TECHNOLOGY AS HABITUAL MODE OF BEING IN THE WORLD

DÜNYADA OLMAKLIĞIN ALIŞKANLIKSAL BİR TARZI OLARAK TEKNOLOJİ

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ÖZ

Teknolojiye ilişkin pratiğin gerisinde yatan motivasyonun, hemen her şeyi olabildiğince "belirgin" (açık, seçik) yapma yolunda teorik bir çaba olduğu konusunda yaygın bir kabul vardır. Bu kabule bir itiraz denemesi olarak, bu çalışmada, teknolojinin en geniş anlamında hiçbir analitik berraklık ya da önermesel açıklık gerektirmediğini ileri süreceğim. Tersine, Deweyci bir kavrayıştan yaklaşıldığında teknolojik etkinliklerimizin bir çeşit 'alışkanlıksal bir varolma ve yapma' formunda gerçekleştiğini, bu nedenle teknolojik etkinlikte bulunurken insanın edimlerinin hiçbir biçimde açık-seçik ya da belirgin bir ardışıklık gerektirmediğini göstermeye çalışacağım.

Anahtar sözcükler: Teknoloji, teknik, alışkanlık, teori, Dewey.

ABSTRACT

It is widely held that the very motivation behind the practice of technology is a theoretical attempt to make everything "explicit" as much as possible. I shall argue in this paper, however, technology in the broadest sense does not necessarily require any analytical lucidity or prepositional clarity. Rather, I will try to show that, approached from Deweyian sense everyday technological activities call for 'habitual mode of being and doing' that has nothing to do with being explicit about the steps one is supposed to follow in a strict order.

Key words: Technology, techniques, habits, theory, Dewey.

I. Introduction

According to Dreyfus there are five features of theory that are deeply related to our current condition concerning technology.[1] One of these five features is that of the attempt to make everything explicit. I shall argue in this paper, however, technology in the broadest sense does not necessarily require any analytical lucidity or prepositional clarity. Rather, I will try to show that, approached from Deweyian sense everyday technological activities call

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[1] Dreyfus, H. D. (1984) Knowledge and Human Values: Genealogy of Nihilism in Toward the Recovery of Wholeness, In Knowledge, Education and Human Values ed. Douglas Sloan (1984) Teachers College Press, London, p. 135-148. Dreyfus in fact does not focus in this chapter particularly on technology. Yet he considers technology as one of the nihilistic implications of "something called 'theory'".

for 'habitual mode of being and doing' that has nothing to do with being explicit that in what ways one gets in touch with technology or technological activities.

To ground my objection to some hesitant accounts of technology I will argue for the givenness of technicality as one of manifest operations of being. In the part that follows I present basic lines of Dreyfus's argument. As I present what Dreyfus tells perhaps too briefly, any textual incoherence should refer to me. In the third part, some conceptual dimensions are examined related to technology. In the fourth part, there is a lengthy treatment of 'technology' and its alternative notions found particularly in Dewey's works.

II. Dreyfus' account of nihilism and the fire directed against technology

In a collection of papers edited by Sloan, Dreyfus' paper entitled "Knowledge and Human Values: A Genealogy of Nihilism" was perhaps one of the most relevant papers presented in a symposium at Woodstock, Vermont, with regard to its concern about theory and technology. An outline of Dreyfus' view in this paper is as follow:

Many people today feel that they have lost a sense of meaning and seriousness of their lives, which might be labeled as nihilism. Nihilism is very deeply rooted in our culture (western) and simply apparent in any sort of belief in possibility of a voice capable of telling the truth about everything. This and other causes, in fact, are all coming in one package called "theory". In Plato's time theory meant contemplation, seeing the systematic order of all of reality. Theory, at the time of Galileo, became science, and science in Nietzsche's time became technology... There are five features of theory that makes it nihilistic: The first cause is basic theoretical split between the knower and the known, ie, objectification. The second one, which is represented by Socratic reason, is *the attempt to make everything explicit*. The third cause, which is a direct result of the second one, is the tendency to take things outside their context, say to decontextualize. Fourth, theory is always directed to form a system or a whole that in this way creates a close circle. And finally, what Heidegger calls, seeing the world as a picture.

III. The concept of technology

Agassi puts it clearly that "Technology can be defined in different ways, and the choice of definition, which may seem rather innocuous an affair, may prejudice our attitude towards it. Different definitions and/or different circumstances may lead to different prejudices." (Agassi, 1985, p. 11) One may think that there is nothing actually new in this quotation. Anything may be defined in different ways so as to lead people to have completely

rival beliefs and attitudes towards it. Put in more fashionable terms, different definitions may appeal to different discourses, and so to different justifications. Yet the quotation helps us what is concealed or misrepresented in the canon-like presentations of technology.

Technology, particularly in philosophical accounts, is mostly associated with some 'no-longer attractive' concepts such as analysis, reflection, procedure, rules, principles or abstraction. What is in common with all these associations is a potential threat they constitute to wholeness. Reserving a room for indisputable value of 'wholeness' or 'holism' in our relationship with the world, I want to propose that those associations that relate technology to somehow objectifying practices are not, in any sense, necessary, but rather arbitrary.

Producing technology, a role played by technician or engineer, is one activity among others by which one relates her/himself to technology. In such a relationship, as Mitcham outlines, we may think of notions 'inventing', 'designing' or 'manufacturing'. In all these notions technology obviously shares something very important with theory or science. Yet, it is not clear in what ways an inventor might be responsible for what Dreyfus calls 'Socratic reason'. As opposed to designing, Mitcham writes, "inventing appears as an action that proceeds by non-rational, unconscious, intuitive, or even accidental means". (Mitcham, 1994, p. 217)

Even in the case of modern engineering and systematic inventing the very moment of instant creativity and imagination remains crucial. Some advance thinking tools, such as brainstorming sessions, creative research procedures and online problem solving forums are but few examples to those attempts being made to repeat those very moments of instant creativity for other inventions.

The point here is that what is implicit in this very moment of instant creativity remains implicit even at the further stages of technological making. For further designs or duplications what engineers or developers seek to do is not to make anything explicit, if it was not already explicit in the very beginning. Rather, technical procedures proceed by means of some sophisticated grammatical representations that work as "minute remainders" of the inventing action. The more detailed these minute remainders are kept and clearly represented in particular grammatical structures, the more explicit procedures for application are derived.

Inventing might well be considered as an interface between 'the inventor' (organism) and 'tools' and 'objects' (extra-organic). However, one of the old bipolar oppositions (nature-culture) is at work here. Traditional understanding draws a sharp line between 'organism' and 'environment'. And it tells us that technological making takes place in interaction between

these two, and it is explicable at the outset where technological pursuit begins and where it ends. This, I shall discuss in the next part, is highly objectionable.

IV. A habitual mode: Being-with-technology

Dewey challenges to the idea that human beings and technical activities are two separate things, and that human beings are conscious subjects who reflect on *problems* and *things* outside themselves to solve the former by means of the latter. Nor that Dewey thinks technical activities of human beings as necessarily being nihilistic in the long run.

According to Dewey, it is not technological activity that in fact requires an explicit fragmentation, but our habits of thinking.[2] In speaking of habits in terms of technology, however, one must further analyze the relationship between technology and 'creation of habitudes'. We see the term 'habit' in many parts of Dewey's wide range works, used within different contexts. Unlike ordinary meaning of the term that has many negative connotations as well, Dewey attaches to it a positive meaning and sees it basically functional.

Habit, for Dewey, means "formation of intellectual and emotional disposition as well as an increase in ease, economy, and efficiency of action". (Dewey, 1899-1924, p. 46-58) Habit, in Deweyian sense, has of course much to do with 'custom' or 'social practices'. However, it cannot be reduced, Dewey argues, merely to the content of what society transmit. His conception of habit rather involves the physical and natural environment as well. There is a dialectic relationship between human agent and physical, natural, and social environment, and out of this interaction habits are continuously modified.

What Dewey writes somewhere in *Human Nature and Conduct* is relevant in many sense to what I call 'technic as an habitual mode of being-in-the-world'. According to Dewey, "As breathing involves both the lungs and an atmosphere from which oxygen is extracted, so all habits at once depends upon and alter the environment in which they are performed." (Dewey, 1922, p.14) Taken together with technology, our plasticity in the sense of capacity 'to retain and carry over from prior experience factors' helps us act in the world so fluently, with no or minimum need for an explicit reflective program. This fluency in acting-in-the-world is neither deliberate nor historical, but precisely a purposeful and earthly mode of being.

The position that conceives of technology as an imperative that is telling us to live definite and itemized lives can be dismissed for relying on a Cartesian bias. We have not good

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[2] Habits, in Deweyian sense, "does not preclude the use of thought, but it determines the channels within which it operates". (Dewey, 1925-1953, p. 340)

reasons, in other words, to agree with Dreyfus that technology and theory are out of the same Platonic mould, so both should be blamed for taking us finally to nihilism. This faulty conception of technology, as Rammert writes, rests on the supposition that "a self or a subject can use a thing as an instrument to effect something in the outer world." (Rammert, 1999) Rammert challenges –in complete agreement with Dewey- to this supposition. He writes: "But is it reasonable to speak of a subject, if the technological instruments change the status of subjectivity? Who is the subject in an atomic plant? The clear-cut limits between subject and object become disturbed". (ibid) An he cites İhde: "Technics is a symbiosis of artifact and user within a human action". (ibid)

So-called limit between subject and object, and Dreyfus' complain of objectifying practices are dissolved in Deweyian notion of habits. Neither technological making nor using can be blamed for nihilistic implications if we are to consider Dewey's understanding of action and habit. In *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey suggests that habits are unifying and regulating impulses that undermine any sharp line between organism and environment.

> We may think of habits as means, waiting, like tools in a box, to be used by conscious resolve. But they are something more than that. They are active means, means that project themselves, energetic and dominating ways of acting. We need to distinguish between materials, tools and means proper. Nails and boards are not strictly speaking means of a box. They are only materials for making it. Even the saw and hammer are means only when they are employed in some actual making. Otherwise they are tools, or potential means. They are actual means only when brought in conjunction with eye, arm and hand in some specific operation. And eye, arm and hand are, correspondingly, means proper only when they are in active operation. And whenever they are in action they are cooperating with external materials and energies. Without support from beyond themselves the eye stares blankly and the hand moves fumblingly. They are means only when they enter into organization with things which independently accomplish definite results. These organizations are habits." (Dewey, 1922, p. 25-26)

Perhaps, Deweyian insight should be extended in the way Hickman suggests. Hickman argues, in his lengthy book on technology, that a distinction needs to be drawn between "technical" and "technological" without separating one from each other. Hickman defines "technique" as "habitualized skills together with their tools and artifacts" whilst "technology" as "systematic inquiry into technique". (Hickman, 2001) One might argue that Hickman's definition of technology denotes to Dreyfus' conception of technology, for the very adjective 'systematic' reveals analytical and definite nature of technological activity.

And this feature of technology leads us to perceive and experience the world in full disintegration. I would not agree.

According to Hickman, Dewey's conception of "reflective thinking" and "habitual mode" produces echo in variety of ways in the realm of technology. He writes,

> Cognition that involves the use of tools and artifacts that are relatively external to the organism is what I have termed "technology." But once technological work has been done, that is, once problematic situations have been resolved with the help of those tools and artifacts, their solutions tend to be habitualized or routinized. Techniques are then stored as habits and used as needed. When habitualized techniques are applied to problematic situations but fail to resolve them, then more technology—more deliberate inquiry into techniques—is called for." (Hickman)

It is very clear in this passage that reflective thinking is matched with the type of systematic inquiry that is necessary in technological activity. Technology, in this sense, begins where habitual action no longer satisfies or lives up to its purpose. But, let me repeat, "... once problematic situations have been resolved with the help of those tools and artifacts, their solutions tend to be habitualized or routinized...".

Moreover, for Hickman, in our being-in-the-world, there is a vivid and continuous relationship between technical and technological types of engagement. The importance of "reciprocity" that Hickman sees between habitual and reflective modes and their effect in the totality of technical-technological experience requires another reference to Hickman:

> In the world in which most of us live there is continual reciprocal movement between the technical and the technological. In other words, the technical and the technological are *phases* of our experience. Technology is what we use to tune up the way we experience the world, and the way we experience the world is increasingly technical." (Hickman)

All this shows that technology, contrary to Dreyfus' conviction, is not "theoretical" in negative sense. It is not necessarily part of the attempt to make everything explicit. It, quite the opposite, is very compatible with human beings' plasticity and tendency to live habitually. When it appears as more reflective and systematic inquiry, it is simply transitory in its purpose and ready to be replaced by more holistic and habitual involvement.

Conclusion

No doubt that the question that whether technology is nihilistic in its orientation or not is not of the kind that can be answered in the scope of any short paper. Yet, I tried in this

paper to argue against a commonplace thinking about technology, which tends to see it simply another variant of "theory" in the realm of which our actions need to be fragmented and made explicit. I argued, based on the insight Dewey provided, that technology is not something separate from our general mode of being-in-the-world. We, when we are supposed to engage in technological activity, are not turning into different beings other than what we have always been. The way that we reflect on the items of technological problem might obviously require sometime a break from very mode of "habitual doing". Yet, this break is always marginal in its occurrence and it –as the very inclination of being- tends to change to other mode, a mode of habituality.

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