

Catchwords: On Heidegger and “Americanism”

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Abstract

Heidegger uses the term "Americanism" to refer to a certain technological-political trend which involves the inability to think the essence of technology. This would also involve the oblivion of the question of Being. His fear of both Americanism and Communism is what led him to support the National Socialist movement. Both the critics and followers of Heidegger gloss over his criticism of Americanism. Yet Heidegger's writings on this subject remain important for us. First, because Americanism would refer to what we now call Globalization, and second, because it addresses the very possibility of philosophical thinking. This paper tries to push Heidegger's criticism to the very extreme in order to discover where its logic begins to strain, and thereby to generate new insights concerning the relationship between technology and thinking.

Keywords: Globalization; Heidegger; Americanism; technology.

Introduction

Questions of place are beginning to haunt me. I find myself drawn to the old Kantian questions I used to take for granted. What can I know? What ought I to do? What can I hope for? And it is not so much a matter concern for truth or morals that draws me, it is more importantly I think a matter of place.

Where are we? What are we pursuing as professors and students, writers and readers of philosophy? What loyalties to we have to our identities: our culture, our nation, our time, our planet? It is quite easy to lose one's way in these questions.

Isn't philosophy itself, as Kant's questions seem to suggest, a matter of finding one's place? Notice that this would give philosophy an added significance by connecting it back with the function of all myth and religion.

And so where are we? In 1935 Heidegger wrote in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*.

This Europe, in its ruinous blindness, for ever on the point of cutting its own throat, lies today in a great pincers, squeezed between Russia on one side and America on the other. From a metaphysical point of view, Russia and America

are the same; the same dreary technological frenzy, the same unrestricted organization of the average man. At a time when the furthestmost corner of the globe has been conquered by technology and opened to economic exploitation; when any incident whatever, regardless of where or when it occurs, can be communicated to the rest of the world at any desired speed ... when time has ceased to be anything other than velocity, instantaneousness, and simultaneity, and time as history has vanished from the lives of all peoples; when a boxer is regarded as a nation's great man; when mass meetings attended by millions are looked on as a triumph - then, yes then, through all this turmoil, a question still haunts us like a specter: What for? - Whither? - And what then? (1959: 39)

This quote is all about place. Place in the history of Being, national place, and place of man with reference to technology. Notice that the questions at the end distantly echo Kant's three questions of philosophy. The threat of the oblivion of Being calls for a kind of questioning, yet the very possibility of this questioning is threatened by destruction. The preservation of German thinking would be the preservation of authentic thinking while the triumph of Americanism would also be the death of this authentic thinking which is alone the locus of salvation.

Notice the fascinating and serious resonances this sounds forth today. Yet both friends and foes of Heidegger tend to avoid this problem. We need to take it more seriously. We need to follow Heidegger's reflections and criticisms of what he calls Americanism (or what we might now call Globalization) all the way to the end. We need to see the concerns which animate these reflections because they all not swept aside simply by dismissing Heidegger because of his political involvements.

The Gigantic

Heidegger claimed that the 'essence of technology' is not technological. That is, it is rooted in the history of Western thinking, specifically with the Greeks. The essence of technology is related to what Heidegger calls the "gigantic." He began to discuss this in 1937 in his work the *Beiträge* with respect to Being itself. There he defined the gigantic as the domination of Being by machination, calculation, and the quantification of quality, what Heidegger would later try to capture with the word "gestell" or the enframing of Being. This domination also manifests itself in the subject/object distinction which is he considered as a stage in the historical concealment of Being. Not only does this "gigantic" essence of technology violate the true essence of Being by quantifying it, but it itself creates its own illusion of quality.

By virtue of their own self-consciousness, those who enact the unfolding of re-presentation (of the world as image) do not know anything of this essence of the quantitative – and thus know nothing of the history that prepares for and completes the dominion of the quantitative. (1999: 95)

From this distorted perspective, Being can only appear to be the most general and emptiest concept because we measure it through quantification. We experience the world through representations, or as mediated by images. We see this also in Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, when Nietzsche claimed that "theoretical man" is a product of the complete triumph of the Apollonian representation over the Dionysian – a triumph initiated by the figure of Socrates.

In his 1938 essay, *The Age of the World Picture* Heidegger described the Gigantic as part of the destiny of Western man.

A sign of this event is that everywhere and in the most varied forms and disguises the gigantic is making its appearance. In so doing, it evidences itself simultaneously in the tendency toward the increasingly small. We have only to think of numbers in atomic physics. The gigantic presses forward in a form that actually seems to make it disappear - in the annihilation of great distances by the airplane, in the setting before us of foreign and remote worlds in their everydayness, which is produced at random through radio by a flick of the hand. Yet we think too little if we find that the gigantic, in the form of continual not-ever-having-been-here-yet, originates only in a blind mania for exaggeration and excelling. We do not think at all if we believe we have explained this phenomenon of the gigantic with the catchword "Americanism" (1977: 135)

In the appendix he goes on to explain:

Americanism is something European. It is an as-yet-uncomprehended species of the gigantic, the gigantic that is itself still inchoate and does not as yet originate at all out of the complete and gathered metaphysical essence of the modern age. The American interpretation of Americanism by means of pragmatism still remains outside the metaphysical realm. (1977: 153)

Americanism then would be a species of the Gigantic which is blind to its own essence. There is a break, a disruption which does not allow its thinking to trace its way back to the origin, the essence of technology and the gigantic's awareness of itself. This sounds quite similar to what Rousseau described in *The Discourse on*

Inequality when he observed that the development of the arts and sciences prevents an authentic understanding of human nature.¹ Our most admired accomplishments – civilization, enlightenment, technology – trap us into a way of thinking where we are unable to think the essence of our own thinking; we have no grounding, no place, we are disengaged from our own origins. An interesting example of this disengagement can be seen in his lecture course *Parmenides* when Heidegger discussed the typewriter.

The typewriter veils the essence of writing and of the script. It withdraws from man the essential rank of the hand, without man's experiencing this withdrawal appropriately and recognizing that it has transformed the relation of Being to his essence/ The typewriter is a signless cloud, i.e., a withdrawing concealment in the midst of its very obtrusiveness, and through it the relation of Being to man is transformed. (1992: 85)

Thinking (Denken) would be related to the hand. The hand which shakes another in a gesture of thanks (Gedanken) which reflects an authentic relationship of thinking to Being in the form of a gratefulness for *what is* or *what is given* (es gibt) by Being. The withdraw of the hand though Typewriter (and Computer) thinking would be a thinking withdrawn from its origin, uprooted from its connection with Being.²

Bloodlines

¹ Rousseau writes:

What is even more cruel is that, since all the progress of the human species continually moves away from its primitive state, the more we accumulate new knowledge, the more we deprive ourselves of the means of acquiring the most important knowledge of all. Thus, in a sense, it is by dint of studying man that we have rendered ourselves incapable of knowing him. (1987: 33)

² We find this same thinking in Guy Debord. In *The Society of the Spectacle*:

The origin of the spectacle lies in the world's loss of unity, and its massive expansion in the modern period demonstrates how total this loss has been: the abstract nature of all individual work, as of production in general, finds perfect expression in the spectacle, whose very manner of being concrete is, precisely, abstraction. The spectacle divides the world into two parts, one of which is held up as a self-representation to the world, and is superior to the world. The spectacle is simply the common language that bridges this division. Spectators are linked only by a one-way relationship to the very center that maintains their isolation from one another. The spectacle thus unites what is separate, but it unites it only in its separateness. (22)

The problem for Heidegger is one of continuity with the origin of thought, and this gives us a clue to why he placed so much importance on the role of Germany during the nineteen thirties and forties. He considered the 'German spirit' to contain within itself a connection back to the Greek ground of technological thinking. This also involves the connection of the German language with the Greek language (with its etymological connections to Being). Not only did he consider Americanism a forgetting of Being and destructive of its own connection with its origins, but during this period, Heidegger considered it to be a threat to Germany as well. In his 1942 lecture course on Hölderlin's hymn *The Ister*, Heidegger states.

We know today that the Anglo-Saxon world of Americanism has resolved to annihilate Europe, that is, the homeland, and that means: the commencement of the Western world. Whatever has the character of commencement is indestructible. America's entry into this planetary war is not its entry into history; rather, it is already the ultimate American act of American ahistoricity and self-devastation. For this act is the renunciation of commencement, and a decision in favor of that which is without commencement. (1996: 55)

Heidegger believed that the only solution is a political movement where man is no longer a slave to technology but subordinates technology to the will. He considered the German Spirit and its remembrance of its Greek origins to be in the perfect position for this task. This is the promise he saw in National Socialism. In his notorious Rectorate address *On the Self-Assertion of the German University*, he states.

Spirit is the determined resolve to the essence of Being, a resolve that is attuned to origins and knowing. And the spiritual world of a Volk is not its cultural superstructure, just as little as it is its arsenal of useful knowledge and values; rather, it is the power that comes from preserving at the most profound level the forces that are rooted in the soil and blood of a Volk, the power to arouse most inwardly and to shake most extensively the Volk's existence. A spiritual world alone will guarantee our Volk greatness. (HC, 1993: 33)

The German Romantic ideas of 'soil' and 'blood' are carefully chosen. These ideas reflect a authentic connection back to Being that insures the authenticity of this movement. He saw the violence of National Socialism as merely the "storm" which attested to its greatness.

In his 1941 lecture course *Basic Concepts*, Heidegger stressed the importance of a ground or foundation in order to think what is "essential."

Attending to the dispensable brings man into the simplicity and unequivocalness of an entirely different domain. Here speak claims that do not derive from his need and do not pertain to the prospect of the well-being of the individual and the many. This domain alone is the site in which a Reich can be founded. For here alone historical man can stand out into an openness while subordinating everything needful and useful to himself, thereby first becoming capable of ruling in an essential sense. (BC, 1993: 4)

He also believed that this ground or foundation is present in the German youth. Rousseau in *Emile* already tried to develop an educational philosophy which would conserve the natural virtue of the child while preparing them for the civilized world. It is a kind of conservation of something the child already possesses on the inside. For Heidegger, the German youth hold the same possibilities within themselves as Rousseau's child.

It is the prerogative of a true and wakeful youth to develop exhortations to knowledge from out of itself, and to cling to these exhortations for itself, in order to construct the future. Whether one occasionally reads a book is a measure for the petite bourgeoisie. It does not ask whether today's man, who gets his education from charts and magazines, from radio reports and movies theaters, whether such a confused, dizzy, and purely American man still knows, or can know, what reading means. (BC, 1993: 11)

Much of modern (American) education is merely fabricated facts coming from the outside.

Almost to the Limit

As Heidegger saw that National Socialism wasn't living up to its promises, he realized that to preserve this continuity with grounds or foundations alone was not sufficient. He now saw the need for a crisis which precipitates a turning back to the remembrance of these origins. Heidegger tried to develop this remembrance of the inception of Western history and destiny through his lectures in the early forties on Heraclitus, Parmenides, Nietzsche and Hölderlin. Remembrance is here also connected to a crisis which provides a "turning" back to origins. Now continuity and disruption go together.

The journeying into the unhomely must go “almost” to the threshold of being annihilated in the fire in order for the locality of the homely to bestow its gladdening and rescuing. (1996: 134)

We see this dynamic in his essay “The Age of the World Picture.” World picture, as he stated in the previous *Beiträge* quote, is not a picture of the world but the world conceived and grasped *as* picture, that is, as representation. And not only is the world distorted and reduced to representation, but we also place ourselves within this representation (we put ourselves into the picture).

Namely, the more extensively and the more effectually the world stands at man’s disposal as conquered, and the more objectively the object appears, all the more subjectively, i.e., the more importunately, does the subjectum rise up, and all the more impetuously, too do observation of and teaching about the world change into a doctrine of man, into anthropology. It is no wonder that humanism first arises where the world becomes picture. (1977: 132)

The world as picture is the triumph of representation and the calculable, and the loss of an authentic relation to Being. Yet it is only by following this trajectory through to the end that salvation can be achieved.³ Heidegger believed that instrumental rationality will continue to weave its web over the earth to the point where eventually in the distant future, Being will once again appear negatively as a *shadow* of representation itself.

By means of this shadow the modern world extends itself out into a space withdrawn from representation, and so lends to the incalculable the determinateness peculiar to it, as well as a historical uniqueness. This shadow, however, points to something else, which it is denied to us today to know. (1977: 136)

³ This reaches its extreme in Americanism. In his lecture course *Basic Concepts* he writes:

Soon we will be able to read off of tables and graphs what the Americans have clearly sought for decades by means of the psychology diploma: the determination of what man is and how he can be most efficiently and effectively used, in the most appropriate place, without loss of time or energy. (1993: 77)

This is a possibility Nietzsche also foresaw in *The Birth of Tragedy* where Apollonian rationality encounters the “tragic insight” of its own emptiness and recognizes that it can only be completed by art – a reappropriation of the Dionysian.⁴

We see this especially in Heidegger's work *The Question of Being* where he responded to Ernst Jünger's reflections about Nihilism. Jünger described the complete fulfillment of Nihilism as the crossing of a 'line' which would initiate a new beginning. In his letter to Jünger, Heidegger begins to cross out the word Being. The cross represents not only a negative concealment but the positive gathering of the fourfold – a new possibility which he is careful warn Jünger, we do not yet have the language to describe since we have not yet crossed the line. The thinker can only prepare a road. Here, Being is remembered negatively in its Oblivion, much in the same way that Adorno in his philosophy tried to recover Nature negatively through the destruction of identity.

But how can the oblivion of Being lead back to its remembrance? Borrowing from Hölderlin, Heidegger called for a “bold forgetting,” that is, a forgetting which has connected with it fresh possibilities for remembrance.⁵

This forgetting is not simply a looking away from one's home. It is a “bold forgetting”... “Bold forgetting” is the knowing and mindful courage to experience the foreign, an experiencing that, in the foreign, steadfastly gives thought to one's own. The boldness of forgetting in the love of colony is the readiness, while in the foreign, to learn from the foreign for the sake of what is one's own, so as to defer what is one's own until it is time. (1996: 132)

This then is a forgetting which maintains a continuous connection with what has been forgotten. Americanism however would be a kind of forgetting which has lost this connection to any ground.

⁴ Nietzsche writes in *The Birth of Tragedy*:

... there is a profound illusion that first saw the light of the world in the person of Socrates: the unshakable faith that thought, using the thread of causality, can penetrate the deepest abysses of being, and that thought is capable not only of knowing being but even of correcting it. This sublime metaphysical illusion accompanies science as an instinct and leads science again and again to its limits at which it must turn into art - which is really the aim of this mechanism (1999: 96)

⁵ Notice that this approach to Hölderlin's conception of remembrance is weighted more towards his so-called Greek condition of humanity and is connected to Hölderlin's essay “Becoming in Passing Away” it is questionable to me whether the dynamic described in this essay can also be applied to the Modern poetic spirit described in “The Processes of the Poetic Spirit” and expressed in his later poetry.

Nature is ahistorical. Unhistorical, and therefore catastrophic in a way that no nature can ever be, is, for example, Americanism. (1996: 143)

Here we also encounter his 'deconstruction' of metaphysics. To become conscious of the oblivion of being is to engage in the remembrance of metaphysics and its complicity in this oblivion. This remembrance would also be the overcoming of metaphysics through the deconstruction of metaphysics. Americanism however, as Heidegger observes is outside of metaphysics and hence outside of the possibility of deconstructive unconcealment.

Heidegger's thought has a certain ambivalence: a desire to reach back and remember the origins, and the desire to affirm Nihilism. What allows Heidegger to bridge this is his dialectic of memory and forgetting, Being and nothing, earth and world, and the reciprocal relation they have with one another. Once again, Americanism is something completely outside of this dynamic. It doesn't allow for this relation.

Heidegger in his letter, warned Jünger about the difficulty of speaking of a turning of Being back toward humanity, since the turn of humanity already involves a separation of subject and object. Yet near the end of his life, in the famous *Der Spiegel* interview, Heidegger seems to have lost his hope to the point where this is the only possibility he can envisage when in Hölderlinian language he asserts "only a God can save us now" In this same interview he also says.

Everything is functioning. This is exactly what is so uncanny, that everything is functioning and that the functioning drives us more and more to even further functioning, and that technology tears men loose from the earth and uproots them. I do not know whether you were frightened, but I at any rate was frightened when I saw pictures coming from the moon to the earth. We don't need any atom bomb. The uprooting of man has already taken place. (*HC*, 1993: 106)

Here the picturing of the world, the complete domination of the world by representation is complete. In the essay "Science and Reflection," Heidegger called this "entrapment." In that essay he pointed out that science reduces the real to an object and therefore the uncanny aspect of the real is lost. As a consequence, the entire earth is reduced to an object. The picture of the earth from the moon would therefore be the most extreme expression of the destructiveness of the modern age. Philosophy is now at an end and there is no way Man can reverse the control of technology. This prompts him to claim that only a God can save us now. In Hölderlinian language, this would suggest a willed return to a confluence with the divine is outside of our own power. We are left to merely wait.

Reactions of a confused, dizzy American man.

Here I must be careful not to lose my way, for I am writing (and I suspect you are reading) securely from within that zone which Heidegger in such grandiose gestures roundly condemns. Let me first acknowledge my own confusion and dizziness. But from this dizziness, this lack of connection, this uprootedness, I find myself critical of Heidegger's attempts at an easy reconciliation of the ambivalences I already mentioned. Heidegger's *short-coming* is that he speaks in Nietzschean and Hölderlinian language yet does not follow the radicality of their philosophies.

Nietzsche's overcoming of Nihilism also involved a bold forgetting, but one which allowed no way back. Heidegger cannot follow Nietzsche when he advises: "If something is about to fall, give it a push" Heidegger is still holding on, holding back, unable to surrender himself to that final acceptance of Nihilism. He is unable to follow Zarathustra's direction to the shepherd: to bite the head completely off the snake to be free of it.

Heidegger was also unable to follow Hölderlin the wanderer in his final steps before his madness. A recognition of a final paradox between a desire to reach back and the need to trudge forward. As Adorno observed, Heidegger is always trying to bring Hölderlin home, while Hölderlin in character and poetry is always losing himself in the Foreign. Heidegger's holding-back involves not only the attempt to bring Hölderlin home, but also in the grounding of these paradoxes safely within such quasi-concepts as "Augenblick", "Ereignis", the "Between", or the "Riss".

Hölderlin already foresaw Heidegger's journey in his novel *Hyperion*. Hyperion embarked on a journey to recover the greatness of the Greek origins. In Book One he tried a poetic recovery, in Book Two a military recovery. Both failed, and Hyperion's militaristic quest ended in the same horrors that would be lived out by National Socialism. He returned to the Germans but they were unable to listen to what he has to teach.⁶

Hyperion finally retreats as in Rousseau's *Reveries*, to the beauty of Nature. Heidegger near the end of his life also followed this same retreat. It is interesting

⁶ Notice that Hölderlin says about the Germans roughly the same thing Heidegger says about the Americans. In the Novel Hyperion returns from his failed attempts to enlighten his German countrymen. Disillusioned, Hyperion states:

It is a harsh word but still I say it, because it is the truth: I can think of no people more fragmented than the Germans. Craftsmen you see, but no humans, thinkers, but no humans, priests, but no humans, lords and servants, boys and established people but no humans - is this not like a battlefield, where hands and arms and all limbs lie chaotically in pieces, while the spilled blood of life runs into the sand. (1990:133)

that Heidegger repeated Hyperion's journey when he could have heeded Hölderlin's warning. Heidegger therefore remains a mere imitation of Hyperion, a mere character of Hölderlin's, while Hölderlin emerges as a thinker far beyond and outside of Heidegger's limits of thinking – far more bold and tragic.

Heidegger deals with mutually exclusive oppositions: the familiar and the uncanny, reason and its other, determination and indetermination, Being and nothing. He therefore has a problem recognizing any positive dimension to scientific and technological determinations. He writes in his letter to Jünger.

The question, "What is metaphysics?" only attempts the one thing: to induce the sciences to reflect that they necessarily, and, for that reason, always and everywhere encounter the complete other of being, the nothingness belonging to being. Even without their knowledge they are already in relation to Being. (1958: 99)

Notice here that scientific determination is only useful because it opens upon its complete opposite – giving Heisenberg as an example. Yet we can find a far more sophisticated understanding of this process in Jung's reading of the alchemists who occupied the beginning of the scientific age, an age when scientific discovery still possessed mystical overtones. There, determination is a necessary process leading to a "conjunctio" between the isolated consciousness and the unconscious. Jeffrey Raff, in his book *Jung and the Alchemical Imagination*, describes this as follows.

It is the ego that carries this sword, without which there is no process of transformation. The ego is of central importance to the work, and there can be no evolution to higher levels of being and consciousness without it. The ego through its intention and will, its attention and discrimination, alters the very nature of the unconscious, ending chaos and beginning the difficult and prolonged work of self-redemption. The divine nature of the human being, hidden beneath the chaotic waters of the unconscious in the latent self, is awakened and pushed toward its own manifestation through the efforts of the ego. (Raff: 105)

This takes us beyond Heidegger's shadow-play of Being and Nothing, and his passive conception of *Gelassenheit*. The mystical is not a radical trembling from the outside but something whose possibility is renewed with every new determination, every new technological device.

Actually, this brings us close to an element of Hölderlin's thinking that Heidegger was unable to appreciate. Hölderlin in his "Pindar Fragments," uses his river imagery to indicate the drift of humanity away from unity with nature and the

divine. And yet, a river as it gains power is no longer bound by its banks, but gains power over its banks. Human power and choice increase as humanity drifts away from the necessity of nature. Humanity now shapes nature. Inherent in this idea is that there is no way back to ordinary nature since the trail has been obscured by human activity. Walter Benjamin in his *Arcades Project* is much closer to an appreciation of this process than Heidegger.⁷

Perhaps the gigantic nature of the Gigantic makes it unable to totally master itself, and so pockets of possibility open, quality opened by quantifications, images opened by hidden digital calculations. So if quality results from quantity, need it be an illusion or can it be a kind of rebirth? This shows the limits of Heidegger's catchwords and his vilification of instrumental rationality (which he shares with Adorno and much of poststructuralism). We can take a step beyond Heidegger and

⁷ Hölderlin writes:

The concept of the Centaur is probably that of the spirit of a stream, insofar as it forms a course and a boundary, with violence, on the originally pathless and upwards growing earth. (1984: 46)

In Hölderlin's later Hymns he recognizes the impossibility of tracing these paths back to the source.

Ripe is the fruit, dipped in fire, cooked
And tested on the earth and it is a law
That all things pass on, snake-like,
Prophetic, dreaming on
The hills of heaven. And much
Like a burden of failures
Upon the shoulders is there
To keep. But evil are
The paths. Namely astray
like horses, go the captured
Elements, and the ancient
Laws of the earth. And always
Into the unbounded goes a longing. But much is
To keep. And in crisis, our faithfulness.
Forwards however and backwards we
Don't want to look, left to rock
Like a swaying boat in the sea.

Here we see a deep ambivalence between the desire to reach back and its impossibility. This ambivalence is never resolved by Hölderlin in his later Hymns. We are always left rocking back and forth.

Benjamin recognizes, like Vico and Hölderlin that nature and truth have been shaped by human activity in the course of human history. Philosophy is a process of uncovering hidden histories contained in our cities, commodities and landscapes. Yet never do we achieve any appreciation of the pure source. Illumination comes instead in a very particular way, through flashes of mystical insight. Philosophy therefore never stands above or outside of its object. It instead becomes circling confrontations with our environment and wanderings.

assert that there can be no homogeneous, monolithic conception of *system, reason, restricted economy, culture industry, etc.*

And finally, what of the photo of the earth which so frightened Heidegger? Why was he unable to respond to it through “wonder”? Is it an 'entrapment', or is there something *in* the picture that Heidegger was unable to think? In the case of this picture, we are not only “in the picture”, but we are also outside the picture as well, looking at ourselves from a enormous distance, through the gigantic essence of technology. The earth never allows itself to be mere object. The uncanny is not eclipsed by the picture but is securely within it, gazing out at us. What emerges is beauty. There is a play of places occurring here. Much of our technology, our telescopes, microscopes, remote sensing technology, has opened vistas and experiences of startling beauty. It has opened anthropological, cultural, geological and astrophysical histories which place us in ways we could never anticipate. Here is a journey into the most foreign. A forgetting which is bold far beyond Heidegger’s imagination. An insight into place that Heidegger could never appreciate. Where does this leave us, us global citizens (I’ll spare us the catchword Americans) faced as we are by our confusion, dizziness, and uprootedness. Perhaps we are left in the same position as Hölderlin, left with a fundamental ambivalence that can never be solved. We are faced with competing places, truths, realities, interpretations and histories which we have to struggle to navigate between. We need to strive to reach back and forward with the knowledge that we will never encounter any past ground or future utopia. And yet... there are flashes of brilliance and beauty which seize us through our technologies, just as there are weapons aimed down at us from the heavens. Perhaps the job of the philosopher is no longer to strive to return home but merely to navigate treacherous seas of the present.

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