Martin Heidegger and Emanuele Severino: A Dispute on the Meaning of Technology

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Martin Heidegger and Emanuele Severino reflected on the meaning of technology more than anyone else in the twentieth century. Their philosophies are irreconcilable. They converge on this simple recognition *and its implications*: techno-science dominates our time. But they disagree even on the interpretation of this domination. Exploring this disagreement will help us understand the leading dynamics of our civilization. Therefore, the intention in this paper is to unveil, for English speakers, the value of Severino's philosophy in relation to Heidegger and the meaning technology. We will see that, ultimately, their disagreement concerns the originary truth of Being and has repercussions on how they conceptualize technology and the possibility of redemption from it. Heidegger indicated the letting-be of beings in their freedom as the possible path beyond technology. Severino saw Heidegger's indication as destined to remain trapped in technology itself. If we understand why this was so – from Severino's point of view – this may open a new path for us: the path of day, the path that may truly lead beyond technology. The aim of this paper is, finally, to indicate one reason why delving into Severino's works is truly worthwhile: if it is possible for the truth to unveil itself beyond willing – where Heidegger couldn't see – then Severino's works may the place where this possibility appears in coherent conceptual form.

Keywords:
becoming, freedom, thing, destiny, necessity

What can oppose the decline of the west is not a resurrected culture
but the utopia silently contained in the image of its decline.
- Theodor Adorno, "Spengler after the Decline"

I want to warn and object: Let the things be!
I enjoy listening to the sound they are making.
But you always touch: and they hush and stand still.
That's how you kill.
- Rainer Maria Rilke, *Pictures of God*

Introduction[1]

Martin Heidegger and Emanuele Severino reflected on the meaning of technology more than anyone else in the twentieth century. Their philosophies are irreconcilable, but they converge on this simple recognition *and its implications*: techno-science dominates our time. Yet, they disagree even on the interpretation of this domination, and exploring this disagreement will help us understand the leading dynamics of our civilization.

The present paper specifically focuses on Severino's criticism of Heidegger because: (*a*) Heidegger's work is already well-known to English speakers, and (*b*) the same speakers don't have much access to Severino's

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1 Emanuele Severino (1929-2020) was an Italian philosopher. He wrote around eighty or more books. As of today, only one has been translated into English: *The Essence of Nihilism* (2016). English readers can also find a collection of essays, entitled *Nihilism and Destiny* (2012) and my own introductions to Severino's discourse on scientific specialization (Pitari 2019) and interpretation of Aeschylus (Pitari 2022). . The present paper introduces English readers to only one facet of Severino's discourse. I translated all the titles and passages from Severino's works here quoted (except for one citation from "Returning to Parmenides"). The bibliography lists them in alphabetical order according to their original Italian title.

works. The intention here is thus to unveil the value of Severino's philosophy in relation to Heidegger and the meaning of technology (for English speakers). Two historical anecdotes give a preliminary indication of Severino's importance: (1) in 2019, findings at the Heidegger archive showed that the German philosopher was particularly interested in Severino's work; (2) Severino's master thesis *Heidegger and Metaphysics* (*Heidegger e la metafisica*, 1948) anticipates the conceptual amendments that Heidegger would later make to *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics* in his 1950 and 1973 prefaces (which proves the depth of Severino's insight).

But ideas are much more profound than historical anecdotes, and in them we shall dwell. In "The Ethics of Science" ("*L'etica della scienza,*" 1988), Severino writes that "ours is the time that has faith in the power of science" (1988a, p. 82). In "The Question Concerning Technology" (1954), Heidegger writes that technology is where "there is *danger* in the highest sense" (1977a, p. 28). Each of these quotes presents a proposition that the other would agree with; throughout their works, they both insist that technoscience is the logical consequence of western metaphysics and is thus destined to dominate western civilization. Even if their interpretation of technology (and metaphysics) is irreconcilable, they agree that technoscience will dominate the world *because* western civilization has always believed in the one fundamental ideology of technology.

So, we must understand the meaning of technology. Technology is at bottom what we may call "the *lógos* of *téchne*": the idea that human beings are technological beings, capable of deciding how to organize means towards the realization of ends. Heidegger and Severino think that human history originates and develops within this fundamental ideology whose true concretization will be the age of technology—the time when this ideology will free itself from its internal contradictions and our most fundamental beliefs will reign undisputed. The *lógos* of *téchne* establishes the availability of things to human domination, and our ability to dominate them. This is our fundamental belief, and philosophy (western rationality) was born to rationalize it: the age of technology will be the time of unencumbered domination.

Therefore, technology means much more than "machinery and equipment developed from the application of scientific knowledge" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). In its essential meaning, technology is the logic and discourse of *téchne*, the affirmation of our ability to dominate, transform, create and destroy things. Accordingly, science is the most concrete *application* of technology: its apparatus is its consequence, not its essence. In this

sense, the term "technoscience" is useful because it indicates that technology (the *lógos* of *téchne*) is the essence of science.

English translations present Heidegger's "*technik*" as "technology." The German "*technik*" is equivalent to the Italian "*tecnica*" that Severino uses. Translating these terms into English as "technology" is certainly correct, but with a caveat. In their common usage, "*technik*" and "*tecnica*" mean above all "technique": "a way of carrying out a particular task," "a way of carrying out the execution of a scientific procedure," "a skillful or efficient way of doing something" (*OED*). Heidegger and Severino use these terms precisely to indicate that technology means the *lógos* of *téchne*: our belief in our ability to dominate things according to our will, to transform the world.

We must keep in mind this essential meaning of technology as humankind's original interpretation of Being and as the logic of all human actions. Technology is what interprets the things of the world as *becoming*, wavering between Being and Nothingness and so undergoing transformation. On this basis, it postulates humankind's power to transform things, including ourselves. Only if becoming and control are the case can human domination be possible; otherwise, we couldn't change the world. The Ancient Greek word "*téchne*" indicates every human activity geared towards production and operated through reason. *Téchne* entails the belief that we are transformative, creative, destructive, rational, and free in becoming. Technology is exactly this belief in *téchne*. And isn't this belief what we all have in common? The answer is yes, and this is why Heidegger and Severino insist that the age of technology will represent the true realization of humanism (as conceived in the west).

Which gets us to what is truly crucial. Both Heidegger and Severino warn us that *téchne* is the essence and root of violence and that our concrete history follows from this fundamental interpretation of Being. The most fundamental disagreement between the two occurs in the definition of said violence. For Heidegger, the violence of technology is the seizing upon beings, the not allowing beings to be free in their becoming (this includes Severino's absolute knowledge, which doesn't allow becoming). For Severino, the violence of technology is the prior originary ideology that makes the thought of this seizing possible (and indeed necessary) in the first place: that is, the affirmation of becoming itself (Heidegger's thought affirms becoming and so belongs to violence).

Ultimately, then, their disagreement concerns the originary truth of Being. That is what's most important, but we'll refer to it only indirectly.

Our focus is on technology and on the possibility of redemption from technology. Heidegger indicated the letting-be of beings in their freedom as the possible path out of technology. Severino saw Heidegger's indication as destined to remain trapped in technology. To understand why this was so, from Severino's point of view, may open a new path for us, the path of day. What follows is my attempt to read Heidegger from Severino's perspective. Whenever a sentence doesn't directly explain Severino's works, it contains my thoughts, and these in turn attempt to unveil further consequences of those works.

Martin Heidegger on the Meaning of Technology

In *Being and Time* (1927), Heidegger interprets human beings as *Dasein*, the only beings who are conscious of existence and reflect upon its meaning, the only beings who give meaning to the things of the world. *Dasein* is the being-in-the-world (*In-der-Welt-sein*) whose existence is inextricable from relationship with things. Yet, this relationship grants ontological priority to *Dasein*, who establishes the meaning of everything else: this is why Heidegger says that *Dasein* alone "exists" and everything else "is." *Dasein* constructs the meaning of the world in accordance with its project. He is contingency and possibility: "Da-sein always understands itself in terms of its existence, in terms of its possibility to be itself or not to be itself" (Heidegger, 1996, p. 10). Existence is a "can be": it's history, temporality, and becoming. *Ex-sistere* means a constant bringing oneself out of oneself, a transcending that always moves beyond what is, towards what is not yet real but is possible. Human existence is a project, and only in light of this project can the things of the world acquire meaning. The difference between an authentic or inauthentic life is a choice. *Dasein* can choose to conquer or lose itself. Authentic existence is the choice to conquer oneself. Inauthentic existence is the choice to see things as "objective simple-presence" (*Vorhandenheit*) and as "tools ready-to-hand" (*Zuhandenheit*); that is, as scientific "objects."

But why is the scientific outlook inauthentic, and why is (or should) authenticity (be) any less objectifying than inauthenticity? Isn't it the case that in both authentic and inauthentic life *Dasein* creates the meaning of the world? Isn't this ineludible creation precisely what the existential analytic of Heidegger's phenomenology theorizes? If so, it remains unclear

how authenticity could distinguish itself from a projectuality that treats things as *Vorhandenheit* and *Zuhandenheit*. This crucial problem remains open before us. Is *Being and Time* a work that presents human beings as technological beings, or is it not?

In the *Letter on Humanism* (1947), Heidegger writes that "the turn" (*die Kehre*) in his philosophy was "not a change of standpoint from *Being and Time*" (1993c, p. 231). This is the beginning of a pervasive ambiguity in his late writings. On the one hand, Heidegger begins to condemn the history of philosophy as the history of domination and violence. On the other, he does not renounce his definition of human beings as free in becoming. In addition, his explicit phenomenological attitude is to avoid all judgments – the goal of phenomenology is to describe "what shows itself in itself, what is manifest" (Heidegger, 1996, p. 25) – and yet he does often judge. For example, when he defines the entire history of metaphysics as the history of the oblivion of Being, is that not also a judgment? He points out that the west always interpreted Being as an object (*ob-jectum*) separate from consciousness; that from this ancient dualism, modern thought produced the idea of the subject, which then became no longer a simple substratum (*hypokeimenon*, *sub-stantia*, *sub-jectum*) but the knowing and thinking I (*ego cogitans*) and the foundation of truth; that, therefore, ever since Descartes, my ego is the only certainty; that the history of metaphysics culminates in this definitive subject-object opposition; that, as a result, truth becomes the correspondence between language, thought, and Being (*adaequatio rei et intellectus*); and finally that this interpretation of reality is a violent mistake – whose origin is the oblivion of the ontological difference between "being" and "Being" – that deserves to be called "nihilism" because it treats the world as an object-to-be-dominated. Is this not a judgment? Sometimes it seems it is, sometimes it seems it isn't. Heidegger's attitude oscillates in this general ambiguity.

In *Nietzsche* (1936-1946), he defines the will to power as the essence of technology and as the necessary culmination of metaphysics. This is the framework that determines all of his late writings. But what does "technology" mean exactly, for Heidegger? His most direct answer appears in "The Question Concerning Technology" (1954) when he discusses the two historical meanings of the term:

> One says: Technology is a means to an end. The other says: Technology is a human activity. The two definitions of technology belong together. For to posit ends and procure and utilize the means

to them is a human activity. The manufacture and utilization of equipment, tools, and machines, the manufactured and used things themselves, and the needs and ends that they serve, all belong to what technology is. The whole complex of these contrivances is technology. Technology itself is a contrivance, or, in Latin, an *instrumentum* (Heidegger, 1977a, p. 4-5).

Heidegger sees in the Latin *instrumentum* the simultaneous presence of the two meanings of technology: technology as tool and equipment and technology as the activity of utilizing means to realize ends. This latter meaning entails that every human activity is technological, because to utilize means to realize ends is synonymous with acting. Therefore, human beings are essentially technological beings; that is, objectifying beings (who use things as instruments). This is why Heidegger here seems unambiguous in defining western metaphysics as the history of violence. But unambiguous he isn't (also, if we are essentially technological beings, why not embrace that? And what about authentic existence: how can that be non-objectifying if we are essentially technological beings?). The ambiguity becomes manifest in his citation of Hölderlin's "Patmos (For the Landgrave of Homburg)" (1803): "*But where the danger is, grows / The saving power also*" (ibid. 28)[2]. Heidegger quotes this poem to state that technology is both the danger and the saving power. On the one hand, he sees in technology the essence of violence, and on the other, he is recalcitrant to condemn it: he believes that "only a God can save us" (last interview with *Der Spiegel*), and he thinks that technology is "the saving power also." How is this not an irresolvable contradiction?

In "The Thing" (1950), he argues that the original Greek interpretation of the thing is the origin of violence, and that concrete contemporary violence originates in ancient metaphysical abstractions: "Man stares at what the explosion of the atom bomb could bring with it. He does not see that the atom bomb and its explosion are the mere final emission of what has long since taken place, has already happened" (Heidegger, 2001, p. 164). What happened long ago was the theoretical annihilation of things. We act according to our most fundamental interpretation of reality, and

2 Alternative translations of this passage are "But where the danger threatens / That which saves from it also grows" (Hölderlin, 1990, p. 45); and "But where there is danger some / Salvation grows there too" (Hölderlin, 1996, p. 54).

the explosion of the atom bomb is the necessary consequence of the Greek definition of the thing as what-can-be-dominated. This interpretation establishes that things are meaningless-in-themselves, they are mere tools for humankind. This is the annihilation of the thing, to treat things as nothing-in-themselves: "the thingness of the thing remains concealed, forgotten" (ibid. 168). For Heidegger, this means that our metaphysics fails to recognize the essence of the thing: things are not slaves to our mastery. Techno-scientific rationality is the culmination of this oblivion, and the explosion of the atom bomb is just an example of its concrete consequences.

In *What Is Called Thinking* (1951-2), Heidegger writes that "science does not think" (1968, p. 8). There is no negative judgment in this statement, the explanation is in *Gesamtausgabe I.16*: "using physical methods, for example, I cannot say what physics is. What physics is, can only be thought following the manner of philosophical question" (see Riha, 2012, p. 80). That "science does not think" simply means that science is a consequence (the final and most coherent consequence) of western metaphysics[3]. What happened in Hiroshima and Nagasaki is the consequence of our most ancient interpretation of the world: "science's knowledge [...] already had annihilated things as things long before the atom bomb exploded. The bomb's explosion is only the grossest of all gross confirmations of the long-since-accomplished annihilation of the thing: the confirmation that the thing as a thing remains nil" (Heidegger, 2001, p. 168).

This is why "the essence of technology [...] is the danger" (Heidegger, 1977a, p. 28). The essence of technology is the belief that we control the world according to our will, and all concrete violent historical outcomes are the necessary consequences of this interpretation of the world. Heidegger writes that "where Enframing reigns, there is *danger* in the highest sense" (ibid.). "Enframing" (*Gestell*) belongs to the essence of willful thought and action. Technology Enframes. *We* Enframe because we seek to control things: to use them as means towards the realization of our ends. In doing so, we oppress, subjugate, and annihilate things. We Enframe things within the function that we want them to serve. Enframing is our

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3   Severino argues as much in *Brain, Mind, Soul* (*Cervello, mente, anima*, 2016): "There would indeed be no knowledge, and therefore no scientific knowledge, if the world were not manifest, if it did not show itself, if it did not appear: if there was no experiencing it. [...] However, science is not interested in that background that is experience itself and from which science itself begins" (2016a, pp. 11-2).

enacted desire to set upon things, to secure them as *objects*, tools-for-use. Enframing is the interpretation of things as *Vorhandenheit* and *Zuhandenheit*. Therefore, "the threat to man does not come in the first instance from the potentially lethal machines and apparatus of technology. The actual threat has already affected man in his essence" (ibid.). So, *the danger resides in our hearts* because we interpret ourselves as technological beings. We are Enframing itself. We are the greatest danger. Sophocles saw this truth long before Heidegger, in *Antigone*, and Heidegger knew it: human beings are *to deinotaton*, the most violent beings.

Finally, in "Science and Reflection" (1954), Heidegger writes that "science sets upon the real. It orders it into place to the end that at any given time the real will exhibit itself as an interacting network, i.e., in surveyable series of related causes. The real thus becomes surveyable and capable of being followed out in its sequences. The real becomes secured in its objectness. From this there result spheres or areas of objects that scientific observation can entrap after its fashion" (1977b, pp. 167-8). This is how science actualizes our will to dominate things: by treating reality as measurable and controllable, transformable and dominatable—"an oft-cited statement of Max Planck reads: 'That is real which can be measured'" (ibid. 169). It is within this technological interpretation of the world that the annihilation of the thing, the advent of the age of technology, and violent domination are necessary consequences. Only within this oblivion of Being can the delusion of science as the highest knowledge appear:

> That annihilation is so weird because it carries before it a twofold delusion: first, the notion that science is superior to all other experience in reaching the real in its reality, and second, the illusion that, notwithstanding the scientific investigation of reality, things could still be things, which would presuppose that they had once been in full possession of their thinghood. But if things ever had already shown themselves *qua* things in their thingness, then the thing's thingness would have become manifest and would have laid claim to thought. In truth, however, the thing as thing remains proscribed, nil, and in that sense annihilated. This has happened and continues to happen so essentially that not only are things no longer admitted as things, but they have never yet at all been able to appear to thinking as things (*ibidem*).

After the turn, Heidegger consciously attempts to unveil the necessary consequences of technology. To interpret ourselves as having the power to

control the things of the world is to unleash the will to power. The *lógos* of *téchne* entails domination and violence, and techno-science is its realization. Technology and the will to power are synonyms. To want to organize and realize is to want to create and destroy, to assign to each thing its meaning in accordance with my will. This is the annihilation of the thing. This is why the history of western metaphysics is the history of violence. The future of the *lógos* of *téchne* is global Enframing, the cognitive and operational supremacy over everything. This is what our civilization dreams of. In Heidegger's eyes, our highest value is the annihilation of the thing.

Emanuele Severino on the Meaning of Technology

In *The Destiny of Technology* (*Il destino della tecnica*, 1998), Severino begins his analysis of contemporary civilization as follows: "today we commonly believe that scientific knowledge is the highest form of human knowledge (a conviction that itself expresses the dominating character of technology)" (p. 9). The key to this passage is in the parenthesis. Science is the *expression of* technology. We believe in science as the highest form of human knowledge because we believe in the *lógos* of *téchne*. This is why in *The Fundamental Tendency of Our Time* (*La tendenza fondamentale del nostro tempo*, 1988) Severino writes that "scientific prediction by now guides the entire existence of humans on earth" (1988b, 179).

The fundamental tendency of our time is to develop human civilization along the technological path. Technology has always been our most fundamental belief, and the age of technology will be the time when the *lógos* of *téchne* will coherently guide humans on earth (to the pursuit of indefinite power, without remorse). Technology has been our interpretation of the world ever since the dawn of human thought. The birth of philosophy is the western attempt to rationally defend this Greek faith: "it is on the foundation of this Greek faith that, for the first time, 'the human being' comes to light as understood by western culture, i.e. as the fundamental origin of action, i.e. of production and destruction" (ibid. 16). The Greeks were the first to rationally theorize human beings as technological beings. Plato and Aristotle set down that we can decide and act upon things, transform, produce, and destroy them (this is a theory, not an observable fact). In doing so, they established that our true fulfilment is the domination of the world. They developed the fundamental opposition between Being and Nothingness and so the idea of ontological becoming, birth and

death, creation and destruction, decision and action, transformation and domination. Only by inventing Nothingness could we make things available to domination. Only if nothingness is true, can ontological becoming be true. Severino writes that "at the core of the will […] to produce and destroy resides the *faith* that the world is historical, temporal, becoming, that reality is a continuous coming out of nothingness and going back to nothingness. One can want to dominate the world – that is, to control the power to produce and destroy it – only if, first of all, one wants the subduable to exist; that is, only if one has faith that the subduable exists" (ibid.).

The origin of all violence is our belief in becoming. This belief constitutes the real essence of technology. Becoming establishes the availability of things to domination. Severino has a book entitled *Téchne: The Roots of Violence* (*Téchne: le radici della violenza*, 2002), in which he writes:

> The technological project of unlimited production-destruction of things necessitates that the "thing" be an absolute availability to being-produced and being-destroyed. In this project, the "thing" does not present itself as available up to a certain point, beyond which it refuses to let itself be handled, but as entirely available. Indeed, for the first time in human history, Greek metaphysics brought to light the meaning of this absolute availability of the "thing" precisely when it tied the meaning of the "thing" to *Being* and *Nothingness* (2018, p. 222).

Doesn't Severino sound like Heidegger, here? The meaning of the "thing" originarily contains the essence of violence. This meaning is what our common sense believes in. The meaning of hurricane is the danger it brings. The meaning of wind is the energy it provides. The meaning of another human being is the joy or despair he or she brings in one's life (human beings are things too). Things become meaningful only in service to the project of the self. I am entitled to using the world according to my will. By dominating things, I treat them according to their nature. There is no real boundary. There are no just limitations. This is the true ethos of technology: the recognition that all limitations are unjust, that traditional ethics is unjust.

Does nature ever declare its indignation? Does the lion wonder what it shouldn't do that it can and wants to do? In truth, there are no ethical boundaries: there is only power and availability. It is *not* right to limit power. Power is good. Power and good are the same. Techno-science without

limitations is the true realization of Greek metaphysics, and of today's humanism. To dominate is to assume responsibility for my power. The moral obligation (the good) is to increase and use my power. This is the truth of technology.

After all, power is "the ability or capacity to do something or act in a particular way"; "the capacity or ability to direct or influence…the course of events" (*OED*). Power is the essence of every decision and action, of every organization of means and realization of ends. If we do change the world, then power is true and good. In fact, the coherence of this reasoning drives our history:

> The history of the west is the progressive seizing of things; that is, the progressive exploitation of their absolute availability and of their infinite oscillation between Being and Nothingness. The technological project of unlimited production-destruction of all things dissolves every limitation regarding that availability and, therefore, within it endures the celebration of the triumph of metaphysics" (Severino, 2018, pp. 222-3).

Doesn't Severino sound like Heidegger, here, again? But Severino sees in Nietzsche and Leopardi the summits of our civilization. Both saw how technology entails no truth nor meaning besides becoming and no morality besides domination. Nietzsche saw that the ethos of technology is the ethos of power. Leopardi did too, but he also made one further final step: power is itself an illusion, the last illusion, and beyond it is meaninglessness, the real fundamental truth of technology. In the *Zibaldone* (1817-32), he wrote: "All is nothing" (Leopardi, 2015, p. 85); that is, not even power means anything. The world is a juxtaposition of meaningless things available to meaningless projects, all destined to eternal annihilation[4].

Building an empire is meaningless, and so is saving children from malaria. This is the end gazed upon by Leopardi. But let us remain with Nietzsche for a second, to see why the ethos of technology is the ethos of

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4 Severino dedicated one work to Nietzsche, entitled *The Ring of Return* (*L'anello del ritorno*, 1999), and three to Leopardi: *Nothingness and Poetry: At the End of the Age of Technology, Leopardi* (*Il nulla e la poesia: alla fine dell'età della tecnica, Leopardi*, 1990), *Mysterious and Wonderful Thing: The West and Leopardi* (*Cosa arcana e stupenda: l'occidente e Leopardi*, 1997), and *On the Road with Leopardi: On the Destiny of Humanity* (*In viaggio con Leopardi: la partita sul destino dell'uomo*, 2015).

power. In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883-5), Nietzsche writes: "But to reveal my entire heart to you, my friends: *if* there were gods, how could I stand not to be a god! *Therefore* there are no gods. […] What would there be to create, after all, if there were gods?" (2006, p. 67). The answer is: Nothing. If there were gods, every human creation would be illusory. Everything would be dominated by gods. If there were a God (an Absolute Truth), He would establish the Eternal Law to which all Being is subject. He could never be surprised by any worldly outcome. Every worldly outcome would come into Being in accordance with His Eternal Law. Under His Necessity, there would be no open space for becoming, contingency, freedom, decision, action, creation, and destruction. Yet, we do create—this is the unquestionable evidence of technology. Therefore, there are no gods. We are free, decide, and act. Therefore, there are no gods. As a result, if we coherently develop our technological interpretation of reality, then no actions are violent, deplorable, or condemnable. Every individual creates meaning. Therefore, every individual can do whatever he pleases. There are no prohibitions and limitations and therefore no violence. Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov and Ivan knew this as well: "*everything* is permitted" (2017, p. 242; 2004, p. 263).

Our civilization hasn't yet realized what precursors like Nietzsche and Leopardi saw one hundred and fifty years ago. But we will get there—we *are* getting there. In "The Fundamental Tendency of Our Time and the Meaning of the Future" ("*La tendenza fondamentale del nostro tempo e il senso del futuro*," 1988), Severino writes that "the fundamental tendency now underway on earth is the transition from the ideological organization of existence to the technological organization of existence: the progressive reduction of the ideological obstructions to scientific rationality is an observable – and by now amply observed – phenomenon" (1988c, p. 52). Scientific rationality is the ideology of technology, and it does come with its own ethics. That science is a-moral is one of the great delusions of our time. The scientific world is a world where, as Severino writes in *Téchne* (2013):

> technology is "the last God," just as God was "the first technician." Whereas ethics used to ally itself with God because God was the most powerful power, now that technology presents itself as the most powerful power, ethics cannot but ally itself with technology. One can imagine what this alliance will mean, what events will unfold, in all contexts: moral, political, bioethical, etc. The old ethics

will be surpassed by the new ethics, where *the* value will be to espouse – as far as possible, and with the greatest coherence –, through law and custom, the only real reigning criterion: the limitless increase of power" (p. 22-3).

In *Being Born* (*Nascere*, 2005), Severino indicates how this overturning will occur:

> Today, human beings appeal to technology for salvation. When they turn to the savior – God or technology –, their goal is their own salvation, and they use the savior as the means. But then they realize that, if the savior is only a means that they own, then the savior is weak, because the weakness of the person who wants to be saved is reflected upon him. From then on, they assume as their new aim the power of the savior itself, and so their will becomes subordinate to the desire that the will of the savior be done. This will cannot be God's anymore. It can only be the will of technology (2005b, p. 263).

The will of technology will be done, and the will of God shall be no more— "God" indicates all traditional systems of belief, morals, and ethics. Our contemporary denigration of "ideology" is a symptom of this process. The original meaning of ideology is "a system of ideas and ideals" (*OED*). The term originates as the unification of the Greek *idéa* and *lógos*: "the speech, discourse, reasoning" (*lógos*) regarding "the form, notion, pattern one sees (*idéa*)." Ideology is the set of ideas by which someone relates to existence. It is essential to life. No one can live without it. Yet, "by now, through this term we indicate every human behavior that diverges, more or less significantly, from techno-scientific rationality (Severino, 1988c, p. 41), and in doing so, we act as if techno-scientific rationality wasn't itself an ideology. Severino writes, in *Beyond Language* (*Oltre il linguaggio*, 1992), that "language reveals the meaning that man confers to the world" (p. 59). If this is true, then our contemporary pejorative connotations of "ideology" speak precisely of the hegemony of the *lógos of téchne* on our time[5]. The fall of ideology is the fall of all traditions: Islam, Communism,

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5   *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* testifies to this: "ideology" is now "generally a disparaging term used to describe someone else's political views which one regards as unsound" (Audi, 1995, p. 360). But the *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* is even

Monarchy, Nazism, and also Christianity, Capitalism, Democracy, Free Speech, and Human Rights. The ethics of technology is "'the will to strengthen, infinitely and unconditionally, the capacity to realize ends.' 'Capacity to realize ends' means capacity to bridge the gaps, solve problems, eliminate needs" (Severino, 2013, p. 15). We want to solve ever more problems, and to do so we must get rid of all ideologies and their ethical limitations. Human Rights (for example) is just one of these kinds of limitations[6]. Nietzsche's Zarathustra also said that "in order for the creator to be, suffering is needed and much transformation" (2006, p. 66). We want to create, and creation needs destruction. We must realize our ends, no matter what suffering they bring along the way. The difference between Raskolnikov and Napoleon is precisely that Raskolnikov *cares*. This is why he remains a louse and Napoleon becomes a hero.

Another way to think about it is the following: to get rid of all ethical limitations is to live according to the state of nature described in Thomas Hobbes's *Leviathan* (1651). In technology, the state of nature is the truth. Humankind has the "right to everything" (*ius in omnia*); more precisely, every individual has the right to everything (*ius omnium in omnia*). Therefore, "the war of all against all" must reign over existence (*bellum omnium contra omnes*). Hobbes postulates the need for a social contract to avoid this endless suffering. But that Hobbes deems the social contract preferable doesn't make it right. And what if one was powerful enough to dominate over everyone else? Why should this person submit to the social contract? Why not try to become such a person? If technology has "one unique end: the indeterminate strengthening of power. *Without any limitation* (Severino, 2013, p. 16), then no law can inhibit anyone from pursuing ab-

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more technological: "ideology: any wide-ranging system of beliefs, ways of thought, and categories that provide the foundation of programmes of political and social action: an ideology is a conceptual scheme with a practical application. Derogatorily, another person's ideology may be thought of as spectacles that distort and disguise the real status quo. Promises that political philosophy and morality can be freed from ideology are apt to be vain, since allegedly cleansed and pure programmes depend, for instance, upon particular views of human nature, what counts as human flourishing, and the conditions under which it is found" (Blackburn, 2008, p. 178).

6 "The Universal Declaration of Human Rights" establishes that "everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person" and that "all are equal before the law…." These rights are metaphysical postulates founded upon our traditional ideologies. If we get rid of the fundamental ideologies, then we get rid of their consequences as well.

solute domination on a personal level. This general reasoning is explained most clearly in "The Ethics of Science":

> The ethics intrinsic to science is indeed science's will to realize the supreme end that science possesses *in and of itself: that is, the infinite increase* of its own power, the capacity to realize ever wider and differentiated sets of ends. Precisely because the Apparatus wants to dominate reality, in principle, it sees no inviolable boundary to power and domination. No level of power is final and insurmountable. And if the supreme end of the Apparatus is the overcoming of every limitation – that is, the infinite growth of its own power – then the Apparatus is bound only to its need to be the supreme form of the will to power, its will to sever every limitation (Severino, 1988a, p. 71).

In technology, this is the ethics of the Apparatus *and* of the individual. After all, *we* make up the Apparatus. *Téchne* is the root of violence, the delusion of domination that culminates in the despair of nothingness. For Severino, the fundamental tendency of our time is our moving towards the coherentization of this thinking. Its final meaning is summarized in *The Stone Wall* (*Il muro di pietra*, 2006):

> the philosophy of our time opens and paves the way to technology. If every truth and every God that aspire to tower over becoming are impossible, then human actions – and, first and foremost, technological actions – cannot be submitted to any limitations anymore. We entrust to technology – which owns the supreme capacity to bring into being what was nothingness and to lead back into nothingness what is – the task of establishing what must come into being and what must remain in nothingness, what deserves being and what doesn't. Technological thinking can thus arouse in humankind a sense of liberation and a form of enthusiasm never felt before. These liberation and enthusiasm, though, are salvific appearances that conceal the underground fire of anguish that is destined to shatter them, sooner or later. This is because, ultimately, the meaning of the world that comes to light in technology is that all things, all states of the world, and all human beings are ephemeral events that emerge without reason from nothingness and are destined to return to nothingness. In the end – of every life, of every conquest of the world, of every development of man, of all pleasures and of happiness – nothingness (Severino, 2006, p. 26-7).

Heidegger's Contradiction

So, Heidegger and Severino agree (albeit through opposite arguments) that technology, metaphysics, and the will to power are one and the same and constitute the essential thought of our civilization. Heidegger's thinking on technology is ambiguous to the core, though, and through Severino's eyes, Heidegger envisions a salvific relationship with technology because he cannot envision a humanity whose essence is not technology. That is, Heidegger hopes to find salvation in technology because, ultimately, he cannot imagine technology not to be true. This is the origin of his fundamental contradiction. This is why he wavers and finally remains trapped looking for salvation from violence in violence, for release from the will to power in the will to power, for the cure to poison in poison.

In "Phenomenological Interpretation of the Greek *Epistéme* and 'Ontological Difference'" ("*Interpretazione fenomenologica dell'* epistéme *greca e 'differenza ontologica*," 1989), Severino writes that Heidegger even "attempts to criticize the explicit condemnation of technology – even when he glimpses the 'danger' in technology and alludes to 'salvation from it'" (2011a, p. 313). On the one hand, Heidegger sees the danger in technology and wants salvation from it. On the other, he criticizes the condemnations of technology and hopes to find salvation in it. The contradiction is evident, and Severino points to its root in Heidegger's ontology: "for Heidegger, Plato's definition of *poíesis* (production) is not mistaken; on the contrary, it must be the point of departure for a deeper reflection on the meaning of 'Being'" (ibid. 314).

In *Symposium* 205 b-c, Plato writes that "every cause (*aitía*) by which anything is made to pass from not-being an entity (*ek tou me ontos*) to being an entity (*eis to on*) is production (*poíesis*)." Heidegger thinks of *poíesis* as the foundation of truth. He thinks that Being discloses itself through production. But Severino warns us that *poíesis* is the most powerful *téchne*, it is the *téchne* that can turn Nothingness into Being and Being into Nothingness. *Poíesis* is the essence of technology, of the atom bomb, and of the annihilation of the thing[7].

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7 In *Future Philosophy* (*La filosofia futura*, 1989), we find a passage that further illuminates how Severino stands in relation to technology, the history of metaphysics, and Heideggerian phenomenology: "It is impossible to discern the authentic meaning of appearance and disappearance when appearance is concurrently thought of as the cre-

Heidegger believes that *poíesis* is true and, therefore, he is a profound affirmer of technology. In *Philosophy from the Greeks to Our Time: Contemporary Philosophy* (*La filosofia dai greci al nostro tempo: la filosofia contemporanea*, 1996), Severino writes that the spirit of Heidegger's philosophy is the "will to bring to light the authentic meaning of becoming" (2017, p. 362). Heidegger thinks that the temporal-historic existence of human beings is the originary truth. Therefore, he thinks that the *technological* character of human beings is the originary truth. To him, the unveiling of the truth (*alétheia*) shows that human beings are technological beings: projects, always *deciding*. A direct example of this is *The Origin of the Work of Art* (1950), where Heidegger defines the work of art as that which "*puts up for decision* what is holy and what unholy, what great and what small, what brave and what cowardly, what lofty and what flighty, what master and what slave" (1993c, p. 169, my emphasis). Another example is *What Is Metaphysics?* (1929), where he writes that "anxiety reveals the nothing" (1993e, p. 101). This proposition implies that "the nothing" *is* and, therefore, that ontological becoming is the case.

This leads us back to the fundamental disagreement between Heidegger and Severino. For Severino, becoming is the essence of technology. For Heidegger, technology is our seeking to objectify becoming. This is what Heidegger means by defining the inauthenticity of the technological Apparatus – in Severino's words – as the "inevitable consequence of the metaphysical concept of Being as form and objective presence" (ibid.) and as the "extreme negation of the freedom and historicity of existence" (ibid. 367). This is why Severino writes that for Heidegger science's "principle of organization and unification […] is incompatible with the historicity of the existence of human beings" (2017, p. 366) and that "Heidegger sees in the absolute organization of technology the most radical form of the metaphysical *epistéme*: the Apparatus that makes the historical becoming of existence impossible" (ibid. 372).

Severino argues that Heidegger's philosophy is one of the two mainstream positions that oppose each other today. On the one hand, there's historicity understood as the set of techno-scientific productions of exis-

ation of beings and disappearance is concurrently thought of as their annihilation. […] From the Greeks up to phenomenology, appearance has failed to appear as appearance – and this is one of the reasons why appearance has inevitably failed to show what authentically manifests itself and has instead altered it and ultimately *hidden* it" (Severino, 2011b, p. 334).

tence (neo-positivism, pragmatism, and certain forms of neo-Marxism). On the other, there's historicity understood as the free play of becoming, where things are let be (Heidegger). Heidegger thus opposes those explicitly techno-scientific affirmations of becoming, and this is how Severino summarizes his view:

> So that historical becoming be; that is, so that the "soil" be not stolen—the soil on which "every great epoch of humanity, every pioneering spirit, every historical characterization of the essence of human beings can be born and grow"—one must not only think that Being is the powerless letting-be of beings (which, as opposed to the power of God, opens the free space wherein historical development can play) but also that Being is itself a pure historical occurrence, a pure fact (ibid. 369).

But because becoming is the essence of technology, then the opposition between interpretations of historicity is only illusory, and Heidegger's philosophy itself entails the affirmation of technology. Heidegger thinks of technology as in opposition to becoming. Severino sees that they are one and the same. If human beings are free in becoming, then they are projects, and projects are always technological: they always organize means towards the realization of ends. In this projectuality, things appear as tools, or else we wouldn't use them. If becoming is true, then the will to power is inevitable. This is why even Heidegger's freedom, letting-be, and *Gelassenheit* must fail to indicate the way beyond technology. These concepts strive to indicate another dimension, but they remain trapped in technological becoming.

Consider these theoretical and practical examples. In "On the Essence of Truth" (1943), Heidegger sets down his conception of truth-as-freedom, and he presents an ethics that follows from this conception. Here, he writes of "the essential connection between truth and freedom" (1998, p. 143) and defines freedom as follows:

> Freedom is not merely what common sense is content to let pass under this name: the caprice, turning up occasionally in our choosing, of inclining in this or that direction. Freedom is not mere absence of constraint with respect to what we can or cannot do. Nor is it on the other hand mere readiness for what is required and necessary (and so somehow a being). Prior to all this ("negative" and "positive" freedom), freedom is engagement in the disclosure of beings as such (ibid. 145).

Freedom is what "reveals itself as letting beings be" (ibid. 144). Who lives in accordance with the truth "lets beings be the beings they are" (ibid.). This person "withdraws in the face of beings in order that they might reveal themselves with respect to what and how they are" (ibid.). The authentic life lets beings be. This is what Heidegger indicates. But this indication cannot be enough. Is this letting be itself a choice, or is it not? If it is a choice, then it must once again be an organization of means towards the realization of ends; that is, an expression of technology, Enframing, an imposition on Being. Heidegger here speaks of "engagement" in a context that affirms freedom, projectuality, possibility, and contingency. How not to understand these words as pervaded by technology?

If we look at *Gelassenheit*, Heidegger's greatest and final attempt to overcome technology, we find the same problem. For Heidegger, *Gelassenheit* means "releasement," abandonment, will-less thinking; it is to let beings be what they truly are. He introduces the concept in the "Conversation on a Country Path about Thinking" (1959), where he imagines a discussion between teacher, scholar, and scientist:

> *Scholar*: "thinking […] is a kind of willing. […] To think is to will, and to will is to think." […]
> *Teacher*: "And that is why, in answer to your question as to what I really wanted from our meditation on the nature of thinking, I replied: I want non-willing" (1966, pp. 58-9).

The teacher identifies the will as the origin of suffering. To will is to suffer. Non-willing is salvation. But the teacher *wants* non-willing, and this obvious contradiction points to a clear impossibility: to want non-willing is to will non-willing, and to will non-willing is to remain trapped within willing—the very origin of suffering from which Heidegger is seeking liberation in the first place. To point out this contradiction is not to just play with words. Nor to be unfair to what Heidegger tries to indicate. Instead, it is to bring to light the most obvious instances of what prevented Heidegger from finding his way beyond technology.

Therefore, to point out this contradiction is not to be unjust to the fact that Heidegger was *not* a naïve subjectivist. He did write in "What Calls for Thinking?" (1952) that "*we never come to thoughts. They come to us*" (1993d, p. 365). He did set down in "Building, Dwelling, Thinking" (1971) that "man acts as though *he* were the shaper and master of language, while in fact *language* remains the master of man" (1993a, p. 348).

He did dedicate the *Letter on Humanism* (1947) to criticizing French Existentialism – exemplified by Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* (1939) – and to make it clear that such subjectivism founded freedom in the "I think" and had nothing to do with *Being and Time*. He did reiterate that "Man is rather 'thrown' from Being itself into the truth of Being" (1993c, p. 234), that "Man does not decide whether and how beings appear, whether and how God and the gods or history and nature come forward into the clearing of Being, come to presence and depart" (ibid.), and that "Man is not the lord of beings. Man is the shepherd of Being" (ibid. 245). Therefore, there is a lot in Heidegger against the subjectivist-technological interpretation of the world, but there is also a fundamental piece missing: the *final* fundamental piece that would allow him to truly conceptualize "care" as non-technological.

In fact, Heidegger himself has the scientist point out, in the conversation, the ambiguity of *Gelassenheit*—"this formulation has proved ambiguous" (1966, p. 59). But the further explication on offer is: "non-willing, for one thing, means a willing in such a way as to involve negation, be it even in the sense of a negation which is directed at willing and renounces it. Non-willing means, therefore: willingly to renounce willing" (ibid.). This is just an iteration of the previous contradiction. The scientist points out that "I want non-willing" is ambiguous, and the answer he gets is "Non-willing means willingly to renounce willing." The ambiguity isn't resolved, not in the least. Granted, the scientist's questions are themselves poisoned by willing, but he does have a point that the teacher fails to provide an answer for. If I am a project in becoming, then to want non-willing is itself a willing. Therefore, willing is pervasive and non-transcendable. Therefore, what the teacher is trying to indicate is impossible: it makes no sense. There's no answer to this problem here.[8]

Heidegger's ambiguity indicates that he's unable to respond to the scientist's counterargument, and within this ambiguity he introduces *Gelassenheit*, the "releasement" from willful thinking, the salvation from the will and technology: "*Gelassenheit* does *not* belong to the domain of the

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8   And in his 1925-26 course on *Logic: The Question of Truth*, Heidegger says that "as existing – whether in speaking, entering/exiting, or understanding – I am an act of intelligently dealing-with" (2010, p. 123). Again, if this is the case – if everything appears to me as something to be dealt-with in my existential projectuality – then non-willing is a logical impossibility.

will" (ibid. 62), it "remains absolutely outside any kind of will" (ibid. 59), it "can never be carried out or reached by any willing" (ibid.), it must come "from somewhere else" (ibid. 61).

It is clear that willing is the danger, here. But again, there's no justification for the assertion of a domain outside willing. Therefore, when Heidegger says that one must allow *Gelassenheit* to "wake up" [*Erwachen*] within oneself, this allowing must manifest itself as yet another expression of willful "re-presenting" thinking. That is, Heidegger's words (unwillingly) imply that *Gelassenheit* needs human allowance to be, and this implication belongs to the essence of technology. This contradiction keeps manifesting itself in the further explanations of *Gelassenheit*. For example: "you want a non-willing in the sense of a renouncing of willing, so that through this we may release, or at least prepare to release, ourselves to the sought-for essence of a thinking that is not a willing" (ibid. 59-60). Again, Heidegger remains trapped within the suffering of the impossibility to will non-willing. He hopes to indicate a "higher acting [that] is yet no activity" (ibid. 61), but no acting can be no activity.

The are other elucidations in the "Conversation," but none of them solves the problem. Another example is when the scientist hypothesizes that "*Gelassenheit* is effected from somewhere else" and the teacher immediately corrects him: "Not effected, but let in" (ibid. 61). This exchange does show that the scientist – who thinks of "effecting" – is trapped in (pro-active) willing. But how is *letting in* itself not an action? How is it not (in-active) willing? Thereafter, the scientist and the scholar ask: "But then, what in the world am I do to?" (ibid. 62). And the teacher answers "We are to do nothing but wait [*Wir sollen nichts tun sondern warten*]" (ibid.). This is perhaps where the contradiction becomes clearest. The logical framework of "what am I to do?" pertains entirely to willful thinking. To coherently indicate a domain out of willing, the teacher should have invalidated the question. "To wait" is not "to do nothing." There is no such thing as doing nothing. To wait is to decide and to act. It is to organize means to realize ends. To wait to let-in the sought-for salvation of *Gelassenheit* is to pursue a technological project. It is to exercise technological domination of Being in accordance with one's will.

Another example is Heidegger's criticism of Meister Eckhart: "*Scientist*: 'The transition from willing into releasement is what seems difficult to me.' […] *Scholar*: 'Especially so because even releasement can still be thought of as within the domain of will, as is the case with old masters of thought such as Meister Eckhart'" (ibid. 61). It is remarkable to see that

Heidegger is aware that "releasement can still be thought of as within the domain of the will" and yet he still clearly fails to provide a conceptual framework in order to differentiate his thinking from those of Eckhart and the other old masters of thought[9].

From Severino's perspective, Heidegger thus appears as a voice of technology. Severino's ontology disputes Heidegger's fundamentally. In *Destiny of Necessity* (*Destino della necessità*, 1980), Severino writes that "freedom belongs to the essence of nihilism" (p. 19), and that only by believing in freedom can human beings believe that they are the *lords of beings*, lords who have the right "to annihilate the state of things (ibid. 32), "to decide what to assign to Being and to Nothingness" (ibid. 36), and so to treat things as if they were nothing.

We want to change the world. Severino responds: "this project is the *extreme* form of the will to power" (ibid.), and human technology (*anthropíne téchne* – Plato, *Sophist* 265 b-e) is its concretization. The original idea of ontological freedom (contingency) is "the *originary* expression of the will to power" (Severino, 1980, p. 37), and it is "the foundation of all control and domination" (ibid. 40). Technology "has become the only reality and the only evidence" (ibid. 37) for our civilization, and Heidegger (unwillingly) participates in its affirmation. But what we take for granted is only an interpretation that can be questioned. The age of technology *will* be the most rigorous concretization of Greek ontology, but not because – as Heidegger thought – technology Enframes becoming, but because it "will be the complete final expression of the will to dominate that is founded upon the will to interpret Being as freedom" (ibid. 41).

From Severino's perspective, the only possibility of salvation from technology (if there is any) lies in the possibility that the truth be non-technological; that is, that the truth reveal the impossibility of becoming, power, control, domination, violence, and transformation—the impossibility of human beings as capable of decision and action. Severino's philosophy intends to indicate precisely the necessary, incontrovertible truth of this impossibility—the coherent and immediate necessity of what Heidegger

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9 In *The Mystical Element in Heidegger's Thought* (1990), Caputo writes that doing nothing constitutes the "preparation for the final stage of releasement where we have left the sphere of willing behind altogether, where man, as with Eckhart, has no will at all" (1990, p. 171). He forgets that Heidegger himself explicitly states that his thinking should have nothing to do with Eckhart.

could only incoherently postulate: that we are not the lords of beings, that this belief is a delusion.

For Severino, every appearance is an appearance of an immediate necessity whose negation (whose not-being) is impossible. This is a logical necessity that is infinitely stronger than scientific determinism. It is the logical necessity that was supposed to coherently found western rationality ever since its beginning (but didn't): "Being is, while Nothing is-not" (Severino, 2016c, p. 50). Everything else follows from there. *This* is the destiny of necessity, the originary structure (*La struttura originaria*, 1958) of the truth that cannot be denied and is "free from will and language, […] *unspeakable*» (Severino, 1980, p. 200). This is the principle of non-contradiction, coherently thought. The language that attempts to indicate this unspeakable necessity is what in *Going Beyond* (*Oltrepassare*, 2007) Severino calls "the song of the truth" (p. 374). Whether this language manages to indicate the truth, and whether this truth is – in fact – the truth, remains open to debate here. The aim of this piece was only to indicate one reason why delving into Severino's works is truly worthwhile. If it is possible for the truth to unveil itself beyond willing – where Heidegger couldn't see – then Severino's works may the place where this possibility appears in coherent conceptual form.

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