an argument that seems to be logical and eerily alluring. However, this is not the tone nor the style of the argument as presented in his famous 1954 essay. In fact, it is a much less of an ideological and esoteric work, at least upon first appearances. Consequently, I suggest that the same rationalities and analyses of technology are at play in this work as they were in his writings of the 1930s, although sometimes concealed by coded language; however, we can now recognize this language as such.

Heidegger opens his famous 1954 essay by claiming that the goal of his task in this work is to question technology in order to “prepare a free relationship to it” (QCT 311). Such a relationship will be “free,” he argues, “if it opens our human existence to the essence of technology”; therefore, in the work, Heidegger goes on questioning “concerning *technology*” in order to communicate what he believes to be modern technology’s essence and thus how we might possibly be freely related to it (311). While I will not be able to cover the depth and complexity of this essay, I intend to touch upon one central concept in the work: “enframing” [Gestell].

“Enframing” in “The Question Concerning Technology” plays a very similar role to “machination” in Heidegger’s *Black Notebooks*, and, as a result, they can both be recognized to represent “the technological essence of modernity” (Malpas 2016, 14). For instance, Heidegger, in this essay, describes “enframing” to be a challenging claim that gathers man with a view to ordering the self-revealing as standing reserve”; in this way, it means “the gathering together of the setting-

upon that sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the actual, in the mode of ordering, as standing reserve” (324-5). Continuing, “Enframing means the way of revealing that holds sway in the essence of modern technology and that is itself nothing technological” (325). These statements can be seen to be in direct agreement with Heidegger’s arguments in his sixth notebook where he claims that we “commonly confront technology | with the claim that its “philosophy” resides | in this overly facile either-or: either humans are subject to technology, or else they are masters of it. As if technology itself were something like a “machine,” or even a tool, rather than the essential consequence of a basic position toward beings” (BN VI.12). In effect, Heidegger’s understanding of “enframing,” similar to “machination,” is that “Technology is a way of revealing” (QCT 318).

Such a “revealing,” as we know, adopts a specific view of nature and man’s relation to it. This view is a “[challenging] forth by the rule of enframing, which demands that nature be orderable as standing-reserve” and thus able to be “manipulated and directed by man” (327-8). This analysis is effectually the same throughout Heidegger’s writings, as seen in Heidegger’s essay “Plato’s Doctrine of Truth” discussed above whereby man develops a conception of himself as an *animal rationale* and begins to place himself in a position to master nature (PDT 181). What is dissimilar in this later essay, however, is Heidegger’s discussion of the destructive power of “technology” as it relates to its method of “enframing.”

While “enframing” in “The Question Concerning Technology” is presented as a mode of “destining,” whereby a specific understanding of a question projects a determination into history and man’s role in it, much like in *The Black Notebooks* and the early essays, Heidegger suggests that seeing beyond the power of this “destining” might be easier than is intimated in his early writings. As he argues in the later essay, “Always the destining of revealing holds complete sway over men. But that destining is never a fate that compels. For man becomes truly free only insofar as he belongs to the realm of destining and so becomes one who listens, though not one who simply

obeys” (QCT 330). In effect, what Heidegger suggests is that by being open, and by listening to the realm of destining, one can see beyond his current horizon, and thus not be forced to “obey” it (330). However, I argue that this is not a change in his thought; rather, what is subtly implied here is that there will be those who are forced to obey the current horizon that is provided by “enframing” while there are others who might be able to see beyond it, similar to what he discloses prior (330).

By reading the *Black Notebooks*, it becomes clear that those who would be able to see beyond it are those who can follow Heidegger and his philosophic quest of preparing for the second beginning of philosophy while there are others who are to serve the role of bringing about the end of the first beginning. Yet, philosophically confronting the ending of “the first beginning,” and thus comprehending the destructive and annihilative essence of modernity, is not a stated goal in this essay; in addition, there is no mention of those who are to bring about the first beginning of philosophy’s end, as is disturbingly presented in the notebooks. Instead, Heidegger merely suggests that “The rule of enframing threatens man with the possibility that it could be denied to him to enter into a more original revealing and hence to experience the call of a more primal truth” (333). Continuing, “Thus where enframing resigns, there is *danger* in the highest sense,” following with a quote by Hölderlin, “But where danger is, grows The saving power also” (333). Here, what Heidegger argues is that being intellectually trapped by the view of nature and thus seeking its mastery, as determined through the mode of the revealing, is simply the danger. However, the implications of this danger are not disclosed. The true extent of the “danger” Heidegger fails to discuss here, I argue, is the self-annihilative character of modernity, carrying over all of the problematic and haunting conclusions from his writings in the recently published *Black Notebooks*.

Therefore, upon my reading of “The Question Concerning Technology,” taken with the recently unearthed reflections in the *Black Notebooks*, I argue that Heidegger retains the apocalyptic outlook he discloses in his early writings on “machination,” modernity, and the essence of

technology throughout his life. Furthermore, I claim that the maintenance of this position, and its problematic politics, is simply concealed in coded language used throughout the 1954 essay. As a result, we should be dubious of Heidegger's facile claim that he is working towards a "free relationship" to "the essence of technology" at the beginning of his work (QCT 311). In fact, as we should realize, the only way to a "free relationship" is the result of a new beginning of philosophy and thus the annihilation of the first. This annihilation and its horrific consequences, I argue, should be viewed as "the danger" (330). Similarly, the "saving power" should only be recognized in our ability to follow Heidegger's thinking into the future, a future that is ever more uncertain (330).

It is only through seeing these facts, and thus the concrete and destructive implications of Heidegger's philosophic vision, that we can begin to understand his analysis of modern technology. Without doing so, or by carelessly reading his famous writings without the context of the notebooks, we risk overlooking his philosophic import and troubling vision. While his narrative analysis is in many ways appealing, as he describes the power, force, and destructive tendencies in our modern outlooks towards all forms of life, we must appreciate and comprehend the implications of his thought and its project. By accepting Heidegger's narrative, which is filled with problematic politics and apocalyptic overtones, we must give up everything we have conventionally come to know, including all of our moral-evaluative schemes. It is upon facing this abandonment that our confrontation with Heidegger must occur. And, as a result, we must decide how far his justifications and rationalizations may go.

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