

THE ROOT OF HEIDEGGER'S CONCERN FOR THE EARTH AT THE CONSUMMATION OF METAPHYSICS: THE NIETZSCHE LECTURES

Dale Allen Wilkerson

ABSTRACT: This essay attempts to situate Heidegger's critique of modernity's technological worldview within the conceptual context and time frame of his Nietzsche lectures of the 1930's. Heidegger discovers in Nietzsche's thought the "consummation of metaphysics" and in Nietzsche's concept of "will to power" an articulation of the world dominating principle reflecting modernity's comportment with beings as mere resources for consumption. Such a principle voices the utter destruction of Being and obliterates any possibility for the more considerate disclosure of beings in a non-technological way.

KEYWORDS: Heidegger; Nietzsche; Technology; Earth; Environmental Philosophy; History of Ideas

I INTRODUCTION: HEIDEGGER'S CONCERN

Heidegger is rightly regarded as one of the first philosophers to show concern for the earth, by laying bare the projected impact of modernity's technological dominance over Being. Heidegger's essay, "The Question Concerning Technology," for example, explicitly lays out such a projection during a period of the reconstruction of Western Europe in the wake of the Second World War. As in his other work from this period, Heidegger promotes a bringing forth of beings through 'poetizing,' a means of disclosure by which human beings participate more fully within the totalizing essence of Being. Some readers, however, have taken Heidegger's lament over Western Europe's unbridled enthusiasm for modern technology with a good bit of cynicism, seeing this lament only through the lens of Heidegger's uncomfortable political situation and his despair during the post war period.¹ The unsympathetic reading of Heidegger's concern for the earth and his lament over the explosion of the modern technological worldview, however, fails to grasp the place of such themes in Heidegger's thought-path going back at least as far as his lectures of the 1930's.²

¹ For example, Sluga refers to the passivity and disillusion of "poetizing," while Margolis finds later Heidegger at the extreme distance of "Quietism" to the 1930's stance of "fascism." Hans Sluga, *Heidegger's Crisis*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1995), 237. Joseph Margolis, "Discarding and Recovering Heidegger" in *The Heidegger Case*, ed. Tom Rockmore and Joseph Margolis (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), 418.

² For a detailed and nuanced reading of the "Political Aspects of Heidegger's Early Critique of Modern

To be sure, Heidegger's activities during the 1930's give us real cause for alarm.³ In what follows, however, I will simply attempt to trace Heidegger's very real concern for the earth and his critique of the dominance of modern technology back to his 1930's lectures on Friedrich Nietzsche, finding in such lectures an interpretation of Nietzsche that explicitly anticipates his post-war stance concerning technology, the earth, and the poetizing essence of Being.⁴

II THE LAST METAPHYSICAL THINKER

By Heidegger's own account, the analysis offered in his 1943 essay, "*Nietzsches Wort 'Gott ist tot'*" is derived from the series of Nietzsche lectures Heidegger had delivered at Freiburg during the years 1936 to 1940.⁵ In these lectures, Heidegger continues the work begun in the 1931-32 essay, "*Platons Lehre von der Wahrheit*," by seeking to elucidate the meaning of Nietzsche's overturning of Platonic metaphysics. In doing so, Heidegger also seeks to affirm Nietzsche's place in the Western tradition and "within the vast orbit of the ancient guiding question of philosophy, 'What is being?'"⁶ Towards that affirmation, Heidegger embarked on the Summer 1936 lecture with a section entitled, "Nietzsche as Metaphysical Thinker," advancing there an argument that will be sustained throughout his confrontation with "the last Metaphysician."⁷ This argument holds that the will to power is Nietzsche's name for the basic character of all beings, a name that answers philosophy's guiding question in a way that is decisive for all of Western metaphysics. Why is Nietzsche's place in the past, present and future of Western metaphysics so decisive? How is this meditation on Nietzsche situated within the development of Heidegger's thought concerning the Western world's technological domination of the earth?

In Heidegger's view, Nietzsche and his work stand out as the "Thinker (and the Thought) of the Consummation of Metaphysics."⁸ It remains for us to determine how Heidegger thinks of this *Vollendung* and what it means for his philosophical path. That Nietzsche's thought proves to be the "consummation" of metaphysics does not mean that this thought is simply the latest in a succession of metaphysical arguments concerning the cosmological nature of the universe and its beings, the human being's

Technology," cf. Michael Zimmerman's *Heidegger's Confrontation with Modernity*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990).

³ Richard Wolin, *The Heidegger Controversy*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1993).

⁴ For a much more detailed treatment of this theme, with differing points of emphasis, see Charles Bambach's *Heidegger's Roots: Nietzsche, National Socialism, and the Greeks*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003).

⁵ Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1977), Preface x. This edition of Heidegger's work will henceforth be referenced as "QTC."

⁶ Heidegger, *Nietzsche I*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 4/Heidegger, *Nietzsche, Erster Band*, (Verlag Günter Neske: Pfullingen, 1961), 2. The four edited volumes of Krell's *Nietzsche* will henceforth be referenced as "*Ni-iv*." The two-volume Neske edition will henceforth be referenced as "*Ni-II*."

⁷ *Niii*: 8/*NI*: 480.

⁸ *Nii*: 3/*NI*: 473.

psychological nature, nor the nature of the divine world. What, then, does the consummation of metaphysics indicate?

Heidegger understands “metaphysics” as the name for a particular kind of relationship between beings and Being, and he observes a consummation in what has happened to that relationship as it plays itself out in Nietzsche’s words.⁹ Modernity “completes itself” in the consummation of all metaphysics, expressed in Nietzsche’s “thought-path leading to the will to power,” an expression of “the unimpeded development of all the essential powers of beings.” Moreover, modernity is that age when the human being has developed its powers for thinking in such a way that beings are thought now to have taken complete “priority over Being.” It is apparent from these words that understanding Heidegger’s *Auseinandersetzung* with Nietzsche is significant for grasping the development of Heidegger’s greater confrontation with the whole of Western metaphysics and its consummation in modernity.

Paying heed to those parts of Heidegger’s analysis in the Nietzsche lectures that suggest the consummation of metaphysics in a new and decisive principle, one guiding the relationship of all beings in their “taking priority over Being,” will perhaps shed light upon the well-spring of Heidegger’s critique of the age of machination (*Machenschaft*). This principle is decisive because it names that power by which values are posited, while Heidegger’s meditation on this principle in the 1930’s brings him closer to unveiling modernity’s one-dimensional disclosure of beings through *Machenschaft* as merely that which “stands in reserve” (*Gestell*) as a resource for consumption. For this reason, I believe my analysis is significant for situating the development of Heidegger’s later thought. We will indeed discover that Nietzsche’s value-positing principle constitutes a metaphysic of sorts, one that is the essence, in Heidegger’s estimation, of Nietzsche’s worldview and one that is determinative of how and why even the highest values are “posited.” Unveiling such a principle will disclose also the one-dimensional nature of the metaphysics of the age.

As I follow Heidegger through Nietzsche’s thought-path to the will to power I will examine how, in Heidegger’s view, such a principle expresses on the whole the major elements of Nietzsche’s thought. Then, perhaps we will be in a better position to understand how and in what way Heidegger conceives of Nietzsche as the avatar for the consummation of metaphysics. We may then also be in a better position to understand how Heidegger’s critique of Nietzsche speaks to the still greater project of thinking on the meaning of Being at the consummation of metaphysics.

⁹ “Metaphysics thinks beings as a whole according to their priority over Being. The whole of Western thinking from the Greeks through Nietzsche is metaphysical thinking. Each age of Western history is grounded in its respective metaphysics. Nietzsche anticipates the consummation of metaphysics. His thought-path to the will to power anticipates the metaphysics that supports the modern age as it completes itself *in* its consummation.” Nii: 7/Ni: 478-479.

III WILL TO POWER AS THE CONSUMMATION OF METAPHYSICS

In Heidegger's view, Nietzsche discloses that the positing of "value" requires a "point-of-view" conditioned by the "preservation-enhancement" of "life." This condition is grounded in "becoming" as Nietzsche understands it in the concept, "will to power," which is revealed also as that which ventures forth to create the horizon of the value-positing point-of-view, in the sense that will to power is the "ground of the necessity of value positing and the origin of the possibility of value judgment."¹⁰ Heidegger confirms the ad-venture-some character of the will to power with Nietzsche's aphorism 14 of *Wille zur Macht*: "Values and their changes are related to the increase in power of that which posits them."¹¹ The self-reflexivity of the meaning and purpose of value and value-positing with respect to power are not lost on Heidegger. He notes that in Nietzsche's analysis of power, "values are the conditions of (value) itself posited by the will to power. Only where the will to power, as the fundamental characteristic of everything real, comes to appearance, i.e., becomes true...does it become evident from whence values originate and through what all assessing of value is supported and directed."¹² Thus, will to power has emerged not only as a newly posited value, but also as a value that at the same time evidences the positing of new values as such (from the perspective of "life"). At the consummation of metaphysics, under the Nietzsche's guiding hand, "values, utterly transformed into calculable items, are the only ideals that still function for *Machenschaft*."¹³

Although "life" and the "sensory world" have emerged at the inversion of Platonic ideals as the conditions for positing such values, the West has yet to think beyond the metaphysical disclosure of Being:

If the essence of metaphysics consists in grounding the truth of being as a whole, then the revaluation of all values, as a grounding of the principle for a new valuation, is itself metaphysics. What Nietzsche perceives and posits as the basic character of being as a whole is what he calls the "will to power."¹⁴

Nevertheless, Nietzsche's metaphysics articulates a change in the nature of value-positing: thus a new principle is required for determining the ground of all future values. Nietzsche names "will to power" as this new principle. It remains to be seen, however, what Nietzsche means by this appellation.

Heidegger usually begins his explication of will to power by deconstructing the all-too-mundane interpretation of what the concept announces. He notes that the mundane view conceives of "will" and "power" independently. Then, this view connects these notions to form a principle that grounds all existence in "the striving (will) to exercise rule and authority (power)," or even "the striving *to come into* power." On this view such striving is a consequence of a psychological condition that feels

¹⁰ QCT: 74/H: 213.

¹¹ *ibid.*

¹² QCT: 75/H: 213.

¹³ Niii: 182/NI: 250

¹⁴ Niv: 6/NI: 36.

privation¹⁵. Yet, we will fail to grasp Nietzsche's meaning, Heidegger argues, by attempting to characterize this concept in these shortsighted ways. Heidegger suggests that we should begin, rather, by considering how will to power is "a fundamental term in the fully developed philosophy of Nietzsche," meaning, in Heidegger's view, how the concept functions as the primary principle in Nietzsche's "metaphysics." Such an elucidation, it is claimed, will reveal Nietzsche's meaning more clearly than even Nietzsche himself understood it.

In the 1943 essay, Heidegger sets up the affirmative part of his interpretation of will to power with a passage taken from *Also Sprach Zarathustra*, in which Nietzsche first names the concept, in the words of the title character: "Where I found the living, there I found will to power; and even in the will of those who serve I found the will to be master."¹⁶ Heidegger emphasizes the part of this passage that connects "willing" with the "will-to-be-master," and he explains that even the will of a slave "wills to have something else under him." This "will to master" is the primary characteristic of all willing, and it means, according to Heidegger, that "to will" is not principally a will "to strive" but rather "to command," defined as a "conscious disposal over the possibilities for effective action."¹⁷ In the SS 1939 lecture, we find that such commanding is essential for "holding to be true" (*Für-wahr-halten*) and for the preservation (*Erhalten*) of what is. Commanding (*Befehlen*)—along with "poetizing" (*Dichten*)—is part of the "groundless grounding of a ground in such a way that it grants itself the law of its own essence."¹⁸

But, an important distinction must be drawn between such "commanding" and "poetizing." In his analysis of "commanding", Heidegger reformulates the structural configuration of "value-positing metaphysics" from the two-fold standard of "preservation" as a "making secure" and of "enhancement" as a venturing forth in self-overcoming. The first command in willing is likewise two-fold: it is the disposition to command and the disposal of that disposition. Heidegger describes here not only "the what" but also "the way" of commanding, and he informs us that this sort of willing requires, most of all, self-mastery. Obedience to oneself is most essential for commanding. In it, one posits and holds oneself as what one is; at the same time, one becomes superior to oneself, and in venturing beyond oneself in this superiority, one becomes, even further, what one is from out of oneself.

This essential form of willing as self-commanding, Heidegger argues, is not grounded in privation. "What the will wills it already has," meaning that as the will wills (ventures) beyond itself (*Er übersteigt sich selbst*), it wills (affirms) itself as what it is.¹⁹ Such an affirmation occurs through the positing of values. And, this affirmation is necessary for the will's "preservation," while the venturing beyond itself into new

¹⁵ QCT: 76/H: 215.

¹⁶ QCT: 77/H: 215-216.

¹⁷ QCT: 77/H: 216.

¹⁸ Niii: 119/NII: 611.

¹⁹ QCT: 77/H: 216.

possibilities, the positing of new values from out of will to power, “enhances” the will’s willingness to will. Heidegger describes the nature of such willing as self-commanding in the early 1940 lecture:

Every being, insofar as it *is*, and is *as* it is, is “will to power.” The phrase names that from which all *Wertsetzung* proceeds and to which it returns.... (O)nly power posits values (*Werte setzt*), validates them, and makes decisions about the possible justifications of a *Wertsetzung*.... But power is power only as enhancement of power (*Machtsteigerung*). To the extent that it is truly power, alone determining all beings, power does not recognize the worth or value of anything outside itself. That is why will to power as a principle for the new *Wertsetzung* tolerates no end outside being as a whole.²⁰

Will to power is that ground from out of which values are posited; it “tolerates” no supersensory ground outside of itself; it not only “is” the highest value, but it also accounts for the way of the highest value *as* what is. Such one-dimensional value-positing is ultimately meaningless, however, and it consummates the metaphysics of the West through an “inflexible” and “superficial” principle of inverted Platonism. “All that is left is the solitary superficiality of a ‘life’ that empowers itself to itself for its own sake.”²¹ While the essential power of Being, having been cast aside,

wanders without prospect in the region of ‘perspectives’ and ‘horizons’ that are bereft of every clearing.... Then the bestowal of meaning gets underway as a ‘revaluation of all values.’ ‘Meaninglessness’ is the only thing that makes ‘sense.’ Truth is ‘rightness,’ that is to say, supreme will to power. Only an unconditioned dominion of the earth by human beings will be right for such ‘rightness.’²²

As the philosopher of the “unconditioned dominion of the earth by human beings” Nietzsche is more properly a remnant of modernity’s Cartesian tendencies than the true slayer of metaphysics. The Nietzschean *Übermensch* is the essence of the Cartesian self, while “meaninglessness ... becomes something we can know as the essential consummation of this age only when it is apprehended together with the transformation of man to *subiectum* and the determination of beings as the represented and produced character of the objective.”²³ Being is reduced to only what can be manufactured and explained: this reduction, for Heidegger, is the essence of *Machenschaft*.²⁴

Mastery of power’s enhancement (*Machtsteigerung*), the “overpowering of power” that “belongs to and springs from power itself” is the essence of life.²⁵ *Erhaltung* “stands in the service of *Lebenssteigerung*.”²⁶ Heidegger describes, here, the way of power as the venturing out of that which remains the same—the empowering-overpowering-power.

²⁰ Niv: 7/NII: 37.

²¹ Niii: 176/NI: 240

²² Niii: 173-174/NI: 238

²³ Niii: 179/NI: 244

²⁴ Niii : 180/NI : 245

²⁵ QCT: 78/H: 217.

²⁶ QCT: 73/H: 211.

Will to power means empowering to the excelling of itself. Such overpowering to excelling is at the same time the fundamental act of excelling itself. For this reason, Nietzsche constantly speaks of power being in itself “enhancement of power” (*Machtsteigerung*): the powering of power is empowering to more power.²⁷

Heidegger has elucidated, thus, an understanding of “will to power” that finds the primary characteristics of willing in acts of “willing as self-commanding” and those characteristics of power in acts of “power as self-overpowering.” Such an elucidation contrasts the usual view of will as “striving for possession,” which is exposed now as only an underdeveloped form of willing.²⁸ But, even this metaphysics of the “self-overpowering power” conceals a life that has become essentially without measure and therefore without meaning: “the measureless has now disguised itself as a self-overpowering power” and meaninglessness finds expression in “*Machenschaft*,” everywhere and always “cloaking itself in the semblance of a measured ordering and controlling” that brings forth “beings as the sole hierarchy and causes us to forget Being.”²⁹

IV CONCLUSION: HEIDEGGER CONTRA NIETZSCHE

While side-stepping altogether several very real and complicated questions concerning the overall accuracy of Heidegger’s portrait of Nietzsche’s thought and its significance to the Western philosophical tradition, my work has attempted to show that Heidegger’s discovery of the consummation of metaphysics in Nietzsche’s “thought path to the will to power” prepares Heidegger’s later development towards a full-blown critique of modernity’s one-dimensional disclosure of beings as *Gestell*. In developing a “metaphysics of value,” which has its ontological origin in the “will to power,” Heidegger’s Nietzsche attempts to “overturn” the way metaphysics has lorded over the physical world from the “heights of the suprasensory.” He appears to spur such an uprising by setting forth the value of “life” as will to power. But, Heidegger claims, even this “overturning” fails to “overcome” metaphysics, since “every overturning of this kind remains only a self-deluding entanglement in the same that has become unknowable.”³⁰ When the will to power is taken as the fundamental principle for positing values, Platonism is inverted, while at the same time brought to completion. The will, in such a reading, works to preserve, fix, certify, make true, correct, justify, and, in general, make constantly present in a one-dimensional fashion, a world that is immediately at its disposal.³¹ What is “possible” for being, in this view, becomes obliterated in the marking off of what has value—while modernity nihilistically discloses beings in such a way that the domain of the gods has been forgotten, as we struggle henceforth to rule and to exploit the domain of the human being. It might also

²⁷ Nii: 152-153/NII: 651.

²⁸ QCT: 73/H: 211.

²⁹ Niii: 181/NI: 250.

³⁰ QCT: 75/H: 214.

³¹ QCT: 84/H 221.

be said that the not-present, in this reading, has been ill-considered as we strive to identify, collect, dominate and consume the present with a one-dimensional disclosure of beings as that which is constantly at the disposal of the value-positing agent.

It is from this vantage point that Heidegger levels his critique of Western metaphysics, within which Nietzsche's *Übermensch* emerges as the avatar for that which is destined to take priority over Being. From here, the *Übermensch* appears as "the supreme configuration of purest will to power; that is to say, of the one and only value."³² The "Overman" represents the consummation of metaphysics as a value-positing super-agent and as the principle consumer of the world. Acts of value-positing from out of the will to power respond, in this view, to "the preservation and enhancement of trade interests and entertainments"³³ and to the narrow task of securing through the technological disclosure of beings a space within which to live (*Die Sicherung des Lebensraumes*). Only such a disclosure could secure this kind of life-enhancement (*ein Mittel zur Lebenssteigerung*).³⁴ When *Machenschaft* becomes a principle for life, as so happens in Nietzsche's consummation of metaphysics, modern life kills "all that (which) is in itself" and consumes and utterly "does away with Being."³⁵

Dale Allen Wilkerson
University of North Texas
U.S.A.

³² Niv: 9/NII: 39.

³³ Niii: 91/NII: 579.

³⁴ QCT: 73/H: 211.

³⁵ QCT: 107-108/H: 242-243.