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## BOOK REVIEW

**Martin Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures: Insight Into That Which Is and Basic Principles of Thinking*, Translated by Andrew J. Mitchell (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), ISBN: 978-0-253-00231-0**

*Bremen and Freiburg Lectures: Insight into that Which is and Basic Principle of Thinking*, translated by Andrew J. Mitchell, contains ten lectures by Martin Heidegger, as well as both a German-English and a English-German glossary of the philosopher's terms.<sup>1</sup> Due to the recent release of the first of Heidegger's "Black Notebooks," there has been a resurgence of public interest in Heidegger's activities during the Nazi Regime. As indicated in the Editor's Afterword, the Bremen Lectures "document Heidegger's first public emergence after the Second World War," and so represent an invaluable contribution to English language discussion of Heidegger's activities following the events of the Second World War (167). For the scope of this review, I intend to analyze the manner in which Heidegger treats the relationship between human agency and technology. Ultimately I contend that Heidegger's conclusion entails that we abandon any understanding of technology as a means in the hands of humans; instead of understanding

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<sup>1</sup> Heidegger delivered the first four lectures, "Insight into That Which Is" in December 1949 in Bremen. Later versions of "The Thing," "Positionality" and "The Turn" were first published in English translation in *Poetry, Language and Thought* (1971), by Albert Hofstadter and *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (1977), by William Lovitt. Heidegger delivered the lecture course "Basic Principles of Thinking" in Freiburg during the summer of 1957. James G. Hart and John C. Maraldo translated the first lecture in *The Piety of Thinking* (1976) and Joan Stambaugh translated a later version of the third lecture "The Principle of Identity" in *Identity and Difference* (1969). The remaining lectures are the first English translations of the 79th volume of Heidegger's *Gesamtausgabe* (1994). Joan Stambaugh's translation "The Principle of Identity" (in *Identity and Difference*, 1969, p 23-41) and the third Freiburg lecture (108-121) are different translations of the same source material. William Lovitt's translation "The Question Concerning Technology" (in Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology, and Other Essays*, translated by William Lovitt (New York, Garland Publishing, INC. 1977), 3-35) contains material from both "Positionality" and "The Danger" in the present volume (23-63), as these lectures were adapted into the former essay. "The Turn" in the present volume (64-73) was similarly adapted into the essay version "The Turning" (36-49, 1977). These lectures contain textual discrepancies from the essay versions that could be the subject of further research.

technology in reference to its effects, Heidegger treats technology in terms of its essence. A ramification of this argument is that any accountability for the use of technology seems to be displaced in favor of an epochal treatment of the question of technological agency. In these lectures, Heidegger attacks the notion that there is any difference between distinct uses of technologies, instead positing that technology has its own *sui generis* agentic tendencies. It should be stated from the outset that the contents of these lectures have been treated in English language scholarship on Heidegger.<sup>2</sup> The reader is encouraged to draw their own conclusions.

The Bremen lectures evince a change in Heidegger's philosophical project. While earlier, Heidegger had attempted to uncover the meaning of Being through the existential analytic of *Dasien*, these lectures abandon the anthropological register of *Being and Time*, and the political / exegetical register of Heidegger's 1933-1935 lectures in favor of an epoch-centered thinking. Epochal thinking appears diagnostic, but entertains a high level of generality, as Heidegger attempts to account for the tendencies of an age in reference to its characteristic metaphysical assumptions.

Epochal trends, due to their high level of generality, assign agency, not to significant events in human history, but rather to formative effects of language. Heidegger's case study is the semantic history of *res*, *Ding*, *causa/cosal/chose* and *thing*; through this history he connects the Latin *res* with what concerns and "approaches" the human (13). The sense of the term 'thing,' generally applied, depends on the ontological viewpoint of the epoch in which the term is used; "because the word 'thing' in the language use of Western metaphysics names something that is in any way at all, the meaning of the noun 'thing' changes according to the interpretation of this which is, i.e., of beings" (15). The genealogical account of the term 'thing' has implications for our understanding of cause and effect as it applies to objects or things in the world. Heidegger argues that cause and effect are caught up in the representational thinking characteristic of positions like that of Kant, which require us to judge the ontological status of things against our ability to represent them to ourselves. Yet "thing" also has alternative meanings, such as that of "gathering" which are descriptive of the presence of objects, rather than mere descriptions of their representation.

A strength of Heidegger's genealogical account is the way in which he demonstrates that the etymological history of terms like "thing" contain alternative resonances that do not fit into the metaphysics of subjective representation. Heidegger traces this conceptual lineage to the Latin *res*, connecting *res* to case, and case to *causa*. He claims that "only because *causa*, nearly synonymous with *res*, means the case can the word *causa* subsequently attain the meaning of cause in the sense of the causality of an effect" (13). Heidegger contends that the synonymy of *res*

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<sup>2</sup> C.f. Richard Bernstein, "Heidegger's Silence?" in *The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 79-141; Richard Wolin (ed.), *The Heidegger Controversy: A Critical Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg (eds.), *Martin Heidegger and the Holocaust* (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1996) 19-38, 215-235; Tom Rockmore, *On Heidegger's Nazism and Philosophy* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992), 204-243; Hans Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis: Philosophy and Politics in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 235-253.

and *causa* indicates a reason for the very general sense in which the term *dinc* was used during The Middle Ages, “for *dinc* means every single thing that somehow is” (14). Rather than containing an ontological specificity, the generality of term’s application results in a metaphysics of representation, in which thinghood is the decisive quality of all things that are, from things in the world, to souls, to God. Insofar as thinghood is linked to cause and effect, the result is a generalized order in which the only significant distinction between things is their *position*. All things that are, as they are effects, can also be circulated into new cause and effect relationships: the “standing reserve” of “everything orderable” is fit for manipulation, transformations in position, in short, all things are stock for yield (31). Insofar as the essence of a thing is to be an effect, the result of a process, the thinghood of a thing is not altered in any significant way by using it for technological processes of refinement and production. Heidegger argues that the linguistic trends that linked *res* and *causa* are prerequisites for the technological worldview of modern times, and that such a view ignores the ontological dimensions of the world that remain hidden from humans, or, in his language, “the earth” and “the immortals” (16).

The ‘framing’ effect of technology results in what Heidegger calls the “essence of positionality,” or, “the unguarding of the thing as thing” (45). The essence of technology is to level and reduce all things to “standing reserve;” ‘the world’ is constituted for us as a vast totality of things which can only be differentiated in terms of their position, and, as a result, the world is represented and concealed by its instrumental status. ‘Instrumental status’ is not the end of a process, but an ongoing one, an “erroneous path” which can be altered, but not without assistance (46). Heidegger identifies the status of the world in the contemporary epoch as “planetary totality,” constituted by parts which are only differentiated in terms of their position (48). What the worldview of planetary totality is oriented towards as a trend, or, in Heidegger’s terms, the “pursuit” [*fara*] is “the danger [*die Gefahr*]” (51). When Heidegger argues that “the danger is the collected pursuit as which positionality pursues the self-refusal of world with the forgetting of its truth through the guarding of the thing,” we might understand this in the following way: due to the accumulated linguistic and technological trends which reduce all things in the world into materials for production, we conceive of the world as a vast planetary reserve in which the materials can be altered, but also think that the world will not fundamentally change, and further, the most dangerous aspect of this trend is that we will fail to recognize what the world is becoming due to consonance of the aims of science and the representational metaphysical thinking that underlies its worldview (51). While it is the case that every danger forms unique imperatives, Heidegger argues that the linguistic relationship between “case” and “cause” results in our inability to attend to dangers on anything more than a case by case basis. Analogously, then, in the same way that things are treated as distinct causes, and as a result, a holistic version of the world eludes us, dangers are treated as distinct cases, and, as a result, a singular understanding of “the danger” or “the distress” also eludes us (53).

Heidegger articulates the elusiveness of “the danger” in another way by arguing that “one observes technology technologically” when we judge technology in terms of its effects (55). Given how the linguistic history of *thing* equivocates *thing* and *cause*, to judge technology in terms of its

effects is to ignore the way in which technology has become a viewpoint, or a framework [*die Gestelle*]. Heidegger argues that when one thinks of technology in terms of its effects, one “is from the outset unwittingly in agreement that technology would be a means to an end [...] placed in the hand of the human” (57). When we conceive of the status of technology in reference to its effects, we have already positioned technology as fully within the realm of human agency. The danger that Heidegger seeks to alert us of, then, is the way that technology “conducts its own disguising” by producing the manner in which it is judged in accordance to its function; technology produces effects, it is judged in accordance with its effects—the framework prevails over both instances.

Heidegger suggests that the relationship between means and ends is altered in the movement from *poesis*—human production—to technological production (61). He argues that understanding technology as a means is an error; technology has “never been a means in the hand of the human” (58). Yet Heidegger does not argue that transformations in production are the origin of the modern technological epoch. Instead, he points to two Greek terms, *physis* and *thesis*, that the former Heidegger associates with both *a-lethia* and *lethe*, and connects it further to *logos*. *Physis* requires both concealment and revealing, but revealing in the sense of “letting something arrive and presence of its own accord” (60). *Thesis* refers to “human positioning” which is distinct from *physis*: “What stands here through [*Thesis*] essences otherwise that what is brought forth here by [*physis*]” (61). The conceptual lineage from *physis* to positionality [*Das Ge-Stell*] has resulted in the “reign” of technology, which Heidegger describes as “the gathering of positioning in the sense of a requisitioning into standing reserve of all that presences” (63). Technology, for Heidegger, is not a means, technology, through ordering, transforms the world and all things *into* means. The reign of technology, therefore, transforms ends *into* means—such that the concept of “instrumentality” is inept to confront technology; “technology, whose essence is being itself, can never be overcome by the human. That would indeed mean that the human would be the master of being” (65).

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