



Will Technology Save or Destroy Us?

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"Technology is not just something that mediates between our mental intentions and the physical world about us, technology gets inside our heads and affect the very way in which we conceive reality" (George Pattison, *Thinking about God in an Age of Technology*, p. 3)

Introduction: Martin Heidegger

When we look at today's language, we can see that there is something to what Heidegger is saying. Natural things are routinely called 'natural resources'... Human beings are 'human resources.' Books and artworks become 'information resources'; and writing becomes 'word processing,' as if language, too, were just a resource to be manipulated (Richard Polt, *Heidegger: An Introduction*, p. 171).

I. R. Abraham Joshua Heschel

1. There is... a perpetual tension in man between the focus of the self and the goal that lies beyond the self... Animal in man is driven to concentrate on the satisfaction of needs; spiritual in man is the will to serve higher ends, and in serving ends he transcends his needs (*God in Search of Man*, p. 397).
2. We are attached to two centers: to the focus of our self and to the focus of God. Driven by two forces, we have both the impulse to acquire, to enjoy, to possess and the urge to respond, to yield, to give (*Man is Not Alone*, p. 146).
3. Our age is one in which usefulness is thought to be the chief merit of nature; in which the attainment of power, the utilization of its resources is taken to be the chief purpose of man in God's

creation. Man has indeed become primarily a tool-making animal, and the world is now a gigantic tool box for the satisfaction of his needs (*God in Search of Man*, p. 34).

4. Most of our attention is given to the expedient, to that which is conducive to our advantage and which would enable us to exploit the resources of our planet. If our philosophy were a projection of man's actual behavior, we would have to define the value of the earth as a source of supply for our industries, and the ocean as a fishpond. However... there is more than one aspect of nature that commands our attention. We go out to meet the world not only by way of expediency but also by way of wonder. In the first we accumulate information in order to dominate; in the second we deepen our appreciation in order to respond (*Man is Not Alone*, p. 36).

5. He who sets out to employ the realities of life as means for satisfying his own desires will soon forfeit his freedom and be degraded to a mere tool. Acquiring things, he becomes enslaved to them; in subduing others, he loses his own soul. It is as if unchecked covetousness were double-faced; a sneer and subtle vengeance behind a captivating smile (*Man is Not Alone*, p. 189)

6. My view of the world and my understanding of the self determine each other. The complete manipulation of the world results in the complete instrumentalization of the self (*Who Is Man*, p. 88).

7. The essence of religion does not lie in the satisfaction of a human need. As long as man sees religion as a source of satisfaction for his own needs, it is not God whom he serves but his own self (*God in Search of Man*), p. 350.

8. [The Sabbath is] a day on which we stop worshipping the idols of technical civilization... is there any institution that holds out greater hope for man's progress than the Sabbath?... On the Sabbath, we live, as it were, *independent of technical civilization*; we abstain primarily from any activity that aims at remaking or reshaping things of space. Man's royal privilege to conquer nature is suspended on the seventh day (*The Sabbath*, p. 28).

9. The solution of mankind's most vexing problem will not be found in renouncing technical civilization, but in attaining some degree of independence of it (*The Sabbath*, p. 28).

II. Soloveitchik

1. This notion of *hiddush*, of creative interpretation, is not limited solely to the theoretical domain but extends as well into the practical domain, into the real world. The most fervent desire of halakhic man is to behold the replenishment of the deficiency in creation, when the real world will conform to the ideal world and the most exalted and glorious of creations, the ideal Halakhah, will be actualized in its midst. The dream of creation is the central idea in the halakhic consciousness—the idea of the importance of man as a partner of the Almighty in the act of creation, man as creator of worlds (Halakhic Man, p. 99).

2. Halakhic man discerns in every divine pledge man's obligation to bring about its fulfilment, in every promise a specific norm, in every eschatological vision an everlasting commandment (the commandment to participate in the realization of the prophecy) (HM, p. 100).

3. ... if the Torah spoke at length about the creation of the world and related to us the story of the making of heaven and earth and all their host, it did so not in order to reveal cosmogonic secrets and metaphysical mysteries but rather in order to teach *practical* Halakhah. The Scriptural portion of the creation narrative is a legal portion, in which are to be found basic, everlasting halakhic principles, just like the portion of *Kedoshim* (Leviticus 19) or *Mishpatim* (Exodus 21). If the Torah then chose to relate to man the tale of creation, we may clearly derive one law from this manner of procedure—viz., that man is obliged to engage in creation and the renewal of the cosmos (HM, pp. 100-101).

4. The peak of religious ethical perfection to which Judaism aspires is man as creator. / When God created the world, He provided an opportunity for the work of His hands—man—to participate in His creation. The Creator, as it were, impaired reality in order that mortal man could repair its flaws and perfect it (HM, p. 101).

5. If a man wishes to attain the rank of holiness, he must become a creator of worlds. If a man never creates, never brings into being anything new, anything original, then he cannot be holy unto his God. That passive type who is derelict in fulfilling his task of creation cannot become holy (HM, p. 108).

6. ... Adam the first is interested in just a single aspect of reality and asks one question only—"How does the cosmos function?" He is not fascinated by the question, "Why does the cosmos function at all?" nor is he interested in the question, "What is the essence?" He is only curious to know how it works. In fact, even this "how" question with which Adam the first is preoccupied is limited in scope. He is concerned not with the question per se, but with its practical implications. He raises not a metaphysical but a practical, technical "how" question... Adam the first is overwhelmed by one quest, namely, to harness and dominate the elemental natural forces and to put them at his disposal. This practical interest arouses his will to learn the secrets of nature. He is completely utilitarian as far as motivation, teleology, design, and methodology are concerned (The Lonely Man of Faith, pp. 13-14).

7. ... Adam the second does not apply the functional method invented by Adam the first. He does not create a world of his own. Instead, he wants to understand the living, "given" world into which he has been cast. Therefore, he does not mathematize phenomena or conceptualize things. He encounters the universe in all its colorfulness, splendor, and grandeur, and studies it with the naïveté, awe, and admiration of the child who seeks the unusual and wonderful in every ordinary thing and event. While Adam the first is dynamic and creative, transforming sensory data into thought constructs, Adam the second is receptive and beholds the world in its original dimensions (LMF, pp. 22-23).

8. To be sure, this alternation of cosmic and covenantal involvement is not one of "light and shade," enhanced activity and fatigue, as the mystics are accustomed to call their alternating experiences, but represents two kinds of creative and spontaneous activity, both willed and sanctioned by God. Let us not forget that the majestic community is willed by God as much as the covenantal faith

community. He wants man to engage in the pursuit of majesty-dignity as well as redemptiveness (LMF, pp. 80-81).

9. Notwithstanding the fact that Western man is in a nostalgic mood, he is determined not to accept the dialectical burden of humanity. He certainly feels spiritually uprooted, emotionally disillusioned, and, like the old king of Ecclesiastes, is aware of his own tragedy. Yet this pensive mood does not arouse him to heroic action. He, of course, comes to a place of worship. He attends lectures on religion and appreciates the ceremonial, yet he is searching not for a faith in all its singularity and otherness, but for religious culture. He seeks not the greatness found in sacrificial action but the convenience one discovers in a comfortable, serene state of mind. He is desirous of an aesthetic experience rather than a covenantal one, of a social ethos rather than a divine imperative. In a word, he wants to find in faith that which he cannot find in his laboratory, or in the privacy of his luxurious home. His efforts are noble, yet he is not ready for a genuine faith experience which requires the giving of one's self unreservedly to God, who demands unconditional commitment, sacrificial action, and retreat. Western man diabolically insists on being successful. Alas, he wants to be successful even in his adventure with God. If he gives of himself to God, he expects reciprocity. He also reaches a covenant with God, but this covenant is a mercantile one. In a primitive manner, he wants to trade "favors" and exchange goods (LMF, pp. 103-104).