

trivialized forms of freedom and prosperity on which the technological society is centered without, at the same time, criticizing freedom and prosperity more generally as a vision of the good life. Quite the contrary, we can call technology into question even more sharply by showing that technology fails to provide the free, prosperous, and good life we want in our waking moments.

Technological society offers a flattened vision of freedom and prosperity. The more disburdened, the better off I am according to this vision. So, the technological idea of freedom is really one of disburdenment. What about prosperity? Cellular phones are currently a status symbol. These devices which disburden people of the constraints of place are taken to be a sign of affluence because, generally, only the more prosperous have them. So, in part, to be prosperous is to have the latest, most refined device. A sign of affluence, too, is to be able to go to an undiscovered exotic place, have the most channels and compact discs, own specially designed clothing, own what no one else has yet. Thus, in part, to be prosperous is to own the most varied, the widest assortment of commodities. Finally, when people buy a product on sale they get both the commodity they purchased and still have money left over. Why is that attractive? Because they can buy something else with the money saved. They are better off that way, they think, because they get more items for the money. Thus people pursue prosperity through the standards of owning the *most numerous, widest variety, and the very latest (most refined)* commodities. The powers that be in the technological society own and control most of these items. Such is the picture of the good life envied by those keeping up with the Joneses. Our culture's vision of the good life is the goods life.

Does this vision really deliver a good life? If we say no merely because it differs from the blessed life according to Abraham, Moses, and the prophets, or from the Greeks' eudaimonia, our analysis would be dogmatic and presumptuous. Technology must be thought through; it will not be met by simply reacting against it. So, if we answer "no," as I will, then we must be able to provide good reasons.

THE TECHNOLOGICAL MEANS TO FREEDOM AND HAPPINESS: THE DEVICE

The ironic consequences of this vision of freedom and prosperity can be drawn out through a careful analysis of the peculiar way technology transforms, or more specifically, dominates nature and culture. Technology does not dominate these in the traditional manner of lording it over them; rather, as Albert Borgmann shows, technology follows a pattern, unique to the modern era, in the way it gets everything under control. We can expose this pattern by examining instances of it.

The central heating system dominates warmth; it brings warmth under control in ways that the wood-burning stoves do not. To show its unique form of domination, Borgmann distinguishes between "things" and "devices." A thing in his sense

is inseparable from its context, namely its world, and from our commerce with the thing and its world, namely, engagement. The experience of a thing is always and also a bodily and social engagement with the thing's world ... Thus a stove used to furnish more than mere warmth. It was a *focus*, a hearth, a place that gathered the work and leisure of a family and gave the house a center. Its coldness marked the morning, and the spreading of its warmth marked the beginning of the day. It assigned to various family members tasks that defined their place in the household ... It provided the entire family a regular and bodily engagement with the rhythm of the seasons that was woven together with the threat of cold and the solace of warmth, the smell of wood smoke, the exertion of sawing and carrying, the teaching of skills, and the fidelity to daily tasks ... Physical engagement is not simply physical contact but the experience of the world through the manifold sensibility of the body. That sensibility is sharpened and strengthened in skill. Skill is intensive and refined world engagement.

Here, in his retrieval of the thing's world and our engagement with the thing, Borgmann has been influenced by Heidegger's fourfold account of things. Obviously, Earth and sky are woven together with mortals. He points out that in