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 <u>The Question Concerning Technology</u> (1954), Martin Heidegger sets out to capture something far deeper than just those surface manifestations of technology: the automobiles, the methods of mass production, the ever-networked world. His essay is about going beneath the surface, and positioning technology as a possible mode of activity for human beings, that may either facilitate a richer interaction, or render Dasein unrecognisable and unable to connect to its world. Technology is something of a final frontier for Heidegger, who uses it to paint a picture of an adolescent phase of Dasein attempting to attain 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.

Reading Heidegger's work can sometimes feel like a relentless onslaught of verbiage. But upon spending a little more time, it is more akin to pulling on a sumptuous Platonic golden thread, where everything is so carefully constructed in a way that has the utmost respect for clarity. Though notorious for his proclivity in semantics, constantly grappling with grammar and translation, and for the wholesale invention of words as they are needed. But rather it belies his commitment to clarity above all, and expressing language that is consistent and self-contained.

Note however, the reader will always need to watch out for non-contextual curve balls in matters of philosophy. For this essay, the challenge on that front relates to Heidegger's conception of self in the word, which he denotes *Dasein*. Dasein comes across as assumed reading in this essay (and to undertake that assumed reading, the voluminous work, <u>Being and Time</u> can be consulted). I will provide some context as needed, but a passing familiarity of Dasein is assumed.

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, 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 to address in its search for authenticity.

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 clue here is to note 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. That teen-dystopia spectre of technology displacing the human 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 Arestotlian 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 Efficians*: 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 an illustrative 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 word and provides a purpose (a "telos") to what was material found in the world.

Enough digression. Back to the main thread of the definition and, at last, 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 greats have the word Aletheia for revealing. The Romans translate this to Veritas. We say "truth" and usually understand it as correctness of representation*

The synonyms keep on coming. 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 craftsperson, an artisan fashioning contrivances out of what is found in the world. 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 that 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 a far thornier issue. Maybe the above definition is satisfactory and the definition of the essence of technology has been established. But how can this possibly relate to modern

technology? It is one thing for some singular bright-eyed novice Dasein to go about the world fashioning silver chalices to reveal the nature of 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 to be delivered by multi-channel marketing campaigns and a vast endless transport network, interacting dozens of subsidiary industries? How can the neighbourhood Aletheia be accommodated into this 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*

My reading of this is that it is here that Heidegger really comes to the heart of the matter. Because modern technology is not just another act of revealing, the result of some kind of multifaceted Dasein teamwork. It is far more derivative and abstract, and in becoming more derivative and abstract, Aletheia loses its meaning. Somewhere in the midst of the process of Dasein revealing the nature of its world, the abstract of its revealing into theories, or into heuristics, into automation arising from the proliferation of technical apparatus, Dasein itself is abstracted away.

This suggests that modern technology may be a revealing, but it is a revealing to an inevitable and strange side effect of Dasein's activity. It arises due to inherent limitations of Dasein to effectively manage its growing multiplicity of contrivances, and the tendency of its contrivances to lead to more abstract structures that manufacture more information, leading to an ever-growing catalogue of revealing. The process of revealing leaves information strewn across Dasein's world, an endless of bits that needs to be organised and reroutes Dasein's efforts

Admittedly, this is a non-standard interpretation. Essentially I am positing that Aletheia, on one hand, acts as the potential to enhance Dasein's world, but on the other hand, to lead to an increasingly unmanageable amount of information which acts as existential pollution. Modern technology is not just another instance of Aletheia, rather it is the trace of Dasein's gradual outsourcing of Aletheia in the face of the potential complexity that revealing can lead to, leading to a kind of tipping point where revealing creates impossible demands on information management. It is

a classic there-is-just-too-much-information problem, that places a ceiling and Dasein's mechanism to create contrivances.

Let me illustrate using a toy example: suppose in a world full of Daseins who are all bubbling along in different phases of development, one of these innumerable Daseins, at some point long ago, creates a contrivance. Aletheia has taken place! And suppose the contrivance that has been created is what a modern day Dasein might think of as a wheel. This is of course a great achievement, though somewhat tempered by Dasein's annoyingly limited lifespan: it wanders the earth but for an instant, manages to fashion a fabulously useful wheel, before disappearing into the void. But now the wheel is in the world, an object for the other Daseins to build on. As to be expected, what this Dasein has created leads to all kinds of other Aletheia moments, so much more fabulous utility. And as all the subsequent Daseins appear and disappear, the world is transformed under the cumulative weight of their revealing. Wheels lead to momentum leads to force leads to abstraction leads to physics leads to more utility leads to more and more utility. That initial revealing of that first Dasein is a drop in the ocean of revolution of revealing, creating a world as the world is increasingly terraformed via complex emanations and abstractions. And all the while the Dasein's appear and disappear into the void.

So the question in this scenario becomes, is there a tipping point to all this? For the Dasein that appears in the time in which I am alive, right now, what is it to be made of all the outputs of all the revealing that has come before, all the abstractions. How can it digest them in order to undertake revealing. Is there a revealing limit? Is there a point at which Dasein can no longer explore the word, but can merely attempt to organise it?

Being a more recent aspiring Dasien myself, I wonder if this tipping point might have some kind of formula, some Shannon-like concept, some mathematical law that spells out the limit beyond which Dasein is no longer an agent of creation but one of bureaucracy? But then again, it is a formula which does not even matter. The underlying problem is that Dasein has been cast into librarian's clothing, a being which, Heidegger notes, "unlocking, transforming, storing, and switching" has inevitably led to a hopeless existential disconnect.

Heidegger puts it all a little differently more poetically, but his underlying sentiment is that the revealing of modern technology is one that leads to information bloat. He calls this process one that leads to 'standing reserve'. It is revealing in the service of creating information in the world, It is a move that, rather than seeking to optimise one's place in the world by revealing it, to be pushed into the service of simply storing and sorting information. Dasein no longer has the time to engage in Aletheia, it derives satisfaction from the self in service as of the non-self. Heidegger

encapsulates this with another term also "enframing". So for Heidegger, enframing is revealing when there is no self involved in revealing. The satisfaction Dasein derives from revealing is satisfied by, organising, one no longer creates, one organises and sorts, one files, Dasein is subjected and manipulation. Enframing is the processing that leaves the trace of information, vast stores of information. It reduces the role of the self and a kind of innite librarian, rather than a writer of works. We also need to be careful about the scope of this problem. THis is about Modern Technology, tendecy of relategation, but there is still revealing happening. There are in the world revealing still happnening, the improvising musician, the artist, the composer, Art has retained this revealing. But modern technology has transformed. I am troubled by this dichotomy.

This is alffo feels like an abiding problem of the world we found ourselves in. deep problem of modernity interprted in all manner of ways. Maybe I interpret it as The subjecgated self, the victim, the grand ennui, the self in politics, the self in boredomhe problem comes when understanding. Dasien's revealing revealing without Dasein on Dasein, it fundamentally alters it. Maybe its a problem of storage and capacity, Heidegger's talks of storage in this essay. Maybe the self is trying on some level to write it outself into oblivion, suicidal How does it effect it, its revealing is on the stuff revealing leaves behind, the derivative. Reveal structure that enhances in the world, reveal structure in the structure, modern technology is a removal from interactive. The examples, like the flood of revealing, come thick and fast

This reminds me of McLuhan's adage approach is in order circular definition: modern technology is the affect on me most of Kafkan nature of modern life. We wander the castle, we prepare for the trial, there are no revealing, there are forms to be filled in, information to be moved, and filed away. The enframed self is bureaucracy of arbitrary things. To be honest, it is a little unclear if this is depressing or not. Maybe the castle is full of other Daseins in the hallways oblivious to their existential plight.

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 essay, things are certainly looking bleak. A duel looks to be on the cards: revealing verses enframing. Will Dasein face the world in all its existential

clutter and still manage to pump out some meaningful Aletheia? Or will it instead be doomed to toil in the information junkyard, a downbeat librarian facing an eternity of aggregation? Will Dasein's fate tend to an authentic life, or will it tend to storage and information management?

But wait, things are actually not that bad. This turns out not to be the final battle, it is rather just the necessary existential denouement. To explain the optimistic turn, Heidegger introduces another term into the mix: *destining*.

> *We shall call the sending that gathers [versamelde 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 this destining business? Heidegger designates it as the starting point, an initial position for Dasein in its world, embodied in time and poised to undertake its contrivance creating interactions. Destining is Dasein on the precipice, seeking to a space in the world that can allow Aletheia. Destining is an interesting into the history of all

The raison d'etre of the destining process is to reveal, but as it sits on the pecipise ready to reveal the world, jump into revealing, and the space of revealing contracting, it is fated to reveal the world, and live in its revelations.

If destining is some kind of existential trait, and revealing is the activity that must arise from this trait, what is the result of this activity? For Heidegger this is where the fork in the road appears. Dasein is faced with a free choice - will it be enframing the world, or revealing the world. Aggregating or exploring. Dasein is free to the extent that it can choose such different types of revealing.

And it in this choice will mean that the world will be more understood, but if enframing is chosen, self encounters the self as a kind of standing reserve. There is an implication here that, as time moves on, as Dasein must content with more history, enframing is the easy way out. 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 turns 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. This passage reminded me of am reminded of Dainin Katigiri when pushed into a corner, the world is revealed. Standing reserver,

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*

Enframing is 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 dissapoint

5. Conclusion

Reading philosophy is to be always assaulted by allusions and explanations. And this is no d McLuhan catch phrase, medium is the message. 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. Whenver I

The english novelist Murdoch - fantasy vs imagination

Kundera's motorcyclist