

Chapter 2

Heidegger's Later Philosophy

Abstract Heidegger's early strategy for answering the question of Being—his lifelong quest—had been to analyse human being. He eventually decided that this strategy was flawed and called this realisation his 'Turn'. Although the question of Being remained his focus, he approached it in different ways. He explored the idea of the 'truth' of Being as the self-concealing/self-revealing Event in which beings are disclosed. Language became a central concern of Heidegger's explorations. Through language, the event of Being is preserved and passed on, keeping the world open for human beings. Heidegger investigated art and poetry, finding them to be sites for the disclosure of Being. He also described a meditative style of thinking in which we allow things to be revealed without attempting to reduce them to traditional representations. The later Heidegger also produced many critical insights. Humanism was analysed as a potent form of the Tradition in which standard representations of human being are coupled with programs for character formation. To the extent that these representations are limited, as Heidegger contends, the educational endeavours they inform must be suspect. Heidegger also analysed our fascination with technology. He argued that the essence of technology or 'enframing' has become the dominant understanding of Being in the contemporary world. It typically reduces everything to resources and thereby fosters an instrumental mentality that threatens to overshadow our own being, as evident in our perception of ourselves as human resources.

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Heidegger never finished the project of *Being and Time*. The analysis we have been tracing stopped after the general analysis of Dasein in terms of temporality, leaving us with a truncated study that has been termed a 'torso' (Schmidt 2006). Pressure to publish the work has been offered as a reason for the appearance of an unfinished product, but Heidegger (2009) indicates a deeper reason that is associated with his famous 'turn'. His assessment was that the whole idea of approaching the question of the meaning of Being via an understanding of human being was ultimately a flawed strategy. His turn consisted in abandoning the

methodological priority he had initially given Dasein. He retraced his steps, so to speak, dropping the argument that the way to the meaning of Being was through disclosing the being of the entity capable of inquiring into the meaning of Being. But in turning away from a systematic philosophical inquiry into Being as we find in the published part of *Being and Time*, Heidegger does not strike out on a methodologically explicit alternative. Rather, in his later work he approaches Being in a more tentative, less argumentative way. For commentators such as Habermas (1989), this turn is a regressive move but for others the turn leads to exciting new vistas of thought (e.g. Young 1997). The first part of the chapter will sketch some of the major themes of 'the later Heidegger': truth, language, art, poetry and 'thinking'. The later Heidegger's critical thought, including his critique of humanism and his analysis of the essence of technology, is addressed in the second part.

2.1 Truth

One of the themes foregrounded in Heidegger's later work is the 'truth' of Being. Already in *Being and Time* Heidegger made a case for deepening the everyday understanding of truth as 'correctness.' When we normally talk about truth we have in mind conformity between some assertion and the situation the assertion is about. My claim that a colleague was not at work last Friday is 'true' in this sense if the colleague was indeed not at work on that day. Truth is in this usage a function of the correspondence between assertions and realities. Heidegger dubbed this understanding of truth 'traditional' and went on to argue that any assertion of or debate about correctness or incorrectness presupposes the prior disclosure of the being of those states of affairs. The disclosure of the being of things and people—our openness to them, their openness to us—is a condition of any talk of truth as agreement. Heidegger appealed to an ancient Greek term for truth, 'alethia', to reinforce his point (2010, p. 211). 'Lethe' in ancient Greek means concealed or forgotten, and alethia means to unconceal or realise. Heidegger's contention is that at the dawn of philosophy in the West, truth itself was understood as *disclosure* and that this experience of the Greeks has been overshadowed by centuries of debate about truth as *correctness* spurred by an interpretation articulated by Plato (Heidegger 1998). Like our general forgetfulness of Being, there is a forgetfulness about the fact that things have to be disclosed—'true' in the sense of alethia—before we can raise the issue of truth as correctness.

In the later Heidegger the theme of truth becomes a distinct locus of inquiry that leads in its own way into meaning of Being. Dasein is no longer the 'royal road' to Being and inquiry into truth is not methodologically tied to Dasein's being. In an essay that epitomises Heidegger's later thought, *The Essence of Truth* (1977b), he reiterates his thesis that truth as correctness derives from a more basic notion of truth as disclosedness but goes on to elaborate a peculiar relationship between human being and Being that is illuminated by the essence of truth. Disclosure is bound up with the clearing of Being, but so is *concealment* insofar as

disclosure never amounts to the total illumination of beings. For Heidegger, concealment is more than a reference to the fact that we cannot see behind things or events far away in time or space. The clearing of being-in-the-world presupposes that the other side of things and events at which we are not present is nevertheless part of the world and in theory accessible by some Dasein if not us. Rather, for Heidegger concealment concerns the fact that our access to beings screens off the event or happening of openness. The Being of beings is concealed when the beings themselves appear. The disclosedness that is the condition of truth as *alethia* is accomplished through the self-concealing behaviour of Being. In the later Heidegger, Dasein becomes caught up in the interplay of concealment and disclosure that characterises *alethia*.

2.2 Language

If a methodological focus of the later Heidegger had to be nominated, then for many scholars language would be a prime candidate (e.g. Standish 2002). Language emerges as a major setting for the drama of truth. Heidegger (1959) acknowledges the fact that the question of Being and the word 'Being' must be articulated in language and that therefore 'the question of being will involve us deeply in the question of language' in which case 'we find ourselves compelled to take linguistic considerations as our starting point' (1959, p. 51). Taking 'linguistic considerations' as his starting point, he delves into the origins of language and suggests that language is implicated in the experience of Being from the very start. The 'mystery' that surrounds and plagues the question of the origins of language is connected with the strange, uncanny, self-concealing character of Being. He declares that,

The origin of language is in essence mysterious. And this means that language can only have arisen from the overpowering, the strange and terrible, through man's departure into being. In this departure language was being, embodied in the word: poetry. Language is the primordial poetry in which a people speaks being (1959, p. 171).

For Heidegger, language is fundamentally entwined with Being. Because Being is the Being of beings, Language is implicated in the Being of beings. If Being is what makes it possible to understand and encounter anything, then language has a special role in making it possible to understand and encounter things. Explaining the way language performs this role, Heidegger says, 'The word, the name, restores the emerging [thing] from the immediate, overpowering surge to its being and maintains it in this openness, delimitation, and permanence' (1959, p. 172). Language serves to stabilise things in the process of their appearance and in the flux of our experience. Words keep things steady in our encounter with them. Elsewhere, he explains that 'Language, by naming beings for the first time, first brings beings to word and to appearance. Only this naming nominates beings to their being *from* out of their being' (1971b, p. 73). Heidegger stresses that words in their ontological function precede the emergence of beings. Words are not to be thought of as 'applied' to a more primary reality experienced prior to words:

Naming does not come afterward, providing an already manifest [thing] with a designation and a hallmark known as a word; it is the other way around: originally an act of violence that discloses being, the word sinks from its height to become a mere sign, and this sign proceeds to thrust itself before the [thing] (1959, p. 172).

Words obviously can serve as 'mere signs' that sit in front of things as labels, but for Heidegger this possibility of language is secondary to the ontological role it has in the disclosure of beings. It is this secondary function of language that is exercised in the chatter of the They, distracting us from the ontological work of language and the possibility of experiencing and questioning the relationship of language to Being.

Heidegger disparages the They's use of language, but at the same time the possibility of language separating from the event of the disclosure of beings and floating above things as a set of designations allows it to at least 'preserve' the truth of beings: 'Language—what is uttered and said and can be said again—is the custodian of the disclosed [thing]. What has once been said can be repeated and passed on. The truth [i.e. disclosure] preserved in it spreads...' (1959, p. 185). Language, then, plays a complex role in Heidegger's philosophy. On the one hand, to ask the question of Being is in some sense to engage with the question of the origins and nature of language. Language in its ontological role is central to the human experience of beings, rendering the latter in a way that allows an encounter with discrete, stable things. But because language has already done this work of rendering by the time we experience things, language is, like Being, all too easy to overlook in everyday speech:

We speak and speak about language. What we speak of, language, is always ahead of us. Our speaking merely follows language constantly. Thus we are continually lagging behind what we first ought to have overtaken and taken up in order to speak about it. Accordingly, when we speak of language we remain entangled in a speaking that is persistently inadequate (1971a, p. 75).

Language is thus transformed into everyday chatter, entangling Dasein in experiences that float in the wake of the primary event of disclosure. But we saw that the secondary mode of language preserves the original experience of disclosure. In this sense, Heidegger says 'language is the house of being' (1998, p. 254). He portrays Dasein as 'dwelling' in this house where it 'guards' the truth of Being. The chatter of the They is thus a vehicle for the truth of Being, even if the They has little capacity for realising the part it plays in preserving the disclosure of Being.

2.3 Art and Poetry

A new theme in the later Heidegger is the place of art in the question of Being (Dronsfield 2010). Heidegger's engagement with art begins with his lecture series *The Origin of the Work of Art* presented between 1935 and 1936. Art in this context is no mere ornament and aesthetics has no place in the analysis. Rather, for Heidegger (1971b, p. 57), art is the 'happening of truth', a special way in which beings are unconcealed that also throws light on the question of the meaning of Being.

In these lectures, Heidegger analyses Van Gogh's *Peasants Shoes* and a Greek temple. He explains that artworks evince a *world*. To encounter Van Gogh's painting is to be admitted into intimate context of the world to which the shoes belong. For its part, the temple conjures a world that venerated the gods and revered the temple precinct as a holy place. Heidegger says the world of the artwork 'worlds'; it places us in a clearing or disclosure generated by the work.

For Heidegger, all art, insofar as it is a 'revealing', partakes in a special kind of disclosure he calls *poesis*. Searching for clues about the primordial conceptualisations of Being in the western tradition, Heidegger believed the ancient Greeks experienced Being as *poesis* or 'bringing forth'. He suggests that the 'highest sense' of *poesis* was reserved for *physis*, or 'the arising of something from out of itself' (1977a, p. 10). This is the being of the natural, 'physical' world and its processes, for example, 'the bursting of a blossom into bloom' (1977a, p. 10). Natural processes of becoming apparently struck the Greeks as the paradigm of the disclosure of beings. The Greeks also entertained a human-engendered form of *poesis* called *techne*, which they saw epitomised in the activity of artists and craft-people. Heidegger emphasises that the ancient understanding of *techne* was of a fundamentally respectful, sensitive form of work that involved deep understanding of and responsiveness to the material and awareness of the broader context of the work and its purposes. He distinguishes the attitude of this kind of *techne* from the more aggressive, 'challenging forth' of modern instrumental thinking (discussed later in the chapter).

In the *Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger (1971b) envisages both the Greek temple and Van Gogh's painting as products of *poesis* in the mode of *techne*, that is, results of a process of respectful revealing or truth by humans. But he makes a case for regarding poetry as a special case of *poesis*. Heidegger explains that the temple and painting emerge within a world that has already been 'cleared' by language. We saw above that language is always ahead of us, always already implicated in the emergence of things. In Heidegger's view, the creation of a temple or an oil painting presuppose a world of language:

Building and plastic creation...always happen already, and happen only, in the Open of saying and naming. It is the Open that pervades and guides them. But for this very reason they remain their own ways and modes in which truth orders itself into work. They are an ever special poetizing within the clearing of what is, which has already happened unnoticed in language (1971b, p. 74).

However, as a form of art that engages directly with language, poetry is in a unique position to shed light on the meaning of Being. Indeed, Heidegger regards language itself as a primal poetry, in the sense of *poesis*, and sees humanly created poetry, or 'poesy', as poetry in the 'narrower sense' (1971b, p. 74).

Yet the creative work of poets contains the potential to bridge the two senses of poetry. Heidegger believes there are 'great works' of poetry, stretching back to Homer, that amount to new events of disclosure. He says,

Language is the primordial poetry in which a people speaks being. Conversely, the great poetry by which a people enters into history initiates the moulding of its language. The Greeks created and experienced this poetry through Homer (1959, pp. 171–172).

Closer to our own time, Heidegger identified the work of poets including Hölderlin, George, Trakl and Rilke as examples of great poetry. The poems of Hölderlin in particular hold a special place in Heidegger's estimation. In his essay, *Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry*, Heidegger (1949) reiterates the connection between language and Being and explains the unique role of the poet in relation to both. Hölderlin is significant here because he was a poet who poetised about poetic creativity, offering for Heidegger rich insights into the questions of Being *and* language. But Heidegger goes further and places the poet and poetry at the crossroads of Being and language. He indicates the essential feature of the poet's work as fundamentally free creation. It is a form of creation that cannot be based in what already exists:

because being and essence of things can never be calculated and derived from what is present, they must be freely created, laid down and given. Such a free act of giving is establishment (1949, p. 281).

This free act of the poet that allows things to be understood as the things they are is also profoundly directed to Dasein in that it is for human being that the poet acts. It is in this sense that the ontological creativity of the poet is a 'gift' (Heidegger 1949, p. 283). Thus Heidegger is at pains to show that poetry should not be regarded as primarily an aesthetic activity and experience, or even an 'expression' of a prior state of things:

Poetry is not merely an ornament accompanying existence, not merely a temporary enthusiasm or nothing but an interest and amusement. Poetry is the foundation which supports history, and therefore it is not a mere appearance of culture, and absolutely not the mere "expression" of a "culture-soul" (1949, p. 283).

Indeed, Heidegger comes to believe that the work of poets and poetry is so important to understanding the meaning of Being that he declares 'the essence of language must be understood through the essence of poetry' (1949, p. 284). No longer will mere 'linguistic considerations' suffice as the basis for investigating the relationship between language and Being.

Heidegger's understanding of the 'free act' of the poet that establishes things and human being is striking. Drawing again on Hölderlin's thinking about the essence of poetry, Heidegger suggests that two forms of determination or 'control' are involved in the poetic 'act of establishing being'. On the one hand, poets 'intercept' signs from Being or in Hölderlin's terms, 'the language of the gods' (in Heidegger 1949, p. 287). Poets listen for and hear intimations of Being, ontologically new ways of understanding. On the other hand, poets are deeply attuned to Dasein. They listen for and hear fundamental human longings, what Hölderlin calls the 'Voice of the People' (in Heidegger 1949, p. 288). For Heidegger, these two principles of the establishment of Being by poetry leaves poets in an unenviable position 'between' gods and men, neither of one or the other:

the essence of poetry is joined to the laws of the signs of the gods and of the voice of the people, laws which tend towards and away from each other. The poet himself stands between the former—the gods, and the latter—the people. He is one who has been cast out—into that *Between*, between gods and men. But only and for the first time in this Between is it decided, who man is and where he is settling his existence (1949, pp. 288–289).

Here we see Heidegger struggling to create new ways to understand the question of Being. Adopting the term ‘gods’ from Hölderlin, he highlights the unsettling idea that the Being of beings can signal to us, can determine us in some way. The ancient notion of gods as messengers, and the equally ancient idea that poets have an almost shamanic power to interpret such messages, is deployed by Heidegger to open our thinking to the event of disclosure as something that determines us by making our world understandable. This innovative suggestion is crystallised in a line from one of Heidegger’s own poems: ‘Being’s poem, just begun, is man’ (1971b, p. 4).

2.4 Thinking

The challenging doctrine of poetry and the nature of the poet’s work does not exhaust the positive philosophy of the later Heidegger. Another theme we consider in this chapter is translated simply as ‘thinking.’ By this term Heidegger does not intend any of the traditional interpretations associated with it. He explicitly contrasts his conception of thinking with the ‘technical-scientific calculation’ (1971a, p. 91) that he says characterises the modern mind, an instrumental way of thinking that approaches things, people and Being in terms of the uses to which they might be put. On the contrary, the realm of ‘thinking’ is ‘the clearing that gives free rein, where all that is cleared and freed, and all that conceals itself, together attain the open freedom’ (1971a, p. 91). However, the freedom Heidegger links with thinking is not the same as the ‘free act’ of poetry. Heidegger does talk of poetry and thinking occupying the same ‘neighbourhood’ (1971a, p. 90) but is clear about their difference. Arguing for their differentiation, Heidegger declares that,

We must discard the view that the neighbourhood of poetry and thinking is nothing more than a garrulous cloudy mixture of two kinds of saying in which each makes clumsy borrowings from the other. Here and there it may seem this way. But in truth, poetry and thinking are in virtue of their nature held apart by a delicate yet luminous difference, each held in its own darkness: two parallels...by one another, against one another, transcending, surpassing one another each in its fashion (1971a, p. 90).

So what is thinking if it must be distinguished in this way from poetry, which seemed to be the ultimate reference point for the inquiry into Being? In his *Discourse on Thinking*, Heidegger (1966) recapitulates the distinction between instrumental thinking and thinking as such. He refers to the latter as ‘meditative’, but is adamant that he is not thereby defining a lofty or dreamy state. He proposes meditative thinking as a way to become independent of instrumental thinking and does so by contrasting *thinking* with calculative thought. A characteristic of meditative thinking is a special comportment towards things he calls ‘releasement toward things’ or just ‘releasement’. He says,

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.... Thus here, evidently, as elsewhere, a profound change is taking place in man’s relation to nature and to the world (1966, pp. 54–55).

Releasement is a deeply sensitive and responsive experience of our contemporary world that contrasts with the grasping insistence of calculative thinking, the instrumental way of thinking we have been taught to use. Heidegger offers an alternative way of articulating meditative thinking at this juncture: *openness to the mystery* (1966, p. 55). That is, being aware of a meaning that underlies the things of our world and staying with this obscure meaning without trying to bring it into words, or representation generally. Heidegger explains that

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 imperilled by it (1966, p. 55).

Thinking thus differs from poetry in a few more-or-less clear ways. It takes its stand on the entanglements that currently beset us facilitated by our modern, calculative mindset. Its focus is the mystery that lies in the essence of technology and instrumental thinking that define our world. It is thus very prosaic in its positioning, in contrast with poetry which harkens to the gods, intercepting and interpreting signs from Being. Thinking is also a means for our independence from the obscure new relationship to things that Being has granted which takes the form of the dazzling world of technology and the breathtaking advances of science. It is thus a path open to everyone and does not suggest the hermetic isolation of the poet. But it does mean we need to disentangle ourselves from the spell of technology. Anderson (1966) explains in his introduction to his translation of *Discourse on Thinking*,

fundamentally, Heidegger is urging his hearers and readers toward a kind of transmutation of themselves, toward a commitment which will enable them to pass out of their bondage to what is clear and evident but shallow, on to what is ultimate, however obscure and difficult that may be (in Heidegger 1966, p. 13).

The emphasis in Heidegger's doctrine of thinking is on coming to terms with our entanglement. He is not suggesting we ignore it but rather that in our entanglement lies a mystery that we can be open to. With this suggestion an important emphasis in the later Heidegger becomes clear: that our entanglements are meaningful, and in the most profound way. We might even say that the way to ask the question of the meaning of Being lies in a certain approach to our entanglements. But the later Heidegger's analyses suggest that the task of disentanglement is even more complex than that envisaged in *Being and Time*, and involves confronting the legacy of humanism and the instrumental mindset that has such a powerful grip on our world, the ontological perspective Heidegger calls 'enframing'.

2.5 Critical Thinking in the Later Heidegger

In the previous chapter a critical vein in Heidegger's early philosophy was identified. The They and the Tradition emerged as powerful forms of entanglement, each leading us away from the possibility of authentic Dasein and into

limited and distorted perspectives on what it means to be, ultimately ending in our distinctive ‘forgetfulness’ of Being. The later Heidegger continues to elaborate critical themes. A fundamental innovation of Heidegger’s (2002) later critical thinking is the notion of ‘ontotheology.’ The term ‘ontotheology’, first used by the philosopher Kant, brings together two ideas: ontology and theology. For Heidegger, all metaphysical assumptions (such as those that shape our everyday understanding of things and ourselves) contain a theological element. In other words, the meaning of Being consistently suggests an originator, a first cause, a primal event in the world that causes or creates everything. Heidegger’s (2002) argument is that the Greeks, who were the first to explicitly elaborate the difference between Being and beings (Frede 2006), connected Being with deity or a ‘God’ who became responsible for beings. Thus the ontological difference between Being and beings was accounted for with reference to the highest being. But another meaning of Being took shape and has come down to us. This other meaning is that Being is the most general concept of all. Being is that which can be applied to all existent things. But by taking on this meaning, Being becomes an empty logical function. The combination of these two ways of interpreting Being—as original cause and most general concept—is for Heidegger the underlying structure of the metaphysical foundations of any era, including ours. The history of Being, one of Heidegger’s conceptualisations of the inquiry into the meaning of the Tradition, is the story of successive ontotheologies. Thomson (2005) explains that ontotheology refers to the ‘constellations of intelligibility’ that underpin the way people understand things in a particular era. Our own time has its own ontotheology in the instrumental metaphysics Heidegger calls ‘enframing’.

Ontotheology becomes Heidegger’s name for the tradition, underlying metaphysical or ontological assumptions of an era, shaping the way we pose our basic questions and constraining our theoretical imagination. The later Heidegger also embarks on a critique of humanism, which he links with nihilism and the meaning of modernity. But it is the notion of *enframing*, the ‘essence of technology,’ which turns out to be Heidegger’s key to understanding modernity, characterised by a fixation on technical methods and technical answers to virtually all issues faced by *Dasein*. For Heidegger, the instrumental mindset of *enframing* constitutes the ontotheology of our time, the style of revealing or *alethia* that reduces all beings to resources. In this part of the chapter Heidegger’s critique of humanism will be briefly discussed before moving on to a consideration of Heidegger’s analysis of *enframing*.

2.6 Humanism

The ontotheological tradition has shaped Western intellectual engagement with a wide range of topics, including, of course, inquiry into the essence of human being. The analysis of entanglements in *Being and Time* revealed that Descartes’

philosophy of the human subject produced a powerful way to understand the human subject from which the analysis of Dasein had to be extricated in order to disclose human being as the clearing of being-in-the-world. The later Heidegger addresses another traditional interpretation of Dasein in the form of *humanism*. Prompted by Sartre's (1945) lecture on existentialism and humanism, Heidegger (1998) undertook an analysis of humanism (first published in 1949) in part to refute Sartre's interpretation of Heidegger's own early philosophy.

Heidegger traces the emergence of humanism to the Roman appropriation of 'culture' as taught in Greek schools of philosophy (a system called Παιδεία or 'paideia'). This culture formed the basis of education for Roman elites. It was concerned with 'scholarship and training in good conduct' (Heidegger 1998, p. 244) and through this training inculcated the distinction between barbarians and *homo humanus*. 'Παιδεία [paideia] thus understood was translated as *humanitas*' (1998, p. 244). Humanism is thus an assertion of the distinctive value of human being, which in the Roman context is developed through scholarship and training in conduct and thereby separates civilized people from supposedly lower forms of existence.

An important characteristic of Roman and later versions of humanism is the coupling of an understanding of *humanitas* with a system or program of formation of conduct. The Greek and Roman *paideia* as well as renaissance humanism, Christianity, Marxism and Sartrean existentialism all presuppose an ontotheology, and all propose programs for individual and/or social formation. Systems of education, codes of conduct, policies and forms of society are all imagined and instituted in accordance with certain ontotheological presuppositions. It is the coupling of limited and/or unexamined understandings of Dasein and Being with institutions for human formation that makes humanism an especially potent challenge for the project of reawakening a sense of the wonder of Being.

The key problem with humanism for Heidegger (1998) is that it systematically inserts an ontotheological interpretation into the relationship between Dasein and Being. He explains that for the Romans, the essence of the human was obvious: we are the rational animal. Rationality thus becomes the measure of the human and comprises the template for the formation of character. Heidegger finds this same general approach—imposing an ontotheological interpretation on the relationship between Dasein and Being—repeated in Christianity (for which human salvation is central), Marxism (for which humans have a social being) and even Sartre's existentialism (which argues that in humans, existence precedes essence without, in Heidegger's assessment, interrogating the meaning of these terms). In these different forms of humanism, the distinctive nature of humanity, 'humanitas', 'is determined with regard to an already established interpretation of nature, history, world, and the ground of the world, that is, of beings as a whole' (1998, p. 245). Humanisms are thus metaphysical or ontotheological in that an interpretation of the nature of human being, experience and world is presupposed.

In Heidegger's view, 'humanism', regarded as an ontotheology underpinning different humanisms, serves as a long-term foundation for thinking and rethinking our nature and relation to each other and the world. A watershed development for this tradition is Descartes' theory of the subject. Heidegger (1998) explains

that enlightenment thinking succeeded in displacing God from the position of the sure basis of beings, opening the position of the foundation of truth to other bases. A problem posed by the deposition of God from the position of ‘subject’ of the world is that an alternative base of certainty is required and it was Descartes who supplied that basis in the form of the ‘I am’ or human ego. His argument about the absolute certainty of the ‘I am’ placed the ego at the position of ultimate subject and law-giver. As the most certain thing, the human ego attains a determining relationship to the world, a relationship of authority that has far-reaching consequences for human values and knowledge.

In terms of consequences for values, Heidegger believes modern humanism leads us into nihilism. Nihilism—the experience or doctrine that things do not possess value in themselves—would seem to be far from the concept of humanism. But humanism presupposes an interpretation of the world and human being in which value is bound up with human being as something bestowed by the valuer. Heidegger explains that,

it is important finally to realize that precisely through characterization of something as “a value” what is so valued is robbed of its worth. That is to say, by the assessment of something as a value what is valued is admitted only as an object for human estimation. But what a thing is in its being is not exhausted by its being an object... (1998, p. 265)

For Heidegger, the act of valuing is at the same time a movement that blocks off the possibility that beings may have other values, values quite apart from human act of valuation. Valuation becomes in Heidegger’s words ‘a subjectivizing’ that denies or distorts the Being of beings. ‘Every valuing,’ he explains, ‘even where it values positively, is a subjectivising. It does not let being: be. Rather, valuing lets beings: be valid—solely as the objects of its doing’ (1998, p. 265). Because the ontotheology of humanism restricts valuing in this way to something that takes its measure from a previously settled base of assumptions, values thinking proves to be another form of entanglement. Heidegger argues that humanism is a nihilism because it turns us from the font of values in Being with the result that ‘thinking in values is the greatest blasphemy imaginable against being’ (1998, p. 265). Nihilism becomes the character of modern human being that bestows and selects values, a kind of being that amounts to a ‘blasphemy.’

2.7 Enframing

For Heidegger, the spread of modern technology and our attitude toward it—that it is something neutral and in our service—is perhaps more problematic for our relationship with Being than humanism. In Heidegger’s assessment, the essence of technology turns out to be *the* ontotheology of our age (Thomson 2005). To get at this ultimately more potent influence on our relationship with Being, Heidegger distinguishes technology per se from the *essence* of technology and stresses that it is our relationship with the essence of technology that is the issue. He argues that,

the essence of technology is by no means anything technological. Thus we shall never experience our relationship to the essence of technology so long as we merely conceive and push forward with the technological, put up with it, or evade it. Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it. But we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception of it, to which today we particularly like to do homage, makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology (1977a, p. 4).

It should be pointed out that whenever Heidegger uses the term 'essence' he means how something shows up, how it reveals itself and endures. As Thomson (2002) explains,

we need to think of "essence" as a *verb*, as the way in which things "essence" (*west*) or "remain in play" (*im Spiel bleibt*). In Heidegger's usage, "essence" picks out the extension of an entity unfolding itself in historical intelligibility....for Heidegger *essence* simply denotes the *historical* way in which an entity comes to reveal itself ontologically and be understood by *Dasein* (2002, p. 126).

In the present discussion, therefore, the 'essence' of technology is what technology means and not a general definition or an ideal that sits somehow outside the world to which individual pieces of technology conform.

Heidegger argues that in approaching the essence of technology we need to resist seeing technology as no more than a means. As long as we see technology as merely a means for attaining our ends technology appears neutral. Analysis can only shed light then on how appropriate a given technology is for some purpose. But for Heidegger, technology is far from being a link in a causal chain. Rather, he says, 'Technology is no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing' (1977a, p. 12). Shifting the meaning of technology (or instrumentality) from 'means' to way of revealing is to invite us to consider our fascination with technology and faith in technical solutions as ways of experiencing Being. The technological is not a general characteristic of gadgets but a framework for representing Being. When Heidegger describes the operation of this framework he draws our attention to a specifically modern attitude to the world. He contrasts this attitude to a more respectful one he attributes to pre-modern *Dasein*, giving the example of the peasant engaged in nurturing and cultivating the earth to bring forth produce. Instead of bringing-forth, the modern approach is 'a challenging, which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored as such' (1977a, p. 14). Heidegger illustrates the peculiarly modern mode of revealing:

a tract of land is challenged into the putting out of coal and ore. The earth now reveals itself as a coal mining district, the soil as a mineral deposit. The field that the peasant formerly cultivated and set in order appears differently that it did when to set in order still meant to take care of and to maintain. The work of the peasant does not challenge the soil of the field. In the sowing of the grain it places the seed in the keeping of the forces of growth and watches over its increase. But meanwhile even the cultivation of the field has come under the grip of another kind of setting-in-order, which sets upon nature. It sets upon it in the sense of challenging it. Agriculture is now the mechanized food industry. Air is now set upon to yield nitrogen, the earth to yield ore, ore to yield uranium, for example; uranium is set upon to yield atomic energy, which can be released either for destruction or for peaceful use (1977a, pp. 14–15).

The modern mode of revealing sees nature as a store or stockpile waiting to be unlocked and used. This challenging attitude does not stop at drawing out. Heidegger says ‘the revealing never simply comes to an end’ (1977a, p. 16). Along with extraction comes processes of regulating and securing, and according to Heidegger, these have become the ‘chief characteristics’ (1977a, p. 16) of challenging-forth. That is, controlling flows, inventorying and storing up accompany extraction as a continuous system of revealing. And what is revealed by this system is, in Heidegger’s analysis, a kind of resource-being that he calls ‘standing reserve’:

Everything everywhere is ordered to stand by, to be immediately at hand, indeed to stand there just so that it maybe on call for a further ordering. Whatever is ordered about in this way has its own standing. We call it standing-reserve. The word expresses here something more, and something more essential, than mere “stock.” The name “standing-reserve” assumes the rank of an inclusive rubric. It designates nothing less than the way in which everything presences that is wrought upon by the challenging revealing (1977a, p. 17).

For Heidegger, everything in our world has become a resource, something standing ready for some use. And the system in which the thing as standing reserve has its place is so pervasive that, according to Heidegger, the resource is not even an ‘object.’ That is, the things around us have no independent significance but are components within systems, each known and specified in advance for their particular role. Heidegger gives the example of the airliner on the runway. It is there as a component in a system of transportation, waiting for its next task and with systematically known characteristics (amount of fuel, level of maintenance, number of flying hours etc.). ‘Seen in terms of the standing reserve, the machine is completely unautonomous, for it has its standing only from the ordering of the orderable’ (1977a, p. 17).

It is Dasein that does the extracting and ordering, but Dasein also finds a place for itself in the system of standing-reserve. ‘The current talk about human resources, about the supply of patients for a clinic, gives evidence for this’ (1977a, p. 18). According to Heidegger, we measure ourselves and each other—our capabilities and infirmities—and submit to the system, available for tasks, in need of maintenance, facilitating extraction, regulation and storing according to measured strengths and deficits. But Heidegger does not believe Dasein can become completely integrated into the system of modern revealing due to the unique role it has in relation to challenging forth (1977a, p. 18). As a mode of revealing, like the bringing-forth articulated in the ancient notions of *poeisis*, *physis* and *techné*, challenging forth is a way Dasein responds to Being itself. Challenging forth is a way of being, of revealing, that is not invented by modern humans but a mode that is implicit in Being itself and to which Dasein responds by exploiting and ordering. We are, in Heidegger’s words, ‘challenged more originally than are the energies of nature’ (1977a, p. 18) and because of our position between Being and the resources revealed by our challenging actions, we cannot be totally subsumed by the system we create. The system needs us to do the revealing without which there would be no system.

So, for Heidegger the modern mode of revealing that challenges nature and orders the resources produced by challenging into a system is not something invented by Dasein or somehow implicit in human society, culture or history, but is a way we respond to being set upon by something. Heidegger's term for this something is 'enframing' which translates the German *Gestell*. Enframing suggests a framework, but it is primarily an active gathering and revealing of things as already within a framework. The translator of *The Question Concerning Technology* suggests that

the reader should be careful not to interpret the word [enframing] as though it simply meant a framework of some sort. Instead he should constantly remember that Enframing is fundamentally a calling-forth. It is a "challenging claim," a demanding summons, that "gathers" so as to reveal. This claim *enframes* in that it assembles and orders. It puts into a framework or configuration everything that it summons forth, through an ordering for use that it is forever restructuring anew (1977a, note to p. 19).

Enframing is thus regarded by Heidegger as a way Dasein responds to Being (without being aware of it) that drives us on to exploit and order. The world and things and even humans are 'gathered' in a special way by this responsive activity that reveals everything as resources or 'standing reserve.' Enframing is the essence of the instrumental and thus of technology. Heidegger summarises his argument thus:

Enframing means the gathering together of that setting-upon which sets upon man, i.e., challenges him forth, to reveal the real, in the mode of ordering, as standing reserve. Enframing means that way of revealing which holds sway in the essence of modern technology and which is itself nothing technological (1977a, p. 20).

As a way of revealing, enframing emerges as an alternative to the ancient mode of revealing of *poiesis* which Heidegger says 'lets what presences come forth into unconcealment' (1977a, p. 21). But because it is a mode of revealing, enframing is a mode of *alethia* or primary truth. A danger Heidegger sees in enframing is that it may crowd out alternative ways of revealing and come to dominate revealing as such. It seems clear that the system of human activity that exploits, measures, orders and puts on stand-by is taking more and more of 'the real' into its calculations, at macro and micro levels as well as in relation to the fluid and volatile capacities and imaginings of human being itself. It is hard to see a place in this total system for the ancient *poiesis* or the emergence of completely new ways of revealing. The activity we are driven to by enframing closes off the subtle realm of the source of enframing, making it difficult to inquire into the ground of the system. There is no point in raising the question of Being in this system where enframing prevails as a powerful, benighting entanglement.

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