



Any story purporting to kill other stories and the story-telling impulse will lead, sooner or later, to its own demise.

~James B. Wiggins

. . . to be restored, our sickness must grow worse.

~T. S. Eliot

Nothing can be of ultimate concern for us which does not have the power of threatening and saving our being.

~Paul Tillich

5. Technology

In more ways than we can name, technology continues to represent the greatest cultural variable in determining the future development of human existence. It is not a simple, one-dimensional variable that will let itself be calculated and mastered, because technology is more than the visible progress of mechanization and electronification that surrounds us and can be documented, charted, and projected; it is a mental phenomenon as well, perhaps even primarily. The mentality of technology goes back beyond the plans and calculations that proximally precede the setting up of physical technological installations, and reaches to the preconditions of technological thinking. As a mental phenomenon, technology can easily remain very much hidden. For all that is public and dependable in the standardized apparatus and reproducible routines of the technological world, there remains a vast reservoir of pre-technological nostalgia, prototechnological reductions, bizarre conceptions and misconceptions of what is possible and practicable, and so on.

Because of the vast scale of its influence and because of its style, that is, the way it presents its demands and determinations, the technological phenomenon seems to call for awestruck acceptance, but that response has not been universal. More important for the future development of technology and those who are destined to live through it has been the work of critical commentators, which has revealed facets of the phenomenon far removed from the products of laboratories and factories. Through criticism, technological civilization has come into an inheritance of a catalogue of complications of technology that have been delineated by that small minority who have not taken it for granted. It would be an unwarranted simplification to equate uncritical participation in the world of technology with a positive attitude toward it and critical reflection with a negative attitude, but it has none the less been usual for the bulk of critical energy in the twentieth century to be devoted to the problems of technology rather than the benefits it bestows.

One of the most widely-read thinkers toiling in these fields has been Herbert Marcuse. Analyzing the dynamics of modern society has brought him into a region of thinking where technology appears to have the first and last word. In the world of technology, there prevails a kind of being that Marcuse named in the title of his *One-Dimensional Man*. In the introduction to that book, he describes

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tendencies of the modern technological situation with reference to the dialectics of material change, but his remarks connect with themes of interest outside the ontology of dialectical materialism also.

In this society, the productive apparatus tends to become totalitarian to the extent to which it determines not only the socially needed occupations, skills, and attitudes, but also individual needs and aspirations. It thus obliterates the opposition between private and public existence, between individual and social needs. Technology serves to institute new, more effective, and more pleasant forms of social control and social cohesion. . . .

In the face of the totalitarian features of this society, the traditional notion of the "neutrality" of technology can no longer be maintained. Technology as such cannot be isolated from the use to which it is put; the technological society is a system of domination which operates already in the concept and construction of techniques.¹

Marcuse is not alone in refusing to accept the fantasy of the neutrality of technology. Likewise, in his assertion that the social context of technological civilization is a totalitarian structure of domination, Marcuse articulates a not uncommon perception. Because of his social focus, however, Marcuse does not take his analysis of technology much further than this. If we were to remain at this level, then technology would appear as an instrument of ideology, even as religion appeared to Marx as such an instrument. To see what technology means for the religion-ideology-falling problematic necessitates going beyond an instrumentalist view of technology, however sophisticated.

In Heidegger's thinking of the question of technology, further insight is afforded into his understanding of both the ontology of falling and the ontical meaning of falling, even though the term "falling" has ceased to appear on the surface of the texts. The insights to be gained from following the idea of falling through the later material which touches on themes related to technology have direct relevance to the problematic of religion and ideology. While Heidegger directed a number of trenchant remarks toward easily accessible social phenomena of technology, his interest in the topic was clearly not