

## Dinosein

*Many terrors (πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ) there are,  
None more terrifying (οὐδὲν δεινότερον) than human being.*

*Antigone 334*<sup>1</sup>

Richard Jebb translates *deina* as ‘wonders’: “Wonders are many, and none is more wonderful than man.”<sup>2</sup> Hugh Lloyd-Jones writes ‘formidable’: “Many things are formidable, and none more formidable than man!”<sup>3</sup> Elizabeth Wyckoff, unhappily: “Many the wonders but nothing walks stranger than man.”<sup>4</sup> Heidegger: ‘*das Unheimliche*,’ “the uncanny”: “Manifold is the uncanny, yet nothing uncanner than man bestirs itself, rising up beyond him.”<sup>5</sup>

“What a piece of work is man.” And what makes humanity a scary piece of work, the Chorus muses, is technology: the sail, the plow, the net, the yoke; the arts and skills of navigation, agriculture, hunting and fishing, animal husbandry, custom and law, medicine. “This” (τοῦτο) travels across even the gray sea by use of the winter wind (χειμερίῳ νότῳ, instrumental dative). It grinds away (ἀποτρύεταί) the Earth, plowing (ἀρότρων) back and forth year on year. Pan-hermeneutical man<sup>6</sup> (περιφραδῆς ἀνὴρ) catches birds, wild animals, and fishes of the sea in the meshes of his twisted snares (σπειραῖσι δικτυοκλώστοις). With his devices (μηχαναῖς) he overpowers (κρατεῖ) predators of plain and mountain. He puts under the yoke (ζυγῶν) horse and bull. He bootstrapped himself (ἐδιδάξατο) into voice (φθέγμα) and insight<sup>7</sup> (ἀνεμόεν

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0185%3Acard%3D332>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0186%3Acard%3D332>

<sup>3</sup> Loeb Classical Library, Volume 21 (1994) p. 35.

<sup>4</sup> *The Complete Greek Tragedies: Sophocles I* (ed. David Grene and Richmond Lattimore 1954) p. 174. Already by 1954 the walk-this-way gag was ancient, and not twenty years later Monty Python established the Ministry of Silly Walks. But nothing walks stranger than Watt: “Watt’s way of advancing due east, for example, was to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and at the same time to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and at the same time to fling out his left leg as far as possible towards the north, and then again to turn his bust as far as possible towards the north and to fling out his right leg as far as possible towards the south, and then again to turn his bust as far as possible towards the south and to fling out his left leg as far as possible towards the north, and so on, over and over again, many many times, until he reached his destination, and could sit down.” Samuel Beckett, *Watt* (1953).

<sup>5</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics* (tr. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt 2000) 156: *Vielfältig das Unheimliche, nichts doch über den Menschen hinaus Unheimlicheres ragend sich regt.*

<sup>6</sup> Heidegger: *der umher sinnende Mann*. ‘Pan-hermeneutical’ is Thomas Sheehan’s phrase.

<sup>7</sup> The figure is of thought rushing up like a gust of wind out of nowhere: ἀνεμόεν, ‘windy.’ As Heidegger says the “first of all questions” may pass through us like “a fleeting gust of wind,” *ein flüchtiger Windstoß*. *Introduction to Metaphysics* 2.

φρόνημα) and sociality in towns (ἀστυνόμους ὀργὰς)—his sanctuary from hillbilly squalor (δυσάυλων πάγων). All ways through are open to him (παντοπόρος); stumped at nothing (ἄπορος ἐπ’ οὐδέν) he moves on the future.

Almost nothing. “Hades alone he shall not manage to escape” (Αἶδα μόνον φεῦξιν οὐκ ἐπάξεται).

The next line is ironic: νόσων δ’ ἀμηχάνων φυγὰς ξυμπέφρασαι. Jebb translates “but from baffling diseases he has devised flights.” Lloyd-Jones: “and he has contrived escape from desperate maladies.” Wyckoff: “He has contrived refuge from illnesses once beyond all cure.” “Once” is not in the Greek. *Nosoi amēchanoi* can mean sicknesses beyond cure, full stop. The very action of this play – three suicides, Creon left mad with grief – and the deployment by Sophocles of *amēchanos*<sup>8</sup> in this verse warrants the reading in retrospect and in the broader context of Sophoclean tragedy that one escape which humanity has made its own is death itself; pressed into service of human need, suicide as technical fix.<sup>9</sup>

In effect, says Lacan, “Antigone herself has been declaring from the beginning: ‘I am dead and I desire death.’” She incarnates “the pure and simple desire of death as such. . . . this desire with its radically destructive character.”<sup>10</sup> Accord Bernard Williams: “At the bottom of it” – at the bottom of her “ready and massive self-assertion” – “seems to be not only a project for which she is prepared to die, but a project of dying.”<sup>11</sup>

Antigone plunges into the clash of totalizing forces. As a Labdacid she is thrown to throw herself between two great aggressions, the chthonic gods’ demand and the command of the *tyrannos*: she must bury the body and she must not.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> **μηχανή**: ‘contrivance,’ ‘device,’ ‘machine.’ The adjectival form means ‘manageable,’ ‘tractable;’ so any person or thing *a-mēchanos/a/on* is ‘unmanageable,’ ‘uncontrollable,’ ‘impossible;’ and *a-mēchana* sticks to Antigone like a Homeric epithet. “To those who face him, friends and enemies alike, the [Sophoclean] hero seems unreasonable almost to the point of madness, suicidally bold, impervious to argument, intransigent, angry; an impossible person whom only time can cure.” Bernard M. W. Knox, *The Heroic Temper: Studies in Sophoclean Tragedy* (1964) 28. In their opening dialogue Ismene rebukes Antigone for lusting after the impossible, ἀμηχάνων ἐρᾶς, and warns her that hounding the impossible crosses a line, θηρᾶν οὐ πρέπει τάμηχανα. *Amēchanon* portends catastrophe.

<sup>9</sup> At *Ajax* 690 the hero about to kill himself says *poreuteon*: ‘the way out must be taken.’ For Ajax death is *poros* from the *aporia* he is caught in: “not something to be borne.” See Bernard Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (1993) 85. *Nosos/noseō* is the thematic vertebra of *The Women of Trachis*. After its first occurrence at line 435 Sophocles deploys it 14 more times in the remaining 840 lines, on average once every 56. The assisted suicide of Hercules, lifted still-living onto his funeral pyre, is the deliverance he contrives from unbearable *nosos*.

<sup>10</sup> *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book VII, The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960* (ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, tr. Dennis Porter 1992) 281, 282, 283.

<sup>11</sup> *Shame and Necessity* 86.

<sup>12</sup> In Aeschylus’ *Seven Against Thebes* (immediate prequel to the action of *Antigone*) as soon as he hears the name of Polyneices, his brother and now mortal enemy, Eteocles “becomes once again the Labdacid of legend, the man of the noble *genē*, the great royal families of the past that are weighed down by ancestral defilement and curses. .

That they **are** aggressions – that it’s aggression all the way down – Heidegger is certain here:

“*deinon* means the violent in the sense of one who needs to use violence—and does not just have violence at his disposal but is violence-doing, insofar as using violence is the basic trait [*Grundzug*] not just of his doing but of his Dasein.” And “*technē* characterizes the *deinon*, the violence-doing, in its decisive basic trait [*entscheidenden Grundzug*]; for to do violence is to need to use violence against the over-whelming: the knowing struggle to set Being, which was formerly closed off, into what appears as beings.” “Only when we grasp that the need to use violence in language, in understanding, in constructing, in building, co-creates . . . the violent act of laying out the paths into the beings that envelop humanity in their sway—only then do we understand the uncanniness of all that does violence.”<sup>13</sup>

*Technē* characterizes the *deinon*, the violence-doing. Violence-doing (*die Gewalttätige*) is the need to use violence (*das Gewalt-brauchen*) against the super-violence (*das Über-wältigende*) – whatever gets in our way, whether “the sea, the earth, the animal.”<sup>14</sup> The setting of Being into what appears **as** beings (*in das Erscheinende als das Seiende*) is the operation of the as-structure; taking-as is the technology of Dasein’s world-forming. The hand, says Aristotle, is the tool of tools. Taking-as, for Heidegger, is the *technē* of *technai*. (But not, he will insist, the *essence* of technology; *technē* remains ‘technological.’)

The next strophe of the ode begins: σοφόν τι τὸ μηχανόεν τέχνας ὑπὲρ ἐλπίδ’ ἔχων: “possessing savvy” (*sophon ti echōn*), “that is to say the deployment of skill (*to mēchanoen technas*) surpassing what one would have thought possible (*hyper elpida*, ‘beyond expectation’).”

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. . . The murderous madness . . . envelops him in the dark cloud of *atē*. The madness of Eteocles is . . . identified with the malignant power of defilement that, once engendered by ancient crimes, is transmitted from one generation to the next right down the Labdacid line.” Jean-Pierre Vernant, “Tensions and Ambiguities in Greek Tragedy,” repr. in J.-P. Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece* (tr. Janet Lloyd 1988) 35. The miasma of Labdacid *atē* enfolds Antigone when her two brothers kill each other.

<sup>13</sup> *Introduction to Metaphysics* 160, 170-171, 168.

<sup>14</sup> *Id.* 166. The need summons justification. Aristotle had his characteristic account: “If therefore nature makes nothing without purpose or in vain, it follows that nature has made all the animals for the sake of human being.” *Politics* 1256b (Barker translation). (“Man is a Nazi to the animals.” Isaac Bashevis Singer.) Spinoza sets out the general warrant: “Save men we do not know any particular thing in nature in whose mind we may rejoice or which we may join to us in bonds of friendship or any other kind of association: therefore the consideration of our own advantage does not demand that we preserve whatever exists in nature besides men. Instead, it teaches us that we should preserve or destroy it according to its usefulness, or adapt it to our use in any manner we please.” *Ethics*, Book IV, Prop. 37, Note I (Elwes translation). (And a Nazi to everything else.) Cf. Lacan: “Antigone appears as *autonomos*, as a pure and simple relationship of the human being to that of which he miraculously happens to be the bearer, namely, the signifying cut that confers on him the indomitable power of being what he is in the face of everything that may oppose him.” *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* 282.

There is no way out of this hegemony of techno-sein. Heidegger reads *pantoporos aporos* together as oxymoron: *Überall hinausfahrend unterwegs, erfahrungslos ohne Ausweg kommt er zum Nichts*. “Everywhere trying out, underway; untried, with no way out he comes to Nothing.”<sup>15</sup>

Heidegger asserts the paradox that our unlimited versatility (*pantoporos*) traps us in its self-generated cul de sac (*aporos*):

“For when human beings are everywhere underway in this sense, their having no way out does not arise in the external sense that they run up against outward restrictions and cannot get any farther. Somehow or another they precisely *can* always go farther into the and-so-forth. Their not having a way out consists, instead, in the fact that they are continually thrown back on the paths that they themselves have laid out; they get bogged down in their routes, get stuck in ruts, and by getting stuck they draw in the circle of their world, get enmeshed in seeming [*im Schein verstrickt*], and thus shut themselves out of Being [*vom Sein aussperrt*]. In this way they turn around and around within their own circle. They can turn everything aside that threatens this circuit. They can turn every skill to the place where it is best applied. The violence-doing, which originally creates the routes, begets in itself its own unessence [*das eigene Unwesen*], the versatility of many twists and turns, which in itself is the lack of ways out, so much so that it shuts itself out from the way of meditation [*Weg der Besinnung*] on the seeming within which it drifts around.”<sup>16</sup>

Heidegger calls the human niche ‘world.’ We are everywhere underway with technology and can always go farther into the and-so-forth. The as-structure cranks continuously, churning out more and more interpretations, ever more beings unceasingly modifying our niche – the totality of referential relations (*Bewandtnisganzheit*), the recursive care-structure. By this, Heidegger believes, we shut ourselves out of Being. That we **can** have access to Being is essential to Heidegger’s paradox that our unlimited versatility limits us, bars our way to the other thinking, *Besinnung*. Of course taking our versatility as an *aporia* comes about only by another turn of the as-crank. Taking-as is our distinctive metabolism, our specific necessity; without it no ‘go.’ We are thrown *technē*/taking-as.<sup>17</sup>

The Chorus says that our iterated ventures into the and-so-forth sometimes go badly, sometimes well: *τὸτὲ μὲν κακόν, ἄλλοτ’ ἐπ’ ἐσθλὸν ἔρπει*. Jebb translates this and the preceding line (*sophon ti echōn*) as “Possessing resourceful skill, a subtlety beyond expectation

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<sup>15</sup> *Id.* 157; H.’s gloss at 162.

<sup>16</sup> *Id.* 168.

<sup>17</sup> “I cannot *not* make sense of everything I meet because I cannot *not* be a priori opened up. By our very nature we are both the demand for and the reason for intelligibility, for a meaningfulness that determines us and yet has no reality apart from us. And there is no way out but death.” Thomas Sheehan, *Making Sense of Heidegger: A Paradigm Shift* (2015) 113.

he moves now to evil, now to good.” With *to mēchanoen technas* the human serpent makes its trail (*herpei*). Taking-as, *technē*, is the means of and-so-forthing; but our management of that means, *to mēchanoen*, sways unpredictably with mixed results.

The Chorus’s final take on human being starts with the next two and a half lines:

νόμους γεραίρων χθονὸς θεῶν τ’ ἔνορκον δίκαν,  
ὕψίπολις: ἄπολις ὅτω τὸ μὴ καλὸν  
ξύνεστι τόλμας χάριν

“Whoever respects the customs of the land and the gods’ oath-grounding order is *hypsipolis*.” The alpha of the next word, *apolis*, has privative force; the *hypsi-* of *hypsipolis* has augmentive force; an intensifier, ‘*echtst.*’ Rule-followers, norm-respecters, and promise-keepers are ‘hypsipolitan’: thoroughly socialized, conforming, conventional, practicing the bourgeois virtues, docile under the yoke of *nomos* and *dikē*, castrated, safe.

Whereas *apolis* is whoever acts ugly (τὸ μὴ καλὸν) – kicks against the pricks – for the sake of boldness (τόλμας χάριν). The upstart, the ready and massive self-asserter is a marauder, *apolis*.<sup>18</sup>

Of this sort, the *apolis*, the Chorus declares, “Never may he share my home, never think my thoughts, who does these things!” (Jebb) This line is the Chorus’s shudder at the City’s recent narrow escape from the hands of The Seven led by Polyneices, the royal without a realm. Ironically then at this point ‘Enter Antigone, under guard.’ Antigone *amēchana* will bring about precisely what Polyneices *apolis* could not, the decapitation of Thebes.

It is a misunderstanding, Heidegger claims, that the Chorus’s deprecation of the *apolis* is an implicit rejection of Being-human (*Menschsein*) “as overweening and audacious, in the derogatory sense;” appraising it “according to some table of values that is attached to it

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<sup>18</sup> The *apolis* phenomenon is primeval, a manifestation of *ἄτη*, the root of Homeric epic and Athenian tragedy: “On their list of serious moral transgressions, hunter-gatherers regularly proscribe the enactment of behavior that is politically overbearing. They are aiming at upstarts who threaten the autonomy of other group members, and upstartism takes various forms. An upstart may act the bully simply because he is disposed to dominate others, or he may become selfishly greedy when it is time to share meat, or he may want to make off with another man’s wife by threat or use of force. He (or sometimes she) may also be a respected leader who suddenly begins to issue direct orders, or a shaman who selfishly uses supernatural connections to manipulate and exploit others for material or sexual gain—or maliciously to cause them serious damage. An upstart may simply take on airs of superiority, or may aggressively put others down and thereby violate the group’s idea of how its main political actors should be treating one another. An upstart can also be a recidivist murderer or a homicidal psychotic. In any of these instances the upstart violates a set of values in which people believe deeply.” Christopher Boehm, *Hierarchy in the Forest: The Evolution of Egalitarian Behavior* (1999) 43.

externally;” recommending “a non-violent resignation in the sense of the cultivation of undisturbed comfort.”<sup>19</sup>

He concedes the text can support such a reading.<sup>20</sup> Yet “Insofar as the chorus turns *against* the uncanniest, it says that this manner of Being is *not* the everyday one [*die alltägliche*]. Such Dasein cannot be discerned in just any ordinary activity and conduct.” Rather the Chorus here gives evidence that this way of Being, the violence-doing of the *apolis*, is the real deal, the true Jacob: “in their defensive attitude [these lines] are the direct and complete confirmation of the uncanniness of the human essence [*der Unheimlichkeit des Menschenwesens*].” With that confirmation “the saying of the ode swings back to its inception.”<sup>21</sup> As Heidegger interprets the ode: *deinon* = uncanniness = violence-doing = *apolis* = the human essence.

Five years earlier Freud had said the same. Describing the conditions of civilization he sounds as if he is half-remembering the same stasimon from *Antigone*. Freud writes,

“a country has a high level of civilization if we find that in it everything that can assist man in his exploitation of the land and protect him against the forces of nature – everything, in short, that is of use to him – is attended to and properly ordered [*gepflegt und zweckmäßig*]. In such countries, rivers that threaten to flood the land must have their courses regulated and their waters channeled to areas of drought. The soil must be carefully tilled and planted with crops that it is suited to support; the mineral wealth below ground must be diligently brought to the surface and used to make the necessary tools and implements. Means of transport must be frequent, fast and reliable. Dangerous wild beasts [*wilde und gefährlichen Tiere*] must be exterminated [*ausgerottet*], and the breeding of domestic animals must flourish.”<sup>22</sup>

“Order is a kind of compulsion to repeat.”<sup>23</sup> Achieving order in everything that is of use to us requires us first to order ourselves, because

“human beings are not gentle creatures in need of love, at most able to defend themselves if attacked; on the contrary, they can count a powerful share of aggression among their instinctual endowments.<sup>24</sup> Hence, their neighbor is not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to take out their aggression on him, to exploit his labour without recompense, to use him sexually without his consent, to take possession of his goods, to humiliate him and cause him pain, to torture and kill him. . . . As a rule, this cruel

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<sup>19</sup> *Introduction to Metaphysics* 175.

<sup>20</sup> *Diese Meinung könnte sich sogar durch den Schluß des Gesanges in ihrem Recht bestätigt finden.*

<sup>21</sup> *Id.* 175-176.

<sup>22</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* [1930] (tr. David McLintock 2002) 29.

<sup>23</sup> *Id.* 30. *Die Ordnung ist eine Art Wiederholungszwang.*

<sup>24</sup> *er zu seinen Triebbegabungen auch einen mächtigen Anteil von Aggressionsneigung rechnen darf.*

[*grausame*] aggression waits for some provocation or puts itself at the service of a different aim, which could be attained by milder means. If the circumstances favour it, if the psychical counter-forces that would otherwise inhibit it have ceased to operate, it manifests itself spontaneously and reveals man as a savage beast [*wilde Bestie*] that has no thought of sparing its own kind.”<sup>25</sup>

In his eighth decade, after a lifetime of listening to intimate murmurs from a throng of patients, Freud says he is no longer able to understand “how we [psychoanalysts] could have ignored the ubiquity of non-erotic aggression and destruction and failed to accord it its due place in the interpretation of life.” He affirms his considered belief that “the tendency to aggression is an original, autonomous disposition of human being.” Indeed, “I can no longer think in any other way.”<sup>26</sup>

“It is the existence of this tendency to aggression,” he writes, “that obliges civilization to go to such lengths.” Because of our fundamental hostility (*primären Feindseligkeit*) toward one another, this *Aggressionslust*, this destructive drive (*Destruktionstrieb*) which is itself an indestructible feature of human nature (*unzerstörbare Zug der menschlichen Natur*) – because of this “Civilization has to make every effort to limit man’s aggressive drives [*Aggressionstrieben*] and hold down their manifestations through the formation of psychical reactions.”<sup>27</sup>

“What means does civilization employ in order to inhibit the aggression it faces, to render it harmless and possibly eliminate it?” Freud’s answer foreshadows Heidegger’s formulation: violence-doing is the need to use violence against the super-violence. ‘Super’ because violence is a decisive (*entscheidenden*) indestructible (*unzerstörbare*) basic trait (*Grundzug*) of Dasein. The super-violence of the destructive drive calls forth the need to use violence against it. Freud says what happens is

“Something very curious, which we would not have suspected, but which is plain to see. The aggression is introjected, internalized, actually sent back to where it came from; in other words, it is directed against the individual’s own ego. There it is taken over by a portion of the ego that sets itself up as the super-ego, in opposition to the rest, and is now prepared, as ‘conscience,’ to exercise the same severe aggression [*strenge Aggressionsbereitschaft*] against the ego that the latter would have liked to direct towards other individuals. . . . In this way civilization overcomes [*bewältigt*] the dangerous aggressivity [*die gefährliche Aggressionslust*] of the individual, by weakening him, disarming him and setting

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<sup>25</sup> *Civilization* 48.

<sup>26</sup> *Id.* 56-57, 58, 56.

<sup>27</sup> *Id.* 48-49. *die Aggressionsneigung eine ursprüngliche, selbständige Triebanlage des Menschen ist.*

up an internal authority to watch over him, like a garrison in a conquered town.”<sup>28</sup>

Thus “Moderated and tamed – aim-inhibited as it were – the destructive drive, when directed towards objects, must provide the ego with the satisfaction of its vital needs and with control [*Herrschaft*] over nature.”<sup>29</sup> Civilization is sublimated aggression, aggression redirected against nature for the sake of human being; often enough against human beings for the sake of civilization; that is, for the sake of satisfying the destructive drive in its sublimated form; a satisfaction “linked with an extraordinarily high degree of narcissistic enjoyment.”<sup>30</sup>

Therefore the question for humanity, Freud concludes, is whether

“the development of its civilization will manage to overcome the disturbance of communal life caused by the human drive for aggression and self-destruction. Perhaps in this context the present age is worthy of special interest. Human beings have made such strides in controlling the forces of nature that, with the help of these forces, they will have no difficulty in exterminating one another, down to the last man. They know this, and it is this knowledge that accounts for much of their present disquiet, unhappiness and anxiety.”<sup>31</sup>

With the Great War in memory Freud considers the danger to be human aggression directed against other humans. He does not consider the possibility of human aggression against nature destroying the conditions for the continued viability of the species.<sup>32</sup> Of course both may operate simultaneously, reinforcing each other synergistically.

Leo Bersani comments on Freud’s text that

“Psychoanalysis gives a persuasive account not of human adjustment but of what makes us unfit for civilized life. This should at the very least cast some doubt on the validity of *any* notion of psychoanalytic ‘cure’. The clinical practice of psychoanalysis is grounded in a theory that tells us why we can’t be cured. The ‘illness’ in question takes on great anecdotal variety in individual lives . . . but our blind destructive fury is an intractable psychic function, and positioning in the world, rather than a deviation from some (imaginary) psychic normality.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> *Id.* 60-61.

<sup>29</sup> *Id.* 57.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* mit einem außerordentlich hohen narzißtischen Genuß verknüpft ist.

<sup>31</sup> *Id.* 81.

<sup>32</sup> Maybe a glimmer in this remark: “We are indignant and call it ‘barbarous’ – which is the opposite of ‘civilized’ – when we find the paths in the Vienna woods littered with discarded papers.” *Civilization* 30. What would Freud say of 4900 million metric tons of plastic waste in landfills and the environment? See Roland Geyer, Jenna R. Jambeck, and Kara Lavender Law, “Production, use, and fate of all plastics ever made,” 3 *Science Advances*, July 19, 2017: <http://advances.sciencemag.org/content/3/7/e1700782.full>

<sup>33</sup> “Introduction” to *Civilization and its Discontents* (2002) xxi-xxii.

Hyper-aggressivity, intraspecific slaughter, and devastation of the natural world are not symptoms of an aberration we might somehow correct. We don't have the plague, we are the plague. Our blind destructive fury is a basic trait, *Grundzug*; intractable, *amēchanos*. Human being organized into civilization is the *apolis* of nature, the massively self-asserting upstart. Civilization is itself "the overwhelming," *das Über-wältigende*, and from the story so far it is *aporos*, a dead end.

In lectures of 1949 at Bremen Heidegger again takes up "the monstrosity" – *das Ungeheure* – "that reigns here [*hier waltet*]." What reigns here is *Ge-Stell*, 'positionality.' Heidegger deploys the verb *stellen* – 'to place, position, set' – to mean "to challenge forth, to demand, to compel toward self-positioning." This positioning takes the form of "conscription," *die Gestellung*, and "ordering, requisitioning," *Bestellen*. His opening illustration works itself up into a convulsive fit of anaphora:

"A tract of land is imposed upon [*gestellt*], namely for the coal and ore that subsists in it. . . . Through such requisitioning [*Bestellen*] the land becomes a coal reserve, the soil an ore depository. . . . In the meantime, even the tending of the fields [*die Feldbestellung*] has gone over to the same requisitioning [*Be-stellen*] that imposes upon the air for nitrogen, the soil for coal and ore, the ore for uranium, the uranium for atomic energy, and the latter for orderable destruction [*bestellbare Zerstörung*]. Agriculture is now a mechanized food industry, in essence the same as the destruction of corpses in the gas chambers and extermination camps, the same as the blockading and starving of countries, the same as the production of hydrogen bombs."<sup>34</sup>

Positionality is violence-doing at planetary scale. Requisitioning "attacks [*befällt*] everything that is: Nature and history, humans and divinities."

"It wrests everything together into orderability. It reaps everything that presences into orderability and is thus the gathering of this reaping. Positionality is a plundering [*Geraff*]. . . . the collected positioning of positionality is the gathering of self-circulating impulse [*Triebens*]. Positionality is drive [*Getriebe*]. The plundering reaps and indeed reaps away into the drive of industry. Positionality essences as the plundering drive that orders the constant orderability of the complete standing reserve." "This violence of requisitioning

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<sup>34</sup> "Positionality," in Martin Heidegger, *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures: Insight Into That Which Is and Basic Principles of Thinking* (tr. Andrew J. Mitchell 2012) 26-27. Apart from its destruction of land habitat agribusiness has also proved lethal to ocean life. The 2017 dead zone in the Gulf of Mexico was the largest recorded, the area of New Jersey, which researchers believe to be an underestimate; <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/2017/08/gulf-mexico-hypoxia-water-quality-dead-zone/>

[*Diese Gewalt des Bestellens*], outstripping everything, drags the particular acts of requisitioning only further behind itself.”<sup>35</sup>

“Positionality is the essence of technology.”<sup>36</sup> And from *Introduction to Metaphysics* we know that *technē* characterizes the *deinon*, the violence-doing, in its decisive basic trait.

He claims now in the Bremen lectures that although positionality is the essence of technology, “Yet the essence of technology is itself nothing technological.”<sup>37</sup> Heidegger says here once more what he had said in his Nietzsche lectures and will say again in the letter to Jünger six years hence: *Dieses Wesen ist nichts Menschliches*. “This essence is nothing human.”<sup>38</sup> Positionality, the essence of technology, is nothing merely human.<sup>39</sup> Requisitioning is “no mere *human* doing, even if the human belongs to the carrying out of such a requisitioning.” “Requisitioning is no human deed.”<sup>40</sup>

Positionality is the essence of technology. And “The essence of positionality . . . is *the danger* [die Gefahr].” Not because threatening and dangerous effects can arise from technology. “The danger is positionality, not as technology, but rather as *beyng* [Seyn]. What essences of danger is *beyng* itself insofar as it pursues [*nachstellt*] the truth of its essence with the forgetting of this essence. Because the essence of technology is nothing less than *beyng* itself.”<sup>41</sup>

What is this non-human essence, *beyng*?

“That which is, is in no way this or that being. What authentically is—and this means properly dwelling and essencing in the *Is*—is solely *beyng*. Only *beyng* ‘is,’ only in *beyng* and as *beyng* does there take place what the ‘is’ names; that which is, is *beyng* from out of its essence.”<sup>42</sup>

The human in human being is ‘taking-as.’ Being on the other hand is the unconcealment (manifesting, ‘presencing,’ ‘letting’) to the human of what is for taking-as – beings. Being is the possibilizer (‘It gives,’ ‘It lets,’ ‘the open,’ ‘the clearing,’ ‘*beyng*’) and the human is the actualizer. Being grants, human takes and makes. Taking-as is technology, *beyng* is the essence of technology.

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<sup>35</sup> “Positionality” 30, 31, 29.

<sup>36</sup> *Id.* 38.

<sup>37</sup> *Id.* 33.

<sup>38</sup> NIETZSCHE. *Volume IV: Nihilism* (ed. David Farrell Krell, tr. Frank A. Capuzzi 1982) 232-233; “On the Question of Being,” in *Pathmarks* (ed. tr. William McNeill 1998) 300.

<sup>39</sup> “Positionality” 37. *Ge-Stell, das Wesen der Technik, nichts nur Menschliches sein*.

<sup>40</sup> *Id.* 29. *kein bloß menschliches Tun ist . . . Das Bestellen ist kein menschliches Gemächte*.

<sup>41</sup> “The Danger,” *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures* 59.

<sup>42</sup> “The Turn,” *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures* 70.

Heidegger illustrates this schema with a thematic pair, *Phusis* and *Thesis*: *Phusis* is to *Thesis* as being is to taking-as.

“*Phusis* is the bringing-here-forth, clearing [*lichtend*] and emerging from itself. . . . Bringing-here-forth, thought in a Greek manner in the sense of *Phusis*, means to bring here from concealment forth into unconcealment. This bringing means letting something arrive and presence of its own accord. Only when *Phusis* reigns is *Thesis* possible and necessary. For only when there is something present that is brought about by a bringing-here-forth can human positioning, *Thesis*, then arrange upon [*hingestellt*] such a presence (i.e., the stone) and out of this presence (stone) now something else that presences [*ein anderes Anwesendes*] (a stone staircase and its steps), here among what is already present (the native rocks and soil). . . . *What stands here through Thesis essences otherwise [west anders] than what is brought forth here by Phusis.*”<sup>43</sup>

Again two kinds of essencing, human and non-human: *Phusis* does not bring forth “through a human production” (*nicht durch ein menschliches Herstellen*); it has the character of a setting-up (*eines Stellens*) “which is not a human accomplishment” (*das nicht eine menschliche Leistung ist*).<sup>44</sup>

*Phusis* is “the letting presence of what presences in unconcealment. The letting presence of what presences is the being of beings [*Sein des Seienden*].”<sup>45</sup>

*Phusis* is the first avatar of being: “being at the beginning of its destiny [*in der Frühe des Seynsgeschickes*] had illuminated itself as *Phusis*.” The relationship between being and positioning “was already announced in the first epoch of the history of being.” “At the dawn of the destiny of being” [*in der Frühe des Seinsgeschickes*] it is shown “that a *Thesis*-character essences in being, i.e., in *Phusis*.”<sup>46</sup>

Once more: the present epoch’s danger arises from “being itself insofar as it pursues the truth of its essence with the forgetting of this essence.”

We can turn every skill to the place where it is best applied. Heidegger applies his skill to the danger of our epoch and contrives something he calls “the turn,” *die Kehre*.

He invokes this verse of Hölderlin’s:

But where the danger is, there grows  
also what saves.

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<sup>43</sup> “The Danger” 60-61.

<sup>44</sup> *Id.* 61.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> *Id.* 62, 60, 60.

Building out from the poet's saying Heidegger writes:

“The self-refusal of the truth of being, pursuing itself with forgetfulness, harbors a still-ungranted grace [*Gunst*]: that this self-pursuit turn itself, that through such a turn forgetfulness turn itself about and become guardianship of the essence of being, instead of letting this essence lapse into dissemblance. In the essence of danger there essences and dwells a grace, namely the grace of the turn of the forgetting of being into the truth of being. In the essence of danger, where it is as the danger, there is the turn to guardianship, there is this guardianship itself, there is that which saves of being [*das Rettende des Seyns*].”<sup>47</sup>

Here Heidegger comes closer in sensibility to Aeschylus than Sophocles, whose vision of human existence, Knox remarks, “differs fundamentally from that of Aeschylus.” Human suffering and infliction of suffering in the all-embracing vision of Aeschylus “has a meaning, even a beneficent purpose . . . The violence, Aeschylus has his chorus sing, is in some way the grace of god.”<sup>48</sup>

With the turn Heidegger holds out to us amidst the banality of our violence the grace of vocation. “The great essence of the human lies in its belonging to the essence of being. It is needed by the essence of being so as to guard it in its truth.”<sup>49</sup> This is Heidegger's kerygma, his variant of ‘God loves us;’ his denial that human existence is a matter of indifference except to ourselves; his affirmation that we are being's necessary complement.

In a note in preparation for *The Birth of Tragedy* Nietzsche wrote that the Greeks “knew the terror and the horror of existence [*die Schrecken und Entsetzlichkeiten des Daseins*] but they covered it, in order to live . . . . To see one's existence, simply as it is, in a glorifying mirror and to guard oneself with this mirror against the Medusa – this was the genius-like strategy of the Hellenic ‘will’ in order to be able to live at all.”<sup>50</sup> Heidegger's projection of human existence as the guardian of the truth of being is just such a glorifying mirror: a bold stroke of *technē*. Nietzsche recounts Paul's similar strategy of repurposing a certain prophet's antinomian teaching into the weapon Paul needed to defeat the overwhelming Law: “What essentially happened then is rather this: his *mind* suddenly became clear: ‘it is *unreasonable*’, he says to himself, ‘to persecute precisely this Christ! For here is the way out [*der Ausweg*], here is perfect revenge, here and nowhere else do I have and hold the *destroyer of the law!* [*Vernichter*

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<sup>47</sup> “The Turn” 69.

<sup>48</sup> *The Heroic Temper* 4.

<sup>49</sup> “The Turn” 66.

<sup>50</sup> “The Dionysian Worldview” [1870], 13 *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 81, 85 (1997) (tr. Claudia Crawford). *Der Grieche kannte die Schrecken und Entsetzlichkeiten des Daseins, aber er verhüllte sie, um leben zu können. Cf.* Lacan: “Such is the fright that seizes man when he discovers the true face of his power that he turns away from it in the very act – which is his act – of laying it bare.” “The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis,” in *Écrits* (tr. Bruce Fink with Héloïse Fink and Russell Grigg 2006) 201.

des Gesetzes]”<sup>51</sup> Heidegger was moved not to destroy the technology that so oppressed him but rather to overturn its subordination to human life: “it always appears ever again as though technology were a means in the hand of the human. In truth, however, the essence of the human is now ordered to give a hand to the essence of technology.”<sup>52</sup> In his late period Nietzsche wrote: “With the aid of such inventions [gods and intermediaries high and low], life then played the trick [*das Kunststück*] it has always known how to play, of justifying itself, justifying its ‘evil’; nowadays it might need rather different inventions to help it [*andrer Hilfs-Erfindungen*].”<sup>53</sup> With gods and daimons now defunct Heidegger’s reinterpreting of human life as the *cultus* of being is the kind of innovative artifice which Nietzsche foresaw might be needed. Among his *Nachlass* is a fragment from 1888: “Truth is ugly. We have art lest we perish of the truth.”<sup>54</sup> It seemed to Nietzsche a fact that, in Williams’s words, “anyone who really understood and held in his mind the horrors of the world would be crushed or choked by them.”<sup>55</sup> Rather than reworking some fable of a redeeming sense to it all Heidegger’s art redirects awareness onto the source, the upwelling, and transfigures human existence into the grateful accomplice-witness to inhuman, needy ontophany.<sup>56</sup>

“Philosophy,” Williams observes, “is still deeply attached to giving good news.”<sup>57</sup> And we are deeply disposed to receive it. Were the human being no more than a thinking animal, Nietzsche reminds us, “truth would drive him to despair and annihilation . . . All that is proper to man, however, is faith in the attainable truth, in the ever approaching, confidence-inspiring illusion.”<sup>58</sup> Equally proper to human being is its distinctive *plastische Kraft* in Nietzsche’s phrase, the *technē* to fabricate such enabling illusion in the first place; to maintain it, repair it, and renew it on the fly; to keep moving on the and-so-forth stumped at nothing. Almost.

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<sup>51</sup> *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality* [1887] (ed. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, tr. R. J. Hollingdale 1997) Book I, sec. 68, p. 68.

<sup>52</sup> “The Turn” 64.

<sup>53</sup> *On the Genealogy of Morality* [1887] (ed. Keith Ansell-Pearson, tr. Carol Diethe rev. ed. 2006) Second essay, sec. 7, p. 44.

<sup>54</sup> *The Will to Power* (tr. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale 1968) § 822. *Die Wahrheit ist häßlich: wir haben die Kunst, damit wir nicht an der Wahrheit zu Grunde gehn.*

<sup>55</sup> Bernard Williams, “Introduction to *The Gay Science*,” in *The Sense of the Past: Essays in the History of Philosophy* (2006) 318.

<sup>56</sup> E.g.: “Heidegger’s way is indeed primarily a ‘meditative thinking’” which invites us “to enter into a deep, rich, serene contemplative and mindful comportment towards all beings and things in their temporal unfolding. . . . and we bear, we bring, to all – we announce – this most marvellous happening (*Ereignis*) of all beings and things.” Richard Capobianco, *Heidegger’s Way of Being* (2014) 96, 97.

<sup>57</sup> Bernard Williams, “*The Women of Trachis*: Fictions, Pessimism, Ethics,” in *The Sense of the Past* 49.

<sup>58</sup> “On the Pathos of Truth” [1872] in *Nietzsche on Truth and Untruth: Selected Writings* (ed. tr. Taylor Carman 2010) 13-14. *Dem Menschen geziemt aber allein der Glaube an die erreichbare Wahrheit, an die zutrauensvoll sich nahende Illusion.*