

The Heideggerian Notion of Technology in *Brave New World*

Noushin Pakzad

Ph.D candidate of English Literature, Instructor, Department of Humanities, Ilam University, Ilam, Iran.

Abstract- *Brave New World* is a dystopian novel about future of human beings. Its pessimistic and also sarcastic view toward the destiny of man is a harsh criticism on the technological progress that is going to occur. According to the novel, this progress stops at a point when stability is achieved; in other words, the politicians conduct it in a way to gain stability. Meanwhile, Heidegger provides a distinct modern definition of the notion of technology and the way we look at it and what it really is. According to Heidegger, technology is related to truth, something that is not found in this novel.

Keywords- technology, truth, poetry, *Brave New World*.

I. Introduction

The main theme of *Brave New World* is the dominance of technology in a highly technological dystopian society of which the citizens are no more than machine-like workers. From the beginning of the novel, Huxley introduces us this society with detailed scientific information about the process of producing human beings. The fact that the novel happens in future is very crucial, because Huxley's pessimistic view toward future becomes relevant.

At the first sight, every facility informs us of a happy life in a highly developed society: the Hatcheries and Conditioning, dividing people into ranks according to their future work, hypnopaedia, transportation by helicopters, soma, and so many other entertainments like dancing and sensual movies seem to make an agreeable life for the new world people. Actually Huxley aims to show that this development has gone astray; in other words, we observe a harsh satire on man's future. (Firchow, 266)

Technology is conducted in a special way to prevent any instability in the society. As Mond states in the novel "science is a public danger. As dangerous as it's beneficent...Thanks to science. But we can't allow science to undo its own good work." (*Brave New World*, 155) In such a dystopia, stability is gained just through taming science and locking people's mind not to think of anything new. Any new invention or new thought shatters the stability of this brave new world. That's the price which the government and people should pay for happiness.

On the other hand, Heidegger's notion of technology is crucial. Being the first philosopher who considers technology as a main subject matter for philosophy, Heidegger looks at technology in a new horizon. In his view, technology is not a device for an aim, but a truth which is concealed. (Heidegger, 308) Inventing a technological device is like unveiling of just a part of this truth. (308) Man should not regard technology as

an object. Heidegger believes as soon as what is unconcealed no longer concerns man even as an object then comes the very brink of a precipitous fall. (308). Therefore, ignoring technology as a truth and conducting it as he wants, man "exalts himself to the posture of the lord of the earth and the illusion comes to prevail that everything man encounters exists only in so far as it is his own construct (308) Actually, Heidegger believes that this view towards technology is only mended when we pass the humanistic view to technology and perceive it as truth. (309)

In this paper we see how in *Brave New World*, an absolute humanistic view towards technology is dominant and how man has made "a lord of universe of himself" (Heidegger, 309). The strict control of the minds of people and the horror of the governors of the truth unveiled shows Huxley foresees future: a bitter stability is dominant with the complete absence of truth.

II. Technology in Heidegger's view

Heidegger raises a question about the concept of technology and first he explains the etymology of that word in Greek or Latin and investigates the meaning through the concept. As Wild states Heidegger believes technology comes from the Greek *techne*, which signifies the skill involved in any making or production. The artifact, the product of *techne*, actually reveals the conflict of the world and the earth. (203) Although "the common understanding" says technology is "a neutral instrument under the control of humans", Heidegger challenges that and believes technology is not a means to an aim. When one looks at technology as an object, his outlook is completely a humanistic one. Actually Heidegger disapproves this idea by demonstrating that technology is a discovery, Heidegger defines a concealing-revealing relationship in any technological invention. He explains revealing causes unveiling of truth; so by technology, and this way we come to know the truth.

Heidegger continues the explanation in this way that these unveiling and discoveries make an enframing as a whole which Heidegger calls *Gastell*. (Heidegger, 309) He states by *Gastell* we make a relationship between ourselves and the definite world, (309). According to Borgman there is a "twofold danger" in the enframing, one danger is that "human being, reduces itself to a resource" and "takes control" over revealing this truth imagining that technology is nothing but instrumental and work at the service of mankind. (429) Therefore, the threat is "the disclosure of the framework forecloses every other dispensation" and conceals that it too is a disclosure (429). This relationship becomes dangerous when we regard technology as an object, for in this way we can not realize its essence. (Heidegger, 309) This is exactly where the misunderstanding happens and the danger threatens. Heidegger believes in this condition, the illusion comes to prevail that everything man encounters exist only insofar as it is his own construct. This delusion gives rise in turn to one final delusion: it seems as though man every where and always just encounters himself. (308) As far as man sees himself as "the lord of the universe", he thinks he has made the world himself, this selfishness makes the *Gastell* a great threat. (309)

III. Technology in *Brave New World*

From the beginning of the *Brave New World*, we face a highly progressed society which the citizens, and the controller and the director are very proud of. Hatching and Conditioning of man is a great triumph. There is no more the pain and suffering of delivering a baby by a woman. The director elaborates different activities done in the Hatching and Conditioning Centre to produce infants. He begins with explanation of fertilizing room in which eggs are detached and ripened, and then fertilized by spermatozoa in a warm condition. In this process the eggs are bottled into different groups of Alphas, Betas, Gammas, Deltas, and Epsilons.

On Gammas, Deltas, and Epsilons the process of Bokanovsky is operated, through which the eggs "will bud, will proliferate, will device from eight to ninety six buds and every bud will be a grown up human being at the end." (Brave New World, 15) The minute explanation goes on and the director introduces Neo-Pavlovian education and the hypnopaedia, the education through sleeping of the children, to make them abhor the flowers and books and to make them achieve the state of stability.

Soma is the precious tablet one gram of which guarantees a happy day and night, helping to forget

about every thing and to enjoy just the time being. Soma, along with hypnopaedia, is the process which controls people's mind. There is no need of police of thought like the novel *1984*, or a Big Brother who controls the thoughts. Brain washing and controlling the minds in *Brave New World* is rather more scientific and programmed. It is the result of technological progress whose goal is to create a happy life, one without any war, without any dispute, and devoid of any pain and suffering.

So the technology used in this dystopia has been conducted in a special way in order to achieve stability. No change is permitted in this well-progressed society. To avoid all changes all the processes of thinking should be prohibited. This prohibition is unconscious, done through brain washing in the time of conditioning and hypnopaedia and the result is a completely brain washed being who knows nothing but doing his own job and enjoying his brave life sexually. As Meckier states the society has been led in a way to stress the advantages of the race and canalizing of energy in to radically useful channels. (9)

Though every body is well produced, with no defect and error, there are few citizens whose Conditioning has not operated well and being Alphas or Betas, their intellectual minds goes beyond what the state has wanted them to be and discover their own talents and realize the treachery of the governors, Bernard and Helmholtz are two conscious people in this dormant society. Their seclusion and trend towards being alone is recognized by the society and they are banished to the land of conscious people in order that the stability of the society would remain still.

People of this brave society have been tricked in a way to believe their own happiness foolishly. The governors could never do better to achieve such stability. They have controlled the mob by the power of science and technology. Being nothing more than mechanical machines, they have no harm for the governors and the stability.

Sex is the power invigorated in this new world to make people not to think. As far as people are busy with their sexual needs, they cannot think of anything else. Sex even has been substituted religion in this society. With the great power of soma, there is no need of religion and people feel no need for it. As Mond declares "soma is Christianity without tears" (157).

In this sense, the whole progress in such a society has become Huxley's subject of bitter satire. In other words, man's aim in exploring new facets of technology is just to help himself, to achieve happiness and comfort, and ignoring the truth. In Huxley's *Brave New World*, we observe an ironic

happiness and comfort, which has costed at the price of escaping and even forgetting truth.

One of the mottos of the society of *Brave New World* is stability. Though this stability first seems to have arranged a nice world, through what the Controller mentions, the horror of change and therefore the danger of individual's thought in this society becomes relevant. Mond explains to Helmholtz and John that science is a public danger, so it should be limited to prevent any mutability. (155)

When John asks Mond why all people of the society are not Alpha plus, which means being equal in rank, Mond answers in this way there will be no stability. (151) There should be always Epsilons and Gammas to do the low tasks and the heavy labour of the society, just this way stability is achieved. As Schmerl states all human activity directed and coordinated by the state, yet the total product is abhorrent. (331)

III. Poetry and Technology

Huxley's attitude towards poetry in his brave new world is interesting. There is no art and poetry in this world. In The World State nothing has been heard of Shakespeare, likewise, every kind of using emotions is ridiculed. Bernard is a character who is not satisfied with the monotonous limited life in The World State. Though not an intellectual, he asks permission from the director to visit the savage reservation, which shows his curiosity to find and explore new ways of life and new people. Helmholtz as an intellectual who is interested in reading books is so much brainwashed that when John reads Romeo and Juliet, he laughs at it. (123) People of London cannot achieve the consciousness of understanding poetry. Helmholtz, the only person who achieves such consciousness and commits poesies in Heidegger's words, cannot live in this society and is ostracized to an island for people who are interested in books. John the savage is an alien who has read Shakespeare and other great poets. His irritating experience of the shallow understanding of World State people frustrates him and makes him commit suicide. Falling in love and bearing an interest in poetry make him distinct as a stranger in that society.

Poetry is not just considered as art for the sake of it. It is rather a means to truth, that's why it is banished by the governors. Helmholtz understands what emotions are. He perceives that there is something in loneliness and saying poetry which makes the individual different from others, and makes him realize the hidden truth in the whole world, and at last makes him to explore the universe in seeking for truth. But in exploring the truth, there is the danger of missing the stability.

Therefore, in Huxley's view, poetry is prohibited, because it helps exploring and so discovering truth. John finds neither poetry, nor any other kind of real poesies and that's why all his eagerness for entering the World State Society changes to disappointment. In other words, John who craves the new world, because he loves to experience the progress made there and its comfort under the shadow of science and technology, but he just faces a dystopia: man has destroyed his dreams, enjoying a silly rather than a happy life. Neither did technology help revealing the truth, nor does poetry exist in this progressed society. Art and science as John mentions are the high prices which these human beings paid for their happiness.

In *Brave New World*, technology is regarded just as a service to mankind. Hatcheries are for removing the pains of begetting babies, soma is for being gay and forgetting all pains, Bokanovsky is a triumph for creating low rank of people to do the hard works of the society, and all these are considered man's triumph. Worst of all, man has put an end to all his explorations of the world, thinking that he has gained all truth and happiness. This is exactly where Heidegger believes the great danger threatens. (308)

III. Conclusion

According to Heidegger there is no stability in revelation of truth. A great part of truth is always concealed and man by his unveilings discovers just a little part of truth. One reason is the essence of modern technology is Gestell or enframing. (Gorner, 177) Gestell is also called 'destining'. (177) because it enframes and restricts events in a specific course and creates a specific destiny. It 'controls' and 'encompasses' the entire globe in the same way that "Nazism" did in Germany "mass propaganda and information". (Malpas, 283) Ironically the same case is viewed in World State Society. Man's humanistic view towards technology never allows him to get out of the dominance of Gestell. As Heidegger mentions "as a destining, it banishes man in to that kind of revealing that is an ordering and nothing more. (309) So it is man who conducts and pushes technology forward by revealing a part of it as truth. Lagan explaining Heidegger's view about technology, states just "as technique cannot be known in its essence, so neither can art be known in its real essence." (198) In Huxley's view, the contemporary humanistic and selfish exploration of technology leads to such a brave new world in future. Firchow states "if the present situation of technology continues to progress as it is progressing now, then the inevitable result must be a brave new world." (266) Referring to the original meaning of techne, Heidegger states this Greek term

was used for arts. (Gorner, 174) The common ground in both is revealing.(308) Art is unveiling because it belonged to Poesies.(308) In every unveiling, art is totally present, like technology that is the work of man and reveals a part of truth.(308) He concludes that poetry can help the unveiling of truth, for both art specially poetry, and technology reveal the truth and through this revealing the humanistic view towards technology vanishes, because in this way, there is no look at technology as an object, but as a high truth absolutely as the way art is.

As we saw, it is not just thinking which is prevented, but arts in general and poetry particularly are prohibited, too. There is no poetry, for there should not be any individuality. As we see in the novel, in England and in 632 years after Ford there is no individuality. Poetry is the revelation of truth and a craving for achieving happiness. Talking of real truth and happiness shatters the illusive happiness of this brave new world, so it is regarded as a danger for the stability of the society. "Poesies" as Heidegger calls it, is prevented in all its aspects.

In *Brave New World*, Gastell revealed is used to conceal all revealing in the sense of poesies. Danger as Heidegger defines dominates this society. The relationship which man has made with the world is a completely humanistic one. Heidegger calls the dominance of Gastell destiny. (309) This is the destiny which man himself has selected.

For John who is a savage and knows no progression, this brave world seems a disaster. He wonders having no mother, no wife, and no family how these people can live and he is astonished by the way they treat dead people, no mourning and no tears. Dividing the society in to ranked people bothers him. He cannot tolerate such stability, for he knows these people are lying to themselves. In the world that there is no God, no art, no poetry, and no truth, he has two options: either ignoring his real essence of being and lying to himself as all people in this New World do or releasing himself from this phony life by committing suicide.

John chooses to suffer. He says "I don't want comfort, I want God, I want poetry." (*Brave New World*, 163) and when Mond asks him if he wants to be unhappy, he confirms. (163) Actually, John is the Jesus in a land who finds no addressee for the truth he aims to convey. Truth has been forgotten in all its forms. With no art and no truth, there won't be a life for him. He cannot stand man's selfishness in sacrificing truth for his apparent happiness.

This is how Huxley feels the danger. The new world he introduces is not just a fantasy: rather it is the outcome of man's selfishness in near future, or as some critics like Firchow believe it is actually a satire

not so much of the future as of the present: a future as it is implicit in the present. (266)

Man should come out of the arrogant attitude of being the "lord of the world" in Heidegger's words. (308) In other words, the humanistic relationship which he has made with the world should be changed. As Trilling states man's greed, his folly and selfishness became Huxley's joke behind which there looms the great fear (304) and in fact the great danger of a threatening future.

Works Cited:

- [1] Borgman, Albert. (2005). "Technology". In *a Companion to Heidegger*. Dreyfus & Wrathall (Eds). Oxford Blackwell Publishing.
- [2] Firchow, Peter. (1981). "Brave New World." Gunton and Sharon (Eds). *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Michigan: Gale Research Company. 18: 266-267.
- [3] Gorner, Paul. (2007). *Heidegger's Being & Time, An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- [4] Heidegger, Martin. (1977). *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- [5] Huxley, Aldous. (1969). *Brave New World*. New York: Harper & Row.
- [6] Lagan, Thomas. (1959). *The Meaning of Heidegger*. London: Routledge & Key & Paul.
- [7] Malpas, Jeff. (2006). *Heidegger's Topology*. London: MIT Press.
- [8] Meckier, Jerome. (1979). "A Neglected Huxley Preface: His Earliest Synopsis of Brave New World." McBrien, William. (Ed.). *Twentieth Century Literature*. New York: Hofstra University Press. 25: 1-18.
- [9] Schmerl, Rudolf. (1962). "The Two Future Worlds of Aldous Huxley." Stone, George Winchester. (Ed.). *P.M.L.A.* Chicago: The University Press. 77: 328-332.
- [10] Trilling, Diana. (1971). "Aldous Huxley." Gunton & Sharon. (Eds.). *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Michigan: Gale Research Company. 8: 304-6.
- [11] Wild, John. (1967). *The Anatomy of Disillusion*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.