MEMORIAL ADDRESS*

Let my first public word in my home town be a word of thanks.

I thank my homeland for all that it has given me along the path of my life. I have tried to explain the nature of this endowment in those few pages entitled "Der Feldweg" which first appeared in 1949 in a book honoring the hundredth anniversary of the death of Conradin Kreutzer. I thank Mayor Schühle for his warm-hearted welcome. And I am especially grateful for the privilege of giving the memorial address at today’s ceremony.

Honored Guests, Friends and Neighbors! We are gathered together in commemoration of the composer Conradin Kreutzer, a native of our region. If we are to honor a man whose calling it is to be creative, we must, above all, duly honor his work. In the case of a musician this is done through the performance of his compositions.

Conradin Kreutzer’s compositions ring forth today in

---

* This speech was presented at the celebration of the 175th birthday of the composer Conradin Kreutzer on October 50, 1955, in Messkirch.
1. Country Path (Tr.)
2. Conradin Kreutzer (1780-1849), German composer and conductor. He was highly productive in concert, chamber and church music, operas and musical plays, choruses and songs. Of his works some of his choruses for men and one of his operas are still well known in Germany. (Tr.)
song and chorus, in opera and in chamber music. In these sounds the artist himself is present; for the master’s presence in the work is the only true presence. The greater the master, the more completely his person vanishes behind his work.

The musicians and singers who take part in today’s celebration are a warrant that Conradin Kreutzer’s work will come to be heard on this occasion.

But does this alone constitute a memorial celebration? A memorial celebration means that we think back, that we think. Yet what are we to think and to say at a memorial which is devoted to a composer? Is it not the distinction of music to “speak” through the sounding of tones and so not to need ordinary language, the language of words? So they say. And yet the question remains: Do playing and singing alone make our celebration a thoughtful celebration, one in which we think? Hardly! And so a “memorial address” has been put on the program. It is to help us to think back both to the composer we honor and to his work. These memories come alive as soon as we relate the story of Conradin Kreutzer’s life, and recount and describe his works. Through such a relating we can find much that is joyful and sorrowful, much that is instructive and exemplary. But at bottom we merely allow ourselves to be entertained by such a talk. In listening to such a story, no thinking at all is needed, no reflecting is demanded on what concerns each one of us immediately and continuously in his very being. Thus even a memorial address gives no assurance that we will think at a memorial celebration.

Let us not fool ourselves. All of us, including those who think professionally, as it were, are often enough thought-

poor; we all are far too easily thought-less. Thoughtlessness is an uncanny visitor who comes and goes everywhere in today’s world. For nowadays we take in everything in the quickest and cheapest way, only to forget it just as quickly, instantly. Thus one gathering follows on the heels of another. Commemorative celebrations grow poorer and poorer in thought. Commemoration and thoughtlessness are found side by side.

But even while we are thoughtless, we do not give up our capacity to think. We rather use this capacity implicitly, though strangely: that is, in thoughtlessness we let it lie fallow. Still only that can lie fallow which in itself is a ground for growth, such as a field. An expressway, where nothing grows, cannot be a fallow field. Just as we can grow deaf only because we hear, just as we can grow old only because we were young; so we can grow thought-poor or even thought-less only because man at the core of his being has the capacity to think; has “spirit and reason” and is destined to think. We can only lose or, as the phrase goes, get loose from that which we knowingly or unknowingly possess.

The growing thoughtlessness must, therefore, spring from some process that gnaws at the very marrow of man today: man today is in flight from thinking. This flight-from-thought is the ground of thoughtlessness. But part of this flight is that man will neither see nor admit it. Man today will even flatly deny this flight from thinking. He will assert the opposite. He will say—and quite rightly—that there were at no time such far-reaching plans, so many inquiries in so many areas, research carried on as passionately as today. Of course. And this display of ingenuity and
deliberation has its own great usefulness. Such thought remains indispensable. But—it also remains true that it is thinking of a special kind.

Its peculiarity consists in the fact that whenever we plan, research, and organize, we always reckon with conditions that are given. We take them into account with the calculated intention of their serving specific purposes. Thus we can count on definite results. This calculation is the mark of all thinking that plans and investigates. Such thinking remains calculation even if it neither works with numbers nor uses an adding machine or computer. Calculative thinking computes. It computes ever new, ever more promising and at the same time more economical possibilities. Calculative thinking races from one prospect to the next. Calculative thinking never stops, never collects itself. Calculative thinking is not meditative thinking, not thinking which contemplates the meaning which reigns in everything that is.

There are, then, two kinds of thinking, each justified and needed in its own way: calculative thinking and meditative thinking.

This meditative thinking is what we have in mind when we say that contemporary man is in flight—from-thinking. Yet you may protest: mere meditative thinking finds itself floating unaware above reality. It loses touch. It is worthless for dealing with current business. It profits nothing in carrying out practical affairs.

And you may say, finally, that mere meditative thinking, persevering meditation, is “above” the reach of ordinary understanding. In this excuse only this much is true, meditative thinking does not just happen by itself any more than does calculative thinking. At times it requires a greater effort. It demands more practice. It is in need of even more delicate care than any other genuine craft. But it must also be able to bide its time, to await as does the farmer, whether the seed will come up and ripen.

Yet anyone can follow the path of meditative thinking in its own manner and within its own limits. Why? Because man is a thinking, that is, a meditating being. Thus meditative thinking need by no means be “high-flown.” It is enough if we dwell on what lies close and meditate on what is closest; upon that which concerns us, each one of us, here and now; here, on this patch of home ground; now, in the present hour of history.

What does this celebration suggest to us, in case we are ready to meditate? Then we notice that a work of art has flowered in the ground of our homeland. As we hold this simple fact in mind, we cannot help remembering at once that during the last two centuries great poets and thinkers have been brought forth from the Swabian land. Thinking about it further makes clear at once that Central Germany is likewise such a land, and so are East Prussia, Silesia, and Bohemia.

We grow thoughtful and ask: does not the flourishing of any genuine work depend upon its roots in a native soil? Johann Peter Hebel once wrote: “We are plants which—whether we like to admit it to ourselves or not—must with our roots rise out of the earth in order to bloom in the ether and to bear fruit.” (Works, ed. Altwegg III, 514.)

The poet means to say: For a truly joyous and salutary human work to flourish, man must be able to mount from the depth of his home ground up into the ether. Ether
here means the free air of the high heavens, the open realm of the spirit.

We grow more thoughtful and ask: does this claim of Johann Peter Hebel hold today?Does man still dwell calmly between heaven and earth? Does a meditative spirit still reign over the land? Is there still a life-giving homeland in whose ground man may stand rooted, that is, be autochthonic?

Many Germans have lost their homeland, have had to leave their villages and towns, have been driven from their native soil. Countless others whose homeland was saved, have yet wandered off. They have been caught up in the turmoil of the big cities, and have resettled in the wastelands of industrial districts. They are strangers now to their former homeland. And those who have stayed on in their homeland? Often they are still more homeless than those who have been driven from their homeland. Hourly and daily they are chained to radio and television. Week after week the movies carry them off into uncommon, but often merely common, realms of the imagination, and give the illusion of a world that is no world. Picture magazines are everywhere available. All that with which modern techniques of communication stimulate, assail, and drive man—all that is already much closer to man today than his fields around his farmstead, closer than the sky over the earth, closer than the change from night to day, closer than the conventions and customs of his village, than the tradition of his native world.

We grow more thoughtful and ask: What is happening here—with those driven from their homeland no less than with those who have remained? Answer: the rootedness, the autochthony, of man is threatened today at its core. Even more: The loss of rootedness is caused not merely by circumstance and fortune, nor does it stem only from the negligence and the superficiality of man's way of life. The loss of autochthony springs from the spirit of the age into which all of us were born.

We grow still more thoughtful and ask: If this is so, can man, can man's work in the future still be expected to thrive in the fertile ground of a homeland and mount into the ether, into the far reaches of the heavens and the spirit? Or will everything now fall into the clutches of planning and calculation, of organization and automation?

If we reflect upon what our celebration today suggests, then we must observe the loss of man's autochthony with which our age is threatened. And we ask: What really is happening in our age? By what is it characterized?

The age that is now beginning has been called of late the atomic age. Its most conspicuous symbol is the atom bomb. But this symbolizes only the obvious; for it was recognized at once that atomic energy can be used also for peaceful purposes. Nuclear physicists everywhere are busy with vast plans to implement the peaceful uses of atomic energy. The great industrial corporations of the leading countries, first of all England, have figured out already that atomic energy can develop into a gigantic business. Through this atomic business a new era of happiness is envisioned. Nuclear science, too, does not stand idly by. It publicly proclaims this era of happiness. Thus in July of this year at Lake Constance, eighteen Nobel Prize winners...
stated in a proclamation: “Science [and that is modern natural science] is a road to a happier human life.”

What is the sense of this statement? Does it spring from reflection? Does it ever ponder on the meaning of the atomic age? No! For if we rest content with this statement of science, we remain as far as possible from a reflective insight into our age. Why? Because we forget to ponder. Because we forget to ask: What is the ground that enabled modern technology to discover and set free new energies in nature?

This is due to a revolution in leading concepts which has been going on for the past several centuries, and by which man is placed in a different world. This radical revolution in outlook has come about in modern philosophy. From this arises a completely new relation of man to the world and his place in it. The world now appears as an object open to the attacks of calculative thought, attacks that nothing is believed able any longer to resist. Nature becomes a gigantic gasoline station, an energy source for modern technology and industry. This relation of man to the world as such, in principle a technical one, developed in the seventeenth century first and only in Europe. It long remained unknown in other continents, and it was altogether alien to former ages and histories.

The power concealed in modern technology determines the relation of man to that which exists. It rules the whole earth. Indeed, already man is beginning to advance beyond the earth into outer space. In not quite twenty years, such gigantic sources of power have become known through the discovery of atomic energy that in the foreseeable future the world’s demands for energy of any kind will be ensured forever. Soon the procurement of the new energies will no longer be tied to certain countries and continents, as is the occurrence of coal, oil, and timber. In the foreseeable future it will be possible to build atomic power stations anywhere on earth.

Thus the decisive question of science and technology today is no longer: Where do we find sufficient quantities of fuel? The decisive question now runs: In what way can we tame and direct the unimaginably vast amounts of atomic energies, and so secure mankind against the danger that these gigantic energies suddenly—even without military actions—break out somewhere, “run away” and destroy everything?

If the taming of atomic energy is successful, and it will be successful, then a totally new era of technical development will begin. What we know now as the technology of film and television, of transportation and especially air transportation, of news reporting, and as medical and nutritional technology, is presumably only a crude start. No one can foresee the radical changes to come. But technological advance will move faster and faster and can never be stopped. In all areas of his existence, man will be encircled ever more tightly by the forces of technology. These forces, which everywhere and every minute claim, enchain, drag along, press and impose upon man under the form of some technical contrivance or other—these forces, since man has not made them, have moved long since beyond his will and have outgrown his capacity for decision.

But this too is characteristic of the new world of technology, that its accomplishments come most speedily to be known and publicly admired. Thus today everyone will be
able to read what this talk says about technology in any competently managed picture magazine or hear it on the radio. But—it is one thing to have heard and read something, that is, merely to take notice; it is another thing to understand what we have heard and read, that is, to ponder.

The international meeting of Nobel Prize winners took place again in the summer of this year of 1955 in Lindau. There the American chemist, Stanley, had this to say: "The hour is near when life will be placed in the hands of the chemist who will be able to synthesize, split and change living substance at will." We take notice of such a statement. We even marvel at the daring of scientific research, without thinking about it. We do not stop to consider that an attack with technological means is being prepared upon the life and nature of man compared with which the explosion of the hydrogen bomb means little. For precisely if the hydrogen bombs do not explode and human life on earth is preserved, an uncanny change in the world moves upon us.

Yet it is not that the world is becoming entirely technical which is really uncanny. Far more uncanny is our being unprepared for this transformation, our inability to confront meditatively what is really dawning in this age.

No single man, no group of men, no commission of prominent statesmen, scientists, and technicians, no conference of leaders of commerce and industry, can brake or direct the progress of history in the atomic age. No merely human organization is capable of gaining dominion over it.

Is man, then, a defenseless and perplexed victim at the mercy of the irresistible superior power of technology? He would be if man today abandons any intention to pit meditative thinking decisively against merely calculative thinking. But once meditative thinking awakens, it must be at work unceasingly and on every last occasion—hence, also, here and now at this commemoration. For here we are considering what is threatened especially in the atomic age: the autochthony of the works of man.

Thus we ask now: even if the old rootedness is being lost in this age, may not a new ground and foundation be granted again to man, a foundation and ground out of which man's nature and all his works can flourish in a new way even in the atomic age?

What could the ground and foundation be for the new autochthony? Perhaps the answer we are looking for lies at hand; so near that we all too easily overlook it. For the way to what is near is always the longest and thus the hardest for us humans. This way is the way of meditative thinking. Meditative thinking demands of us not to cling one-sidedly to a single idea, nor to run down a one-track course of ideas. Meditative thinking demands of us that we engage ourselves with what at first sight does not go together at all.

Let us give it a trial. For all of us, the arrangements, devices, and machinery of technology are to a greater or lesser extent indispensable. It would be foolish to attack technology blindly. It would be shortsighted to condemn it as the work of the devil. We depend on technical devices; they even challenge us to ever greater advances. But suddenly and unaware we find ourselves so firmly shackled to
these technical devices that we fall into bondage to them.

Still we can act otherwise. We can use technical devices, and yet with proper use also keep ourselves so free of them, that we may let go of them any time. We can use technical devices as they ought to be used, and also let them alone as something which does not affect our inner and real core. We can affirm the unavoidable use of technical devices, and also deny them the right to dominate us, and so to warp, confuse, and lay waste our nature.

But will not saying both yes and no this way to technical devices make our relation to technology ambivalent and insecure? On the contrary! Our relation to technology will become wonderfully simple and relaxed. We let technical devices enter our daily life, and at the same time leave them outside, that is, let them alone, as things which are nothing absolute but remain dependent upon something higher. I would call this comportment toward technology which expresses "yes" and at the same time "no," by an old word, releasement toward things.  

Having this comportment we no longer view things only in a technical way. It gives us clear vision and we notice that while the production and use of machines demands of us another relation to things, it is not a meaningless relation. Farming and agriculture, for example, now have turned into a motorized food industry. Thus here, evidently, a profound change is taking place in man's relation to nature and to the world. But the meaning that reigns in this change remains obscure.

There is then in all technical processes a meaning, not invented or made by us, which lays claim to what man does and leaves undone. We do not know the significance of the uncanny increasing dominance of atomic technology. The meaning pervading technology hides itself. But if we explicitly and continuously heed the fact that such hidden meaning touches us everywhere in the world of technology, we stand at once within the realm of that which hides itself from us, and hides itself just in approaching us. That which shows itself and at the same time withdraws is the essential trait of what we call the mystery. I call the comportment which enables us to keep open to the meaning hidden in technology, openness to the mystery.

Releasement toward things and openness to the mystery belong together. They grant us the possibility of dwelling in the world in a totally different way. They promise us a new ground and foundation upon which we can stand and endure in the world of technology without being imperiled by it.

Releasement toward things and openness to the mystery give us a vision of a new autochthony which someday even might be fit to recapture the old and now rapidly disappearing autochthony in a changed form.

But for the time being—we do not know for how long—man finds himself in a perilous situation. Why? Just because a third world war might break out unexpectedly and bring about the complete annihilation of humanity and the
disaster of the earth? No. In this dawning atomic age a far greater danger threatens—precisely when the danger of a third world war has been removed. A strange assertion! Strange indeed, but only as long as we do not meditate.

In what sense is the statement just made valid? This assertion is valid in the sense that the approaching tide of technological revolution in the atomic age could so captivate, bewitch, dazzle, and beguile man that calculative thinking may someday come to be accepted and practiced as the only way of thinking.

What great danger then might move upon us? Then there might go hand in hand with the greatest ingenuity in calculative planning and inventing indifference toward meditative thinking, total thoughtlessness. And then? Then man would have denied and thrown away his own special nature—that he is a meditative being. Therefore, the issue is the saving of man's essential nature. Therefore, the issue is keeping meditative thinking alive.

Yet releasement toward things and openness to the mystery never happen of themselves. They do not befall us accidentally. Both flourish only through persistent, courageous thinking.

Perhaps today's memorial celebration will prompt us toward this. If we respond to the prompting, we think of Conradin Kreutzer by thinking of the origin of his work, the life-giving powers of his Heuberg homeland. And it is we who think if we know ourselves here and now as the men who must find and prepare the way into the atomic age, through it and out of it.

If releasement toward things and openness to the mystery awaken within us, then we should arrive at a path that will lead to a new ground and foundation. In that ground the creativity which produces lasting works could strike new roots.

Thus in a different manner and in a changed age, the truth of what Johann Peter Hebel says should be renewed:

We are plants which—whether we like to admit it to ourselves or not—must with our roots rise out of the earth in order to bloom in the ether and to bear fruit.