
Reviewed by Frank Schalow, University of New Orleans, author of *Heidegger and the Quest for the Sacred: From Thought to the Sanctuary of Faith*.

If decades from now someone were to write an intellectual history of the 20th century, a chapter would have to be reserved to the prophetic vision that Martin Heidegger demonstrated as one of the first thinkers to address the danger of modern technology. Indeed, for historians as well as philosophers, Heidegger’s foresight in projecting the cataclysmic possibilities of technology, including the prospect of “ecological disaster,” may very well stand as his greatest legacy. In *The Gods and Technology*, Richard Rojcewicz provides an insightful “reading” of Heidegger’s landmark essay “Die Frage nach der Technik” (“The Question Concerning Technology”), and thereby an interpretation of the overall impact of his thinking. As Rojcewicz states in his Preface: “This is a lengthy study attempting to reopen and take a fresh look at a brief text in which Martin Heidegger projected a philosophy of technology” (p. vii).

As the title of Rojcewicz’s book indicates, the rise in the dominance of modern technology parallels a decline in humanity’s capacity to heed a sense of the sacred, the holy, or the gods. “Moreover, never far from the surface is the theme of piety, a theme especially characteristic of Heidegger’s later period; in play throughout this study is what Heidegger sees as the proper human piety with respect to something ascendent over the human, with respect to the gods” (p. vii). In this spirit, Rojcewicz asks whether a greater mystery of human existence remains concealed within our increasing dependence upon technology; and conversely, whether the prospect of once again experiencing awe before such a mystery can arise through a crisis that pits our desire to maximize the technological advances of today against our obligation to safeguard the earth for future generations. Indeed, in addressing the global impact of technology, Heidegger explores its ambivalent or Janus-sided nature.

According to Rojcewicz, Heidegger does not associate technology simply with the use of machines, but instead equates it with a radical transformation of our interaction with nature—and its way of appearing to us as resources to be exploited—which ultimately shapes the entire direction of Western history. “What demand does modern technology place upon nature, what is the satisfaction claimed in the challenge? It is the demand that nature yield up its energies and resources so that they might be on call, i.e., readily available for human use” (p. 71). In titling his 1954 essay, “The Question Concerning Technology,” Heidegger challenges us to proceed along a lengthy path of inquiry in order to broach this topic. Even in his own philosophical development, he first began to raise this question the mid 1930s with his account of “machination” in *Contributions to*...
Philosophy (1936–1938). Subsequently, in a series of lectures delivered at the Club at Bremen in 1949, which would ultimately form the mosaic of issues developed in “The Question Concerning Technology,” he explicitly developed the contemporary problem of technology in conjunction with the perennial question of being. In the process, he uncovered the historical roots of the technology, in order to show how it is inextricably interwoven with the history of philosophy and Western culture as a whole. Modern technology thereby reveals nature through the lens of an “encompassing imposition,” which Heidegger calls “enframing” (Ge-stell) [p. 102].

The historical thrust of technology emerges through a crisis that brings the fate of Western civilization as a whole into question. We experience this crisis as an overwhelming forsakenness, in which human beings become mired in the endless cycle of production and consumption, manipulation and exploitation, while losing a greater sense of meaning and the possibility of encountering what is “wholly other” or the sacred. To characterize this crucial historical juncture, Heidegger cites Friedrich Hölderlin’s description that we live in a “destitute time” in which “the old gods have fled and the new gods have not yet come.” “The concealment of being, the absconding of the gods, is, for Heidegger, equivalent to a concealment of truth. That accounts for the many instances in which Heidegger identifies the danger of modern technology with its covering over of the truth” (p. 148). As Rojcewicz emphasizes, the danger lies in the hubris whereby human beings assert their superiority over nature, fostering the illusion that they can master the technology on which they completely depend. “If all things are at our disposal, if they are entirely posed by us, then we will see ourselves a completely in control. This hubristic view, as we have already indicated, is threatened by a nemesis. If all things become disposables, we will stand on the verge of a precipice: we will be tempted (and have perhaps already yielded to the temptation) to take ourselves as disposables, entirely posed by forces out of our control” (p. 149).

The interlude of the absence of the gods is the period, as Rojcewicz aptly states, in which “idolatry” replaces “piety” (p. 1). The idolatry stems from the hubris, which advances the illusion that the anthropocentric satisfaction of human interests constitutes the ultimate source of meaning—the pursuit of wealth, power, comfort, and security. But piety is not an attitude that we can will to occur, but, on the contrary presupposes a different enactment of freedom whereby we participate in the uniqueness of being’s manifestation. Indeed, one of the merits of Rojcewicz’s book is that he accentuates this primordial form of freedom as a responsive engagement, which Heidegger calls “letting be.” By letting be, humanity puts aside the narrowness of its own instrumental needs, which modern technology carries to an extreme, in order to facilitate being’s impetus to become manifest, to foster the advent of unconcealment as such. “The original exercise of