

Heidegger and Bureaucracy

1. Introduction

What is dangerous is not technology. Technology is not demonic; but its essence is mysterious. The essence of technology, as destining of revealing, is the danger. (p.2)

In *The Question Concerning Technology* (1954), Martin Heidegger sets out to capture something far deeper than just those surface manifestations of technology: those factories with endless automation, the methods of mass production in an ever-networked world. His essay is about going beneath the surface, and positioning technology as a possible mode of human activity, that will either facilitate a far richer interaction for Dasein in its world or render it unrecognisable and unable to connect. The stakes are high and in this, technology acts as something of a final frontier for Heidegger, who uses it to paint a picture of an adolescent phase of Dasein attempting to grasp hold of its maturity. The essay's final position, perhaps not overly optimistic, belies a genuine interest in whether technology will evolve the human being's place in the world, or it will all come to nothing.

No one likes to admit that reading Heidegger's often feels like a relentless onslaught of verbiage. And though this may be the case, the judgement is somewhat premature. If one puts in the effort to wade through his pages it all becomes more akin to pulling on a sumptuous Platonic golden thread, where everything is so carefully constructed in a way that has an utmost respect for clarity. Though notorious for his proclivity in semantics, constantly reforming grammar and grappling with translation, and for the wholesale invention of words as they are needed, underneath this lives a commitment to clarity above all, and expressing language that is consistent and self-contained.

When reading philosophy, the reader will always need to watch out for those non-contextual curve balls (it is perennial price of entry for the discipline). For this essay, the enduring challenge relates to Heidegger's conception of the Self in the word, which he denotes *Dasein*. Dasein comes across as assumed reading in this essay (and to undertake that assumed reading, check out his seminal work, *Being and Time*).

But stay on the same page and, at least for now, put off reading Heidegger's voluminous tome, I will provide a simplified crib notes on Dasein. Dasein is not the same as self. While philosophy enjoys the unspoken privilege of arbitrating the

perfect arc between extremes of clarity and ambiguity, attaching semantically similarity to these terms is not ok. The Dasein that Heidegger speaks of is something far more than the Self. Dasein is not just everyday consciousness, or an awareness of existence, or a kind of Cartesian abstraction positioning the human as a dual agent variously (though not specifically) inhabiting mind and body. Dasein is rather a deeply immersive and fluid involvement between a human being and its world. It is a collaboration par-excellence, one in which the human being has accepted the limits of its collaboration and the fleeting nature of its existence. Dasein is an embodiment of the understanding of inevitable physical decay borne by temporality. It is also intimately bound with the idea of authenticity, an authenticity forged by the accepting of responsibility for a limited lifespan and, in the face of this, and to choose to optimise the situation one is found in.

A final note before getting into the weeds of his essay: it might be tempting to paint Heidegger as some kind of luddite, a countryside recluse lamenting the decline of the modern world, the evils of technology, living in some kind of glorious and idealised Wagnerian past. It is a seductive narrative that, while arguably fitting conveniently into some aspects of his biography, is surely an oversimplification. Heidegger always faces the reader with a complicated moral and historical context that is important to acknowledge, however what is fascinating about this essay is how much it cuts across this context and the broader history of the time in which he lived. There is a kind of an eternal truth bubbling throughout, that views the integration of technology as a core challenge for Dasein in its evolution to maturity.

2. From contrivance to causality to revealing

The first salvo in the technology essay is the classic first-principles philosophical opening: be as general as possible. The question of what technology is becomes the question or what, really, is anything:

According to ancient doctrine, the essence of a thing is considered to be what the thing is. We ask the question concerning technology when we ask what it is (p.2)

Heidegger provides two responses. First, that technology is a human activity. And second, it is a means to an end. This all feels like something of an opaque opening gambit, for the implication appears to be that technology could be any activity at all. But the magic clue here is to take note that while technology might be almost anything, it is nevertheless not something that is 'out there'. Whatever its content may be, it is an indelible part of Dasein. Further, it is a process (rather than a thing or artefact). It is at the disposal of Dasein that is undertaken to shape the perceptions of the world Dasein inhabits.

Heidegger follows it up with ever more detail, drilling down more precisely into the nature of this process. Technology allows Dasein to have things at its disposal, instruments or contrivances it can employ to uncover the hidden nature of an obscure world. There is even an unexpected lack of majesty in the way he describes all of this: technology is presented almost as a bag of tricks (being instruments or contrivances) that add to Dasein's attempt to clarify the world: "the whole complex of these contrivances is technology. Technology itself is a contrivance" (p.3).

It is refreshing stuff. Words like 'modern' and 'technology' are always such triggers for the usual doom and gloom. But no tropes like that here. The diabolical spectre of technology displacing the human, the teen-dystopia of it all, is mercifully absent. Like I said, Heidegger is not an indiscriminate grumpy luddite, despite the vibe that seems to emanate.

From here, things take an Aristotelian turn. Means leading to ends become causes leading to effects. The instruments and contrivances Dasein arms itself with in the face of the world are recast from ends to effects. This conveniently opens the door to use Aristotle's fourfold definition of cause and effect, and it all gets broken down as follows:

1. *Causa Materialis*: referring to the material out of which an instrument is made
2. *Causa Formalis*: referring to the shape of the instrument will be made
3. *Causa Finalis*: referring to the purpose of the instrument after its entrance into the world
4. *Causa Efficiens*: referring to the the creator of the instrument, the artisan

It is a short lived love affair. For Heidegger, this characterisation of cause and effect does not hit the mark. It is all a little too arbitrary. Why four causes? Why not more? Or less? And why are things so very discrete? Heidegger immediately counters with an alternate view, that things are just so much more interconnected, "all belonging to each other, of being responsible for something else". Cause and effect are related to the profound nature of collaboration that the Dasein finds it engaging in as it encounters the world.

Heidegger goes on to provide his classic back pocket example: the silver chalice. This particular contrivance, he claims, cannot be described as somehow emanating from Aristotle's four discrete concepts. Instead, the chalice appears in the world as an interplay, a profound collaboration driven by the Dasein's inescapable interconnectivity and indebtedness to its world that furnishes it with the perception of materials. Aristotle's four concepts are reimagined as being far a more integrated

affair, where Dasein plays the part of the director in a process of becoming, limited by the materials at hand. To be human is to collaborate deeply with the world, to create "circumscribed bounds", from the appearance of boundless materials for the individual Dasein. The instrument that comes to be, is an emergent phenomena that shed's light on a previously unseen aspect of the world and provides a purpose (a "telos") to what was material found in the world.

So finally, to a definition for the essence of technology: the essence of technology is a mechanism for Dasein to create instruments or contrivances that reveal the nature of its world, providing it with an opportunity to optimise its being in the world, to fulfil its nature as Dasein. It is a process of "bringing forth", or "revealing".

Heidegger wraps up the definition by invoking uses the Greek term, *Aletheia* (which translates to "revealing") claiming:

Bringing forth comes to pass only insofar as something concealed comes into unconcealment. This coming rests and moves freely within what we call revealing. The Greeks have the word Aletheia for revealing. The Romans translate this to Veritas. We say "truth" and usually understand it as correctness of representation

Two further terms are offered up, (which admittedly turn out to be particularly critical later on): *Techne* and *Poiesis*. *Techne*, related to yet another term, *Episteme*, comes by way of Plato, and refers to a practice of knowing (somewhat similar to revealing, but from a different angle). This idea, along with *Poiesis*, comes together to paint Dasein as a craftsman, an artisan fashioning contrivance out of what is found in the environment. The essence of technology, this revealing, turns out to be more about art: "the art, to poiesis; it is something poetic".

Following this veritable pastiche of terminology, it turns out that what is really happening here is that technology is a facilitation of the disposition of the artisan. Technology turns out to be a means to art, a nod to the potential creativity of Dasein. Technology, it seems, is something far deeper than what was perhaps expected:

Technology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing. If we give heed to this, then another whole realm for the essence of technology will open itself up to us. It is the realm of revealing, i.e., of truth.

3. On becoming a bureaucrat in an arbitrary world

It is at about this point in the exegesis that Heidegger needs to turn to the far thornier issue. Maybe the above definition is satisfactory and the definition of the essence of technology has been established. But how does this relate to modern technology? It is one thing for some singular bright-eyed novice Dasein to go about the world fashioning silver chalices to show off its ever-deepening relationship with its world. But it seems an entirely different proposition to relate this to the modern industrial complex, one dominated by the trappings of mass production and automation. What to make of all those anonymous automobiles flying off the assembly line, thrust into a multifarious existence of multi-channel marketing campaigns and vast transports networks, coming to interact with dozens of subsidiary industries? How can the neighbourhood Aletheia be accommodated into such a version of events? In addressing this, Heidegger claims:

...modern technology is something incomparably different from all earlier technologies because it is based on modern physics as an exact science. Meanwhile, we have come to understand more clearly that the reverse holds true as well: modern physics, as experimental, is dependent upon technical apparatus and upon progress in building of apparatus

It is here for me that Heidegger really comes into the heart of the matter: the theoretical lens through which modern technology takes place, a world of physics and structure whose complexity far outpaces Dasein's capacity or understanding, means that contrivances in the context of modern technology are not just more acts of revealing, or even the result of some multifaceted Dasein teamwork that creates complex objects. It is far more of a disconnected abstraction, a relegation of Dasein to a process where Aletheia has somehow lost its intent and been swallowed into its content. It is revealing in which there is process and form, but no content. Somewhere during the process, Aletheia's purpose has turned to empty heuristics.

So modern technology, while it may be a revealing, it is a revealing with side effects. They arise due to the inherent limitations of Dasein to effectively manage its growing multiplicity of contrivances, and the tendency to respond to this by creating structures to manage this multiplicity which increasingly tends toward complexity. Modern technology is Dasein running low on memory, forced into manufacture of ever more information-heavy structures to make sense of its world. That process of Aletheia, wonderful and majestic though it may be, tends to leave something behind

over time – arbitrary bits of information strewn across Dasein's world, inevitably pushing Dasein to move into the business of information management.

Of course, this is a non-standard interpretation. On the one hand, I am positing that Aletheia acts as a process to enhance Dasein's world. But on the other hand, I am intimating a darker side to the process that leaves existential pollution in its wake for successive Daseins in the world to wade through, and which may even act as the limiting factor for Dasein in the world. So modern technology then, is not just another instance of Aletheia, but rather the historical record of Dasein's gradual outsourcing of Aletheia in the face of the unbearable complexity that Aletheia has created. It is a kind metaphysical environmentalism problem, a too-much-information quandary, that places a hard ceiling on Dasein's ability to interact with the world.

To make such an opaque argument slightly more concrete, consider this toy example: suppose in a world full of Daseins who all are bubbling along in different phases of development, one of these innumerable Daseins, at some point in the far distance past, created a contrivance. Aletheia has taken place! And suppose also that the contrivance that has been created is what a modern day Dasein might think of as a wheel. It is an exciting achievement to be sure, though somewhat tempered by Dasein's annoyingly limited lifespan: it wanders the earth but for an instant before disappearing into the void. But now this wheel is in the world, an object for all the other Daseins to contemplate and integrate into their own acts of Aletheia. More fabulous utility abounds. And as all the subsequent Daseins appear and disappear, the world becomes transformed under the cumulative weight of their revealing. The wheel leads to momentum and curvature leads to force and mass leads to abstraction leads to physics leads to more and more utility leads to machines leads to complexity leads to more and more utility, ad nauseum. That initial revealing of that first Dasein was just a drop in the ocean of a tidal wave of revealing, creating a world that is increasingly terraformed via complex abstractions and structures. History itself becomes measured and defined as the growth of structures Dasein must wade through. And all the while the Dasein's appear and disappear.

So, is there a tipping point to all this? Is there some Shannon like limit in view, a formula lurking somewhere that might return the probability that Dasein can engage in Aletheia? Is there an identifiable point where Dasein can no longer push through an ever-structured world, can no longer reveal anything, but can only attempt to organise? Is history nothing but a metric, a growing likelihood that Dasein will be cast into the librarian's clothing, whose destiny will become one of, "unlocking, transforming, storing, and switching", leading to a hopeless existential disconnect? And when this moment is reached, what happens next? Will Dasein find itself facing a radically different ontology, and be swept away by a Darwinian transformation to acknowledge an existence that is mundane, inauthentic, inconsequential?

Heidegger does not put it quite this way, but his underlying sentiment is that modern technology is a problem of information bloat. He defines this shift in the purpose of Aletheia one that leads to *standing reserve*. Standing reserve, in place of Dasein's contrivances, gets created when the volume of information overwhelms Dasein's activities. No longer seeking to optimise its place in the world, Dasein becomes pushed into the service of simply storing and sorting, which acts as escapism that excuses Dasein from its true intent. Dasein becomes the non-self, roaming through endless information which desperately needs to organise and gets sucked in to passing the time in the most banal way.

Heidegger also uses the term *enframing* to capture this sentiment. My reading of enframing is that it acts as an inauthentic prop of Dasein's temporary satisfaction, gained through organising, sorting, cataloguing. And as history unfolds, the tendency of Daseins in the world to turn away from Aletheia and fill the void with enframing grows, leaving smaller and smaller spaces where authentic revealing can take place. Sure, some Daseins will still be finding those precious moments of Aletheia, carving out authenticity, but Heidegger's point is that this window is closing as time marches on.

4. On Destining

The coming to presence of technology threatens revealing, threatens it with the possibility that all revealing will be consumed in ordering and that everything will present itself only in the unconcealedness of standing-reserve. Human activity can never directly counter this danger. Human achievement alone can never banish it. But human reflection can ponder the fact that all

So, at this point in the Heidegger's essay, things are certainly looking bleak. A duel looks to be on the cards. Will Dasein's fate be revealing or enframing? In the face of a world filled with existential clutter, will it still manage to pump out some meaningful Aletheia? Or will it instead be doomed to toil in an information junkyard, a downbeat librarian facing an eternity of aggregation? Will it tend to an authentic life, or will it tend to storage and information management?

But things turn out not to be that bad. The final battle turns out to be just the necessary existential denouement Dasein could use. To explain this optimistic turn of events, consider the new term offered up into the mix: *destining*.

We shall call the sending that gathers [versammelnde Schicken], that first starts man upon a [306] way of revealing, destining

*[Geschick]. It is from this destining that the essence of all history
[Geschichte] is determined.*

So what is destining? Heidegger designates it as a primal starting point, an initial position for Dasein in its world, an existential mode that finds Dasein embodied in time and poised to embark on its creation of contrivances. Destining is about Dasein being on a precipice, gazing at the available places offered up by the world for revealing to take place. But the spaces are getting smaller, bound by history, an ever limiting set of possibilities to enable revealing juxtaposed with ever growing information. Dasein finds itself in the briefest moment of freedom, when choosing revealing or enframing. But as history rolls on, it becomes more and more difficult for Dasein to choose the former.

If Dasein chooses to fall into existing instruments of the world, if enframing is chosen, takes part of encounters the self as a kind of standing reserve, ongoing organisation. This is the easy way out, a rejection for Dasein. Instruemnts, postures, personality, just becomes a variation, a Gaussian mediocrity. The world does not get revealed, enframing is the true opiate of the masses, and this pushes Dasein to its most dangerous state, because the world, rather than getting revealed, becomes stagnant, endless revolving platonic solid infinitely revealing the same thing.

Thus where enframing reigns, there is danger in the highest sense.

But before Dasien simply slinks and throws its hands in the affair at such a state of affairs, Heidegger turns again to Holderin:

*But where danger is,
grows The saving power also.*

It is an elegant twist. Hiedeger pulls back from the precipice Heigegger recasting things into an idea of equilibrium, a limit an equilibrium limit in play here. This knife edge revealing every smaller spaces, out be the key component faced by Dasein in its navigation of the world, turns out just just what it needs to push through from its adolescence to nature, the threat of empty form, pushes into a corner. It feels almost spiritual, passage reminded me of am reminded of Dainin Katigiri when pushed into a corner, the world is revealed. Standing reserver,

As the essay wraps up Heidegger keeps riffing on the point, making a a couple of really nice moves to round out the essay, repositioning enframing, as rather than a type of revealing, a fork in the road, but as the result of the technology , technology is

a universal. It is not side affect to avoid, it is a nescerray aspect of the revealing of Dasein in the world. Dasein needs technology to find its salvation:

Thus enframing, as a destining of revealing, is indeed the essence of technology, but never in the sense of genus and essentia. If we pay heed to this, something astounding strikes us: it is technology itself that makes the demand on us to think in another way what is usually understood by "essence." But in what way?
[312]

Causality, is a side affect, how to account for growing causality, technology, as the universal embodiment of technology,

Thus where everything that presences exhibits itself in the light of a cause-effect coherence, even God, for representational thinking, can lose all that is exalted and holy, the mysteriousness of his distance.

Dasien has to overcome this challenge, to revealin the face, making its world increasingly determininistic, how to be in this world as a being that can reveal.

enframing comes to pass for its part in the granting that lets man endure—as yet inexperienced, but perhaps more experienced in the future—that he may be the one who is needed and used for the safekeeping of the essence of truth

This means that enframing turns out to be critical to the whole operation. Heidegger ends with

The closer we come to the danger, the more brightly do the ways into the saving power begin to shine and the more questioning we become. For questioning is the piety of thought.

Its a bold ending that does not disappoint: Dasein needs to fly closer as possible to sun to reach its authentic self. Darwinian.

5. Conclusion

Reading philosophy is to be always assaulted by allusions and explanations. I have skipped over but tried to get to the heart of the matter. By this he measn that the

world we create, its structures, will create the parameters of our ontology and the message is organise. Will humanity before secoming to heat death, succumb to somthing far more moribund, a kind of information death? not to be defeatist the end, Heidegger's technoloy paints a view of adolescence of. Will our destiny be revealing or enframing. Revealing will be a destiny, but enframing will be a framing for no one in partiular, a destiny for no one. But it is nescerry to evolve though this, into a state of being, it is nescerssy to inculcate this danger into a way of being. Whenever I

The english novelist Murdoch - fantasy vs imagination

Kundera's motorcyclist