"Only A God Can Save Us Now"
Heidegger on Technocracy, Cybernetics, and Being Human

2022

Johannes Achill Niederhauser
Halkyon Academy

Introductory Lecture

Heidegger's Spiegel Interview, published one year after his death, is as widely known and notorious as its true scope remains concealed. Yet, today we might slowly be, or rather fast, be necessitated, coerced to see what has been announcing itself for long: The total technocratic rule and domination of the human being and his world, which is now a global interwoven network of nodes and which is itself precisely what rules, organises, reorganises, shapes, structures, leads, drives and *steers* the world. In fact, the planet itself becomes a cybernetic system. Cybernetics comes from the Greek *kybernatein* which means to steer a ship. Heidegger even goes as far as saying that philosophy has become cybernetics through the (natural) sciences, i.e., the sciences that want to effectuate efficient change. There is much talk about "decentralisation" today which is not wrong *per se* but which presumably misunderstands that no one is enacting the "decentralisation" but the network itself in which the human being partakes. Decentralisation is at once the strongest enforcer of centralisation because now the centre(s) is shifting from node to node and can be anywhere all at once. In this chaotic anarchy the dwelling places of human beings are destroyed. The now all but also hackneyed talk about the "unworlding" of the human being means not simply a disconnect between an inside and an outside, which could somehow be bridged again. The unworlding of human being means rather to unearth human being, to rip human being out of its belonging to place, yes, and out of its dwelling in the innermost passageway of sense. If anything, decentralisation is a euphemism for what is to come: manifold stretched-out collapses and the ensuing chaos of anarchies. What cybernetics *steers* through and by is not the good order of the metaphysics of old regulated by the Idea. Instead, in this crippled and mutated *version* of a technicised entirely externalised meta-physics split from its origin the ship that sails through a

wreckage, an endless tempest and tsunami and waves. Blinks of momentary control simulations are possible only at ever greater expense – while, uncannily, everything continues to function somehow.

The latest instalment of the process, which is now becoming apparent, namely the process of instantiating and manifesting metaphysical *views* and making them technologically and immediately operable, is the Metaverse. The Metaverse, slowly having been built up over the past several decades, through the spread of digital platforms will signify the merger of the visible, "physical" sphere and the "immaterial", virtual-digital sphere which is if not entirely invisible not yet visible and perfectly entangled with the so-called "physical" sphere. The attempt here is not to build another place or space into which users withdraw. Instead, here the gap between the "physical" and the "digital" is bridged through time. It is nothing short of an attempt to unify the "ideal" virtual world with the ephemeral world through making all timelessly stored information instantly available in the fleeting *here and now* which in this way receives again validity. It is as Nietzsche says in the *Twilight of The Idols*: with the destruction of the ideal Platonistic world of eternal ideas we have destroyed also the ephemeral world. The Metaverse is the attempt to save any access to the world while at once the clearest rejection of time and the self-mutation of the human being now outperformed by calculating machines. At once the Metaverse may hence also be seen as the futile attempt to bring order where none is possible any longer. At the same time, therefore, the methods and the thinking of metaphysics can no longer lead us into and through the coming age, on its own.

How did it come that far? Why do we want to believe that "machines" will soon be more "intelligent" than human beings without having any conceptual understanding of "intelligence"? The Metaverse will be the most visible attempt yet at the final destructive uprooting of human being because here time and history are eclipsed.

In the *SPIEGEL* interview Heidegger's interlocutors ask about the "network of inevitabilities" which Heidegger foresees in the coming "absolute technological state". The technological state, i.e., technocracy, however is not, says Heidegger, truly in charge but is only subservient to the operations of technics.

The interviewers ask: "Can the individual still influence this *web or network of inevitabilities* [Zwangsläufigkeiten] at all, or can philosophy influence it, or can they both influence it together in that philosophy leads one individual or several individuals to a certain action?" And it is to this question, i.e., the question which goes to the heart of the cybernetic web as the permanent

interlacing and causalistic interactions constantly triggered and enforced by other nodes in the system, generating a multiplicity and multiplying swarm of new nodes, that Heidegger responds:

Only a god can still save us now.

He continues: "The only possibility available to us is that by thinking and poetizing we prepare a readiness for the appearance of a god, or for the absence of a god in [our] decline, insofar as in view of the absent god we are in a state of decline."

Heidegger says this explicitly in response to the question what the cybernetic technocratic state means for us in the coming age. Only a god can save us. We need to understand however what Heidegger means by "saving" and by "god". Here I will only give hints. Heidegger speaks of "a god" not of "God". Hence any musings about "deism" or "theism" in a monotheistic sense are outside the scope of this thinking. In simplified terms Deism means that God once created the world and has since left His creation to its own devices. Theism in turn is the belief that God from time to time intervenes. None of this however is what Heidegger's thinking after the divine means. In this course we will delve into the question of the divine in Heidegger. It is crucial also to note that through poetising and thinking, not per se philosophy, but through an-other way of thinking, Heidegger thinks it likely an openness to the arrival of a god will present itself. We must remain open to it. The absence of a god or the staying away of a god however is not something negative. Instead, the staying away, the withdrawal of the divine in our age must itself be embraced and experienced and suffered through. This very withdrawal itself must be thought and experienced so that precisely this experience of withdrawal may enrich our being, for that which withdraws is at once also, through its twirling, bursting open its own realms, of the unseen and unheard. We cannot simply "celebrate" atheism – we must allow the death of the Christian God to take its course and the withdrawal of the divine itself to show its depth.

When Heidegger speaks of saving, *retten* in German, we must heed Hölderlin's word from his hymn *Patmos* and we must heed Lessing's understanding of *retten*. We are not here waiting for a Saviour or salvation. Lessing's German still understands *retten* as guiding something safely to its *place* in the sense of freeing something to its ownness, more precisely even in its original meaning, related to the Latin *eripere, retten* used to say of the wrest (in the sense of to rip) something out of danger (*eripere e periculo*). Also danger is a term of art in Heidegger as we shall see. In his writings on technology Heidegger again and again quotes Hölderlin's word:

Wo aber Gefahr ist
Wächst das Rettende auch
Where there is danger
There what comes to save also grows

This word moves deep into the thinking of simultaneity, of the ecstatic "at once", which cannot be thought dialectically (or logically). Instead, the thinking is poietic out of the "at once". Dialectically danger would be the negation of that which saves and as such cancel out that which saves. Here that which brings danger brings at once, not that which per se saves, but that which provides the fertile soil for the freeing of something (or someone) to its ownness. More radically: without danger no freeing at all would be possible. It is precisely danger itself that frees, unbeknownst to itself, an unforeseen, unforetold too, excessive abundance of paths and leeways.

A god that comes to rescue in this sense is the kairos of freeing what is at stake into its ownness, which now is our very human *being* and *memory*.