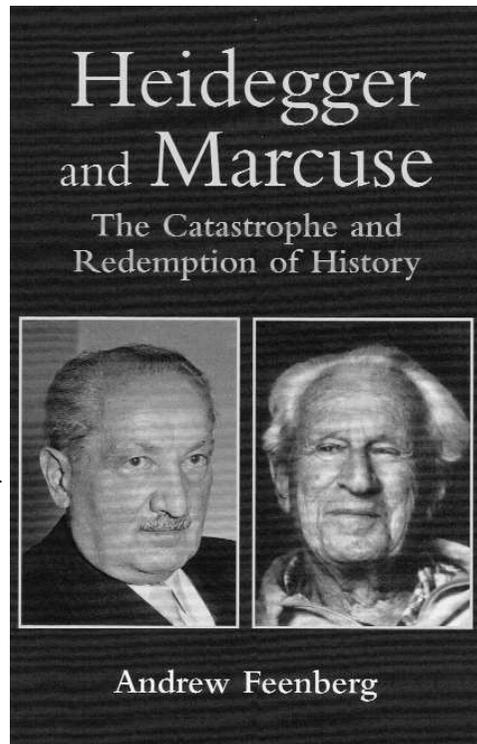


*Review Article of Andrew Feenberg (2005) Heidegger and Marcuse: The Catastrophe and Redemption of History, New York, London: Routledge, 158 p.*

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Anyone who has followed Feenberg's book under review cannot help noticing his uncanny ability to unravel interwoven strands of philosophical thought of Aristotle, Hegel, Heidegger, Lukacs and Herbert Marcuse. Despite this mammoth effort, Feenberg does not flinch from his basic purpose, namely a major re-look at Marcusean thought on the technology issue through the prism of Herbert Marcuse's teacher and the grandsire of phenomenology and existentialism, Martin Heidegger. Marcuse, who according to Feenberg, was 'wild enough to synthesize Marx and Freud', is in this book cast in the new role of an "early Heideggerian", contrary to the popular impression that Marcuse was abjectly disillusioned with phenomenology and Heideggerian thought.

Feenberg landed up in La Jolla, California in 1965 as a graduate student to



learn Heidegger's *Being and Time* under the guidance of Herbert Marcuse. Marcuse had drifted away from Heidegger and was skeptical of phenomenology. However Marcuse was still rooted in an authenticity, a concept that was drawn from Heidegger's *Being and Time*. By articulating a new interpretation of Hegelian and Marxian dialectics of "real possibility" or "potentiality", Marcuse provided a better perspective on 'alienation', which he could relate as non-possibility of realizing the 'authentic'. For Heidegger, Aristotle's concept of being was derived from *techne*, which is a mode of revealing of potentiality that was at the same time respectful of human beings and nature. The later Marcuse also saw technology as a mode of revealing and this is exactly the point at which Marcuse moved closer to Heidegger. The corollary for Marcuse was that technical practices that does not follow *techne*, leads to in-authenticity, alienation and unmaking of the world. In other words, characterization of technology as value-neutral was according to Marcuse and Heidegger the 'tragedy of modernity'.

In Chapter 2 Feenberg traces Heidegger's essay on technology and its Aristotelian roots. Heidegger's critique of modernity is clearly brought out here especially in relation to human beings. However as Feenberg notes, the onslaught of modernity which causes the Being to become the object of pure will, needs to be obviated by a saving power. Unfortunately Heidegger's work neither defines the saving power nor tells us what it promises. However Feenberg notes that the substance of Heidegger's work is to deny that the essence of technology is technological. Heidegger was thus able to distinguish between an instrumental account of technology from an ontological one. While the former deals with a function of technology in fulfilling human desires, the latter focuses on the role of technological revealing in structuring a world in terms of exigencies of planning and control. The instrumental account of technology is internal to modernity but cannot explain why the promise of technology has gone awry. Only through an ontological account thus the true nature of modernity gets illuminated along with its catastrophic outcome. Heidegger goes on to argue that the modes of revealing are historical and that ontology must be pursued as the history of being. It is in this light that Heidegger concept of *kinesis* (movement), which is related to 'bringing forth', *physis* (nature), *techne* (kno-how), *logos* (reason), *Eidos* (look) and *Morphe* (form) *Dynamis* (potentiality) and *Energia* (reality), *enantia* (contrary), *Poesis* (production). The chief argument is that things exist by *physis* or by *techne* while *physis* is self-originating the things of *techne* are made or at least helped into being by an agent. *Techne* is associated with production or *poiesis*, which can be contrasted with *episteme* or science. For Heidegger

*techne* is not about procedures of making but about how things must come out of production. In bringing out a product *techne* goes beyond *physis* to bring forth another type of being which is not the product of arbitrary will but of a *logos* (reason) or the act of gathering in which a model is identified and articulated. *Logos* in turn is linked to *eidos* or idea, which is basically the look that the finished thing must have to be a proper product of its *techne*. The *eidos* is not much an idea as much as it is a real thing to be made. The concept is closely related to *morphe* or form. *Eidos* must appear or come into presence through the formation of its material called *hyle*.

In terms of *techne*, Heidegger states that emergence is through a process of formation and not accidental. *Poesis* is nothing but the "*being-finished-and-ready*, i.e. a kind of being in which motion has arrived at its end". In the context of art Heidegger says that the artist's *techne* participates in disclosing a world through the work. Feenberg ends with the broad question Marcuse was a Hegelian Heidegger?

In chapter 3 Feenberg considers Marcuse's thesis on Hegel's "Ontology and the theory of Historicity" submitted to Heidegger in 1930. For Marcuse, Hegel's logic was centrally influenced by Aristotle's *Metaphysics* and particularly so his notion of *kinesis*. Like Adorno before him, Feenberg tracks the Heideggerian influence in Marcuse's thesis on Hegel. Despite Marcuse's thesis not carrying any mention of Heidegger, his use of a Heideggerian tool of revealing to analyse Hegel is good enough for Feenberg to bring out the Heidegger affinity in Marcuse. Marcuse however went a step later to recruit Hegel to the cause of Marxism through the prism of Lukacs. There was no inconsistency in weaving the thoughts of Aristotle, Hegel, Heidegger and Lukacs in one stream. Hegel and Heidegger owed their roots to Aristotle while all of them commonly swam against the tide of positivism and neo-kantianism.

As Feenberg notes that Heidegger by resituating Aristotle's metaphysics of production and linking it to his concept of Being, came up with a phenomenological analysis of world hood (51). This is the strand that Marcuse picked up in his thesis on Hegel. Indeed Marcuse argued that Hegel's dialectic is a modern repetition of Aristotle in which the modern idea of labour does the work of *techne*. Marcuse then makes a shift to Marx through the Lukacs route since he found no better way of explaining alienation than in relation to Being.

In Chapter 4 the Lukacs influence is brought out in clearer terms. While Heidegger was left struggling to overcome the centripetal force of modernity in a unified conception of Being in the world, Marcuse saw that this predicament could be overcome if Lukacs interpretation of Marxism was incorporat-

ed. Feenberg states that Lukacs interpretation enabled him to launch a Hegelianized approach to revolution that Marcuse combined with Heidegger's fundamental ontology. (80). At the same time conscious of the fact that Lukacs had failed to understand the connection between nature and society and thereby develop a critique of technology, enabled Marcuse to propose the alternative of using the power of imagination and aesthetic experience to yield a concept of technology.

In chapter 5 thus we find a major discussion on aesthetic redemption through technology that is premised on the aesthetic. The chapter begins by noticing Marcuse's ambivalence towards modernity and efforts on the part of Ernst Junger, Oswald Spengeler, Heidegger, Walter Benjamin and Marcuse to combine cultural critique and modernism in a revolutionary manner and propose an alternative modernity which was supposed to grant a different function in ways corresponding to their different political convictions (84). For Marcuse authenticity does not just imply dissolution of alienation but conveys a positive connotation namely the social character of existence. This leads to the contention that unlike arts, which bring existence to its essential form and in a finality mode, modern technology does not provide for finality and is therefore based on the destruction of *technai*. Thus politics also ceases to be norm based. The solution lies in the aestheticizing of politics (Benjamin). At the same time the theory of imagination ensures that the arts explore possibilities or potentialities for aesthetic redemption. In terms of this notion, technologies not only carried power and its consequences (a connotation which Heidegger, Adorno and Horkheimer deplored) but also a positive promise. The danger of non-aestheticizing technology will be the emergence of value-free technology, which treats everything as raw materials including Being. As Feenberg notes the advancements in the field of environmental movements and information technology were not anticipated by Marcuse. Today these developments have made human societies far more aware of the contingency and design on social and political choices, than was the case a generation ago (103). This leads to the fact that medicines and the architecture and urban and environmental planning suffer from weak *technai*. For Feenberg there are two kinds of politics. First is the instrumental politics aimed at power, laws and institutions and the second is the identity politics through which individuals attempt to re-define their social rules and their place in the society (112). According to Feenberg, Marcuse represents a third kind of politics which is civilization politics, a politics of collective self-definition that concerns not power, laws and institutions but the very meaning of our humanity.

In chapter 6 the technology question is pursued in greater detail. Feenberg says that Marcuse follows Heidegger in arguing for the priority of technology over science. The project of technological domination is the scientific concept of nature. The over throw of the former would lead to the change in the latter and to the invention of a new science. Feenberg raises the issue of whether Marcuse was phenomenological in approach when he states that increasing wealth releases society from the struggle for existence, thus enabling perceptions to transcend and realize the unrealized potentialities (128). Feenberg argues that in his later works Marcuse was wavering between a Hegelian Marxist historicism and a Heideggerian phenomenology (129). Marcuse according to Feenberg unsuccessfully struggled with the notion of overcoming the limitations of phenomenology especially in its tendency of viewing the world through a double truth mechanism, one as a system of meaning in act revealed to each of us in lived experience and the second as existence given objectively to all of us and comprehended in various ways. Towards the end of the chapter Feenberg speculates whether Marcuse could have developed an explicit phenomenological Marxism to explain his theory of potentialities. Marcuse in phenomenology, which followed Hegel's ontology, would have viewed structures of perception as relative to practical relations established in the labour process. This would not have been a fixed entity as Kant imagined, but would have changed with historical development of humanity. Interestingly Marcuse's later work goes beyond even this conception when he introduces the aesthetic. Marcuse's aesthetics would have informed the world of work by transforming technology in accordance with the laws of duty. For Feenberg a phenomenology of the aesthetic could have been developed by Marcuse to explain the anticipated transcendentals of affirmative culture. This potentiality was not realized by Marcuse since his approach remained caught in the ambiguity of his source in the earlier Marx (132). This then according to Feenberg was Marcuse's limitation. He would have had to struggle to refute naturalism and defend his normative stance against relativism and value nihilism. Feenberg concludes the chapter by stating that Marcuse refused to give up on his existential politics and this was his greatness as well as his vulnerability.

In the final chapter Feenberg recounts his discussions starting from the Greek concept of *techné* and potentialities and the manner in which Heidegger reconstructed the same. He finds that the Greek concept could gel well with Marxism of the Lukacian variant, which said that liberating knowledge lay

not in absolute science, but in the proletariat, which can transform society by being a conscious of its role as " a creative subject of the labour of historical construction' (136). This according to Feenberg means that the essential potentialities of the Greeks get transformed to human potentialities. Marcuse who took this strand forward stumbled upon aesthetics and looked at it as the solution for the problems of modernity. By arguing that a new technology which is based on an aesthetically informed sensation that respect humans and nature than destroying them Marcuse got over the extreme pessimism of Heidegger and Adorno. Coming to the issue of politics and the political prospects in a crisis-ridden world, Feenberg feels that the concept of authenticity as internalized by Marcuse is important. For Marcuse authenticity involved a confrontation with one's own time and its possibilities. Despite its criticisms the concept of authenticity is important as it still provides a method of 'going forward to nature' to an imagined future in which critical consciousness will inform the schematic enriched perception, revealing aspects of the reality obscured today.

Elsewhere Feenberg challenges the widely held view that all modern societies are converging on an identical civilizational model, a position which he holds in common with Heidegger and Habermas (Feenberg,2005). Both philosophers of modernity consider modernity to be characterized by a unique form of technical action and thought which threatened non-technical values. This then gave rise to the substantive theory of technology as it moves away from value-free approaches of technology. However Habermas and Heidegger hoped that this grip of technology cannot be loosened from its homogenizing effects by something radically different. Feenberg does not share this pessimism about modernity. He does not consider that technical action has the broad significance attributed to it by Heidegger and Habermas and would adduce the argument that there could be culturally specific differences in a technical sphere. And this according to him is enough to facilitate distinguishing of people both symbolically and technically. To this extent Feenberg disagrees with Heidegger and his pessimistic view about the destructive potential of modern technology.

In essence the book is a major and creative re-appraisal of Marcuse and Heidegger in relation to the technology question. Perhaps the one limitation of the book is its emphasis on setting the paradigm of aestheticized technology against the tendency of treating technology as free from values. However the unusual juxtaposition of the late Marcuse work to the early Heidegger gives Feenberg's work its unusual spark. In the process, Feenberg has demolished the walls of philosophical separation between phenomenology and classical

Marxism. This enables him to point to Marcuse's inability in developing a 'phenomenology of the aesthetic' that could have positioned his technology world view differently. Feenberg's work has also opened up possibilities of new critiques about the debilitating environmental effects of ideologically driven scientific policies pursued in parts of the erstwhile East European Communist blocs which were far removed from the ideal of aestheticized technology. Feenberg's work also raises new issues about contemporary movements that challenge modernity, namely the counter-current movements of traditional tribal and indigenous people (the flag bearers of *techne*) of the world against the dominant trend of stamping intellectual property rights on all forms of modern products, processes and creative works including those which were inspired by indigenous knowledge. In a globalized world where modern production apparatuses seek *Ge-Stell*, Heidegger's term that means 'global warehouse of raw materials' (Heidegger,1992), the longing for indigenous crafts and agricultural produce (native seeds and organic products) produced by localized, small scale entities is no less discernible. Technology that is based on the aesthetic or as Feenberg (2005) notes has been democratized, is a potentiality that today's world will look forward to welding with actuality. This then is the real significance of Feenberg's major re-appraisal.

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