

Technology as Behavior: A Phenomenological Account of the Etymology of *Techné*

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Abstract

Never in History did human activities rely so much on technology as they do in our times. Yet, the central question keeps on being asked: “What is technology?” (e.g., Borgmann 1999; Dreyfus 1995; Ellul 1964; Feenberg 1999; Heidegger 1977; Ihde 1990). In a phenomenological manner, striving to get rid of assumptions, presuppositions or *a priori* notions about the phenomenon under inquiry (e.g., Husserl 1964, 1970, 1995), this paper passes over the main theoretical positions that address the cardinal issue of the nature of technology. This methodological turn, implying nothing on the relevance or not of those theoretical positions, is a way of trying to provide a new and useful contribution to the field by exploring phenomenologically the rich etymology of the word technology. In this paper we use etymology not as an end in itself but as a means devised to bring back the grounding meanings around which the phenomenon under analysis unfolded through out history and was given a name.

This paper strictly focuses the origins, formation and evolution of the distinctive element of the word technology, the ancient Greek word *techné*. I claim that this clue, in spite of being mentioned recurrently in the literature, was not up to now sufficiently followed and explored in a phenomenological manner. In this paper I follow the origins of the ancient Greek word *techné*, trying to make sense of their meanings and evolution within the historical and civilizational context where they fitted in. *Techné* is thus traced back to *tikto*, which signified to bring forth, and still further back to *ouros*, which meant a guard, and to *tino*, which indicate either to pay a penalty or to provide recompense. These origins of the word technology as well as their various paths are explored, related and connected, so that it is shown that the necessity, the possibility or the desire of shaping human behavior, namely the education and rearing of children, were the grounding meanings around which the word *techné* formed. My analysis points out, hopefully, that the meaningfulness of specific ways of acting and being were the deeper origins of the ancient Greek word *techné*. The paper concludes by considering briefly some implications of these uncovered root meanings of *techné* on realms of human contemporary action.

References

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