



Questions of Technology and Ecology

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The Relation between Technology and Truth in Heidegger's *The Question Concerning Technology*

Abstract

*As people who live in modern ages, technology occupies a great place in our lives. In the way how we relate to technology, we regard it as a means to an end. We use technology in the service of our needs. But we also blame technology for dissolving human relations and controlling our lives. My claim in this paper is that technology in itself cannot be hold responsible for this unwelcome scene alone. There is also the role of the way how we relate to technology. Therefore, we should question what technology is in itself regardless of its service. Heidegger in *The Question Concerning Technology* claims that technology cannot be understood instrumentally but as a mode of revealing. In this revealing the truth, in the sense of aletheia, happens. Thus, if we consider technology as a place where truth happens, we can reconstruct our relation to it.*

Key words

technology, truth, revealing, unconcealment, enframing, Martin Heidegger

Heidegger assigns a major importance to the concept of truth in his works. I think that in order to understand Heidegger's thoughts in general one should get an understanding of the notion of truth. My aim in this paper is to investigate the relation between technology and truth in *The Question Concerning Technology*. In order to realize this goal, I will also discuss the concept of truth in *Being and Time* and *The Origin of the Work of Art*.

The works which we are going to investigate were written in different periods of his life. *Being and Time* was published in 1927, *The Origin of the Work of Art* in 1935 and *The Question Concerning Technology* in 1954. *Being and Time* is regarded as one of his early works, whereas the others are among the later works. Heidegger's thoughts concerning the notion of truth have changed in time. In this work, I will also try to display the change in his thoughts as well as emphasizing on common points in relation to our goal.

In *Being and Time* he defines 'truth' as the activity of Da-sein. Truth in this sense is the essential characteristic of Da-sein. "Da-sein is in the truth."¹ In

The Origin of the Work of Art he treats it as a happening in the work of art. He claims that in the work of art truth happens as “the disclosure of beings as a whole”.² This happening of truth takes place as the strife between the clearing and the concealment. He says that truth in its essence is un-truth since it involves not only unconcealment but also concealment.³ Therefore, truth involves a tension. In *The Question Concerning Technology* he considers ‘truth’ in relation to modern technology and defines it as a revealing. He asserts that both in craftsmanship activity and in modern technology there is a revealing of truth though it happens in different ways. The essence of modern technology embraces a danger but in this danger there is also a saving power. This saving power is the possibility of revealing of truth in modern technology.⁴

In all of these three works he tries to point out that we use truth as having a derivative meaning. He calls it the traditional understanding of truth. This derivative phenomenon of truth covers up the primordial one. He starts his investigation with the concept of truth as a derivative phenomenon, namely in the way that it is used today. Then he lays out that the traditional understanding presupposes and points to a more primordial understanding of truth. Lastly, he explains the primordial understanding of truth.

Heidegger claims that the primordial meaning of truth was known once, but then it has been covered up by the derivative meaning and forgotten throughout the history of thought. But if we contemplate on the derivative meaning of truth we can see that it refers to a more primordial one. With this reason, he tries to uncover the lost meaning of truth in his works.

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger claims that the traditional understanding of truth has been developed and adopted within the limits of metaphysical thought. According to the traditional understanding, truth is the property of judgment and its essence is the agreement of the judgment with its object. This is the modern understanding of truth.

“To say that a statement is true means that it discovers the beings in themselves. It asserts, it shows, it lets beings ‘be seen’ (apophansis) in their discoveredness. The being true (truth) of the statement must be understood as discovering. Thus, truth by no means has the structure of an agreement between knowing and the object in the sense of a correspondence of one being (subject) to another (object).”⁵

It is claimed that a statement is true if it corresponds to the reality or the fact that it states. Namely, in order to find out whether a statement is true, we should compare it to reality. If a statement corresponds to reality that it states then we say it is true. This definition assumes that a statement can represent the reality as it is in itself.

Guignon thinks that, according to Heidegger, the traditional understanding of truth has indeed cut off our relations to truth. He argues that Heidegger tries to show us that the traditional understanding is derived from the more primordial concept of truth and we can uncover it. Thus we can reconstruct our relations to truth. He expresses his thoughts in the following paragraph.

“The feeling that our ability to distinguish truth and falsehood has been lost originates in a conception of truth as a ‘correspondence’ or ‘agreement’ between some human product (e.g., ideas, propositions, theories) and some states of affairs in the world, the *adaequatio intellectus et rei*. Heidegger tries to lead us to see that this traditional understanding of truth is *derived from* a deeper and more primordial conception of truth.”⁶

Our traditional understanding is derivative and it both covers up and depends on the primordial understanding of truth. Heidegger claims that the traditional understanding of truth presupposes a discovering activity, a discovery of the

facts and beings. The more primordial understanding of truth grasps truth as discoveredness (unconcealment). The word *aletheia* is used for it. It means to unconceal, opening up the cover. Truth as the activity of removing the cover is prior to truth as the property of sentences. In order to talk about the agreement between the judgment and the object, there must be an object which is discovered. Guignon discusses the meaning of the Greek word *aletheia* in the following paragraph:

“Uttering statements, discovering entities, and confirming the agreement of utterance and reality – all these are possible only within the *clearing* of Dasein’s disclosedness. Heidegger says that the most primordial understanding of truth is found in ‘the *oldest* tradition of ancient philosophy’ (219), in the Greek word ‘a-letheia’, which he interprets as meaning, literally, ‘un-hiddenness’.”⁷

According to Heidegger, being discovered or discoveredness is not the most primordial phenomenon of truth. He says that:

“Being true as discovering is a manner of being of Da-Sein. What makes this discovering itself possible must necessarily be called ‘true’ in a still more primordial sense. The existential and ontological foundations of discovering itself first show the most primordial phenomenon of truth.”⁸

The most primordial phenomenon of truth constitutes the foundation of the discoveredness. Truth in this sense is the condition of the possibility of encountering things. This condition is what lies under the activity of discovering. We cannot consider truth in the most primordial sense independently of Da-sein. Truth is the way how Da-sein relates to the things.

Heidegger sets forth the two aspects of the most primordial truth. One is that truth is the disclosedness of Da-sein and the other is that Da-sein is in truth. He says:

“The existential and ontological interpretation of the phenomenon of truth has shown: (1) Truth in the most primordial sense is the disclosedness of Da-sein to which belongs the discoveredness of innerworldly beings. (2) Da-sein is equipordially in truth and untruth.”⁹

As we can infer from his words, truth is constituted by the disclosedness of Da-sein which provides the ground for the discoveredness of beings. Thus, Da-sein is in truth in terms of both discovering the innerworldly beings and being disclosed during this activity of discovery.

In *The Origin of the Work of Art* Heidegger investigates the work in itself. He claims that a work belongs to the region it itself opens up. The work-being of the work can only be found in such an opening up. “In the work, when there is a disclosure of the being as what and how it is, there is a happening of truth at work.”¹⁰ In the work, the happening of truth is at work. The work of art is not

2
Martin Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 32.

3
Ibid., p. 31.

4
Martin Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, State University of New York Press, 1977, p. 28.

5
M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 201.

6
Charles B. Guignon, *Heidegger and The Problem of Knowledge*, Heckett Publishing Company, 1983, p. 198.

7
Ibid., p. 199.

8
M. Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 202.

9
Ibid., p. 205.

10
M. Heidegger, *Off the Beaten Track*, p. 16.

a thing which is created; it is not merely the product of an artist. Rather it is the place where truth happens and the artist is the mediator of this happening.

He tries to explain the happening of truth by giving an example of a Greek temple. The Greek temple does not portray anything. It simply stands there and by standing there it makes the god present.

“The work is not a portrait intended to make it easier to recognize what the god looks like. It is rather a work which allows the god himself to presence and is, therefore, the god himself.”¹¹

The temple work by making the god present opens up a world while it sets this world back onto the earth. As such there is the happening of truth in the Greek temple.¹²

Heidegger claims that there are two essential features of the work-being of the work. One of them is setting up a world and the other is setting forth the earth. The notions of ‘world’ and ‘earth’ have peculiar meanings within the context of *The Origin of the Work of Art*. World is neither an object which stands before us nor the product of our imagination. Rather it has a role in the happenings of our history.

“World is that always-nonobjectual to which we are subject as long as the paths of birth and death, blessing and curse, keeps us transported into being. Wherever the essential decisions of our history are made, wherever we take them over or abandon them, wherever they go unrecognized or are brought ones more into question, there the world worlds.”¹³

The work is a set up. But this setting up is different than the construction of a building. We can consider the rising of a statue. Here setting up does not mean merely putting in place. This setting up is an erecting in the sense of dedication and praise. In the workly construction the holy is opened up as holy and the god is called forth into openness. The work opens up a world means that it sets up a world.¹⁴

Heidegger compares the equipment and the work of art in terms of their relation to the material. Work material is determined through usefulness and serviceability. Equipment takes a material into its service. In the manufacture of equipment, stone and other materials are used and used up. They disappear into some other useful construction. On the other hand, the temple work in setting up a world does not make the material disappear. Rather, it allows it to come forth for the very first time. In a painting, colours are not used up, but they begin to shine for the first time and in a poem, words are not used up, but they become a word. The work allows the work material to come forth into the open of the world.

“That into which the work sets itself back, and thereby allows to come forth, is what we called ‘the earth’. Earth is the coming-forth-concealing... In setting up a world, the work sets forth the earth. ‘Setting forth’ is to be thought, here, in the strict sense of the word. The work moves the earth into the open of a world and holds it there. *The work lets the earth be an earth.*”¹⁵

Heidegger specifies that the earth is different than matter or a planet. Rather it has a special meaning.

“What this word means here is far removed from the idea of a mass of matter and from the merely astronomical idea of a planet. Earth is that in which the arising of everything that arises is brought back – as, indeed, the very thing that it is – and sheltered. In the things that arise the earth presences as the protecting one.”¹⁶

The earth is the aspect of concealment which is embraced within the things that are unconcealed. According to Heidegger, the Greeks were aware that what is unconcealed is only a small part of what is concealed. The unconcealment of beings is always accompanied by concealment. Something un-

conceals itself as at the same time concealing itself. This togetherness of the unconcealment and concealment refers to the togetherness of the world and earth. Although the world and earth are different, they cannot be separated.

“The world is the self opening openness of the broad paths of simple decisions in the destiny of a historical people. The earth is the unforced coming forth of the continually self closing, and in that way, self-sheltering. World and earth are essentially different and yet never separated from one another. World is grounded on earth and earth rises up through the world.”¹⁷

There is an opposition between the world and the earth. “As the self opening of the world will tolerate nothing closed. As the sheltering and concealing, however, earth tends always to throw the world into itself and to keep it there.”¹⁸ The world wants to bring out the earth into the open and as opposed to that the earth wants to close in the world. The opposition between the features of the world and earth is called strife. The work initiates this strife by setting up the world and setting forth the earth. The work of art holds together the strife between the world and earth. It does that for the strife remains the strife. In other words, the work constantly carries on the strife. The work being of the work consists in fighting the fight between the world and earth. And in the work truth happens in this fighting of the fight between the world and earth.¹⁹

Heidegger claims that truth in the sense of unconcealment is coming into the open of beings in the *clearing*. Clearing is an open place which appears in the center of beings.

“In the midst of beings as a whole an open place comes to presence. There is a clearing. Thought from out of beings, it is more in being than is the being. This open center is, therefore, not surrounded by beings. Rather, this illuminating center encircles all beings – like the nothing that we scarcely know.”²⁰

The being can only be if it stands within this clearing. Because of clearing beings are unconcealed. But something can be concealed within the scope of the illuminated. Therefore, both concealment and unconcealment takes place in the clearing. As we have seen, truth in *The Origin of the Work of Art* captures the tension between the unconcealment and concealment.

In *The Question Concerning Technology* Heidegger deals with technology and, as opposed to the general understanding, he claims that there is a relation between technology and truth. In modern ages, we regard technology as a means to an end. We use technology in order to control nature and make it to serve our needs. This is an instrumental understanding of technology. “The current conception of technology, according to which it is a means and a human activity, can therefore be called the instrumental and anthropological definition of technology.”²¹ It regards technology only as an instrument and does not consider technology in itself.

11
Ibid., p. 22.

12
Ibid., p. 21.

13
Ibid., p. 23.

14
Ibid., p. 22.

15
Ibid., p. 24–25.

16
Ibid., p. 21.

17
Ibid., p. 26.

18
Ibid.

19
Ibid., p. 26–27.

20
Ibid., p. 30.

21
M. Heidegger, *The Question Concerning Technology*, p. 5.

“Modern technology too is a means to an end. That is why the instrumental conception of technology conditions every attempt to bring man into the right relation to technology. Everything depends on our manipulating technology in the proper manner as a means. We will, as we say ‘get’ technology ‘spiritually in hand’. We will master it. The will to mastery becomes all the more urgent the more technology threatens to slip from human control.”²²

In this passage Heidegger explains the relation of man to technology in modern ages. It is a relation which depends on mastery and nothing else. It seems that the instrumental understanding of technology arose because we have forgotten the ancient roots of the word ‘technology’. He suggests that we should reconsider technology in itself regardless of its service. With this reason he questions the essence of technology. Thus, the question concerning technology can be regarded as the question concerning the essence of technology.

Heidegger investigates the origin of the word ‘technology’. *Technikon* is the Greek word for *technology*. *Technikon* means what is related to *techne*. In order to understand the meaning of *techne* we can apply to Aristotle’s distinction concerning knowledge. He makes a distinction between *episteme* and *techne* (in *Nichomachean Ethics*, Book VI, chapters 3, 4). *Episteme* is scientific knowledge whereas *techne* is the knowledge of art. He defines art as the knowledge of how to make things involving a true reasoning.

According to Heidegger, *techne* is a mode of revealing. He asserts that “*techne* is a mode of *aletheuein*. It reveals whatever does not bring itself forth and does not yet lie here before us, whatever can look and turn out now one way another.”²³

“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.”²⁴

It reveals whatever does not bring itself forth. This revealing constitutes the primordial meaning of technology.

He claims that in technology there is the happening of truth. “Technology is a mode of revealing. Technology comes to presence in the realm where revealing and unconcealment take place, where *aletheia*, truth happens.”²⁵ This revealing is involved not only in craftsmanship activity but also in modern machine-powered technology. Modern technology is also a revealing, but its revealing is different than the revealing in the work of handicraftsman in the sense that it is a challenging. In this revealing the truth, in the sense of *aletheia*, happens.

“The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging, which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy which can be extracted and stored as such.”²⁶ The challenging revealing regards nature as an unlimited supply of energy. In this account, nature is regarded as nothing but a source which can be utilized by human beings. In the enframing human being is placed at the center and he regards himself as the master of nature. Enframing is an epoch. It is one of the conditions of the possibility of experience. We live in it, but it is not up to our choice to determine the epoch in which we live. Heidegger claims that there are two main epochs in which human beings have been lived through the history. One of them is the epoch of metaphysics. Heidegger argues that metaphysics has started with Aristotle and Plato. And we still live in this epoch. He asserts that in metaphysics human beings regard themselves as the center of everything. But there was a different epoch before metaphysics. The epoch of pre-metaphysics within which Pre-Socratics live.

In pre-metaphysics people regarded themselves as the listeners of the forces. And they had a role in the coming into the open of the forces.

He claims that human beings do not produce epochs, but they can sense them. They can be aware of the epoch in which they live. Enframing is the last sub-epoch which emerges within the epoch of metaphysics. Human beings in the epoch of enframing claim to be the master of the earth. In this epoch technology is seen as an instrument to an end and the essence of technology is missed. In the enframing things are seen as the forces which provide energy. "Thus the challenging Enframing not only conceals a former way of revealing, bringing-forth, but it conceals revealing itself and with it That wherein unconcealment, i.e., truth comes to pass."²⁷ Challenging enframing which lies in the essence of modern technology has the danger of preventing the revealing of truth.

Enframing is neither something technological nor a machine. Rather "it is the way in which the real reveals itself as standing-reserve."²⁸ Therefore, it is neither a pure human doing nor beyond all human doing. On the one hand, since the real reveals itself as a standing reserve in the enframing it is not a human doing. But on the other hand, since human beings have a role in the emergence of this epoch, it is not beyond all human doing.

"This producing that brings forth – e.g., the erecting of a statue in the temple precinct – and the challenging ordering now under consideration are indeed fundamentally different, and yet they remain related in their essence. Both are ways of revealing, of aletheia. In Enframing, that unconcealment comes to pass in conformity with which the work of modern technology reveals the real as standing-reserve. This work is therefore neither only a human activity nor a mere means within such activity."²⁹

Heidegger claims that enframing belongs to the destining of revealing. This destining is not a danger in itself for man.

"Yet when destining reigns in the mode of enframing, it is the supreme danger. This danger attests itself to us in two ways. As soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as object, but does so, rather, exclusively as standing-reserve, and man in the midst of objectlessness is nothing but the orderer of the standing-reserve."³⁰

The danger lies in the essence of technology as a destining of revealing. In technological production the role of earth disappears or better to say it is covered up. The man is promoted to the level of lord of the things from being a medium to the revealing of the earth. Dasein becomes the orderer and the earth becomes the reserve which is always ready to hand.

Heidegger claims that in the destining of revealing "the saving power" is hidden and he quotes Hölderlin's following lines:

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

22
Ibid.
23
Ibid., p. 12.
24
Ibid.
25
Ibid., p. 13.
26
Ibid., p. 14.

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Ibid., p. 27.
28
Ibid., p. 23.
29
Ibid., p. 21.
30
Ibid., p. 27.

Hölderlin's words imply that what involves danger, involves the saving power as well. Following these words, Heidegger says:

“If the essence of technology, Enframing, is the extreme danger, and if there is truth in Hölderlin's words, then the rule of Enframing cannot exhaust itself solely in blocking all lightening-up of every revealing, all appearing of truth. Rather, precisely the essence of technology must harbor in itself the growth of the saving power.”³¹

Saving power arises in the enframing. This saving power reminds the man that he is the safekeeping of the coming to presence of truth. Through the saving power, in technology there is still the possibility of happening of truth.

Consequently, in the works we have considered Heidegger claims that modern understanding of truth is derivative and it covers up the primordial one. Therefore, he tries to uncover the primordial notion of truth in these works. In *Being and Time* he defines truth as the activity of Da-sein whereas in *The Origin of the Work of Art* and *The Question Concerning Technology* both the craftsman and artist do not have such a central role in relation to truth. The artist becomes a medium, through which being is revealed. He is the one who lets the work of art be. And the craftsman is the listener of the forces mediating them to come into the open. The position of the human being changes with the emergence of modern technology. He does not regard himself as the mediator, but the master of the forces. In *The Question Concerning Technology* Heidegger reminds us the old relation of men to technology and the place of truth in this relation. There, in this relation, lies the possibility of happening of truth again.

Dilek Arlı Çil

Odnos tehnike i istine u Heideggerovom djelu *Pitanje o tehnici*

Sažetak

*Kako živimo u modernom dobu, tehnika zauzima veliko mjesto u našim životima. U našem odnosu prema tehnici smatramo je sredstvom za određene svrhe. Koristimo tehniku u svrhu naših potreba. No također krivimo tehniku za razaranje ljudskih odnosa i kontroliranje naših života. U ovom radu tvrdim da tehniku samu po sebi ne možemo smatrati odgovornom za ovu nepoželjnu situaciju. Tu je također i uloga načina na koji se odnosimo prema tehnici. Stoga bi trebali propitati što je tehnika po sebi bez obzira na njenu upotrebu. Heidegger u djelu *Pitanje o tehnici* smatra da se tehnika ne može poimati instrumentalno, nego kao način raskrivanja. U tome se zbiva raskrivanje istine, u smislu aletheia. Na taj način, ako tehniku poimamo kao mjesto gdje se zbiva istina, možemo rekonstruirati naš odnos prema njoj.*

Ključne riječi

tehnologija, istina, otkrivanje, raskrivenost, postava, Martin Heidegger

Dilek Arlı Çil

Das Verhältnis zwischen Technik und Wahrheit in Heideggers *Die Frage nach der Technik*

Zusammenfassung

Da wir in der modernen Ära leben, nimmt die Technik eine beachtliche Stellung in unseren Existenzen ein. In unserem Verhältnis zur Technik betrachten wir sie als Mittel zum Zweck. Wir bedienen uns der Technik im Dienste eigener Bedürfnisse. Dahingegen geben wir ihr jedoch die Schuld an der Zerrüttung der menschlichen Beziehungen sowie an der Kontrollübernahme über

unsere Leben. Meine Behauptung in diesem Artikel lautet, die Technologie könne für diese unwillkommene Szenerie nicht allein verantwortlich gemacht werden. Als mitwirkend erweist sich bei dieser Gelegenheit die Art, in der wir die Technik behandeln. Dieserhalb sollten wir dem Wesen der Technik auf den Grund gehen, ungeachtet ihrer Verwendung. In Die Frage nach der Technik beteuert Heidegger, die Technik könne nicht instrumental ausgelegt werden, sondern vielmehr als Enthüllungsmethode. Darin findet die Offenbarung der Wahrheit statt, im Sinne der Aletheia. Nehmen wir folglich die Technik als Schauplatz der Wahrheit in Augenschein, so sind wir instande, unser Verhältnis zu ihr nachzubilden.

Schlüsselwörter

Technik, Wahrheit, Offenbarung, Unverborgenheit, Gestell, Martin Heidegger

Dilek Arlı Çil

**Le rapport de la technique et de la vérité dans
La question de la technique de Heidegger**

Résumé

En tant que personnes vivant à l'âge moderne, la technique occupe une grande place dans nos vies. Dans notre rapport envers la technique, nous la considérons comme un moyen de parvenir à nos fins. Nous mettons la technique au service de nos besoins. Mais nous la accusons également de détruire les relations humaines et de contrôler nos vies. Dans cet article, j'affirme que la technique en soi ne peut être considérée comme responsable de cette situation indésirable. Il y a aussi le rôle du mode de notre rapport envers la technique. De ce fait, il faudrait questionner ce qu'est la technique en soi indépendamment de son utilisation. Dans La question de la technique, Heidegger affirme que la technique ne peut être interprétée de manière instrumentale, mais comme un mode du dévoilement. C'est en cela que le dévoilement de la vérité, au sens de l'aletheia, se passe. Ainsi, si l'on conçoit la technique comme un lieu où se passe la vérité, l'on peut reconstruire notre rapport envers elle.

Mots-clés

technologie, vérité, dévoilement, non-occultation, arraisonnement, Martin Heidegger