

L&S 160E Notes – 2/3/2010

Don't read the appendices for "Age of the World Picture." However, keep your eyes open next week for Heidegger's definition of what the modern age is. He's learned a lot between these 2 essays, and his definition is different.

"The Age of the World Picture" is about understanding what being in the modern epoch is. The modern epoch goes starts around the 1600's with Descartes, and is the epoch of Galileo and Newton. Modernity has a lot to do with science, and the key phrase of the modern epoch is "Subjects and Objects." The subject-object state of being was invented by Descartes, before him, we didn't understand our world as objects. Now though, we get the ideas of dominating nature and forcing everything into our normative realm.

Heidegger wants to understand our epoch, where it's heading and what dangers come with it. He loses his train of thought in the "gigantic" part of the essay, but what he's trying to say is something along the lines that before the modern epoch, there were things that were simply too big to be understood. Now though, we believe that no matter how complex something is, we will understand it eventually.

As you read "The Question Concerning Technology," think back on this and see what Heidegger has overturned. Professor Dryfus thinks Heidegger has a new, post-modern, understanding of being that is radically new. He doesn't have any word for this epoch yet, but it is totally different from the modern epoch.

When a new epoch starts, there is no radical breakthrough. It is not as though everyone wakes one day and says "ah, my understanding of being has changed." Instead, there is constant overlap of the various epochs.

Truth has come to mean a relation between propositions and reality. This is not how the Greeks understood truth, for them truth meant “not covered up-ness.” Truth for the Greeks was an uncovering. So to review the epochs:

- Greeks – everything “Whoosing up,” being uncovered.
- Romans – everything is produced
- Christianity – everything is created by God
- Modern
- Post-Modern

Question: What does “Whoosh” mean?

Answer: In Homer, things well up, stay around for a bit, then go away. Whooshing is that kind of “Welling up”.

Heidegger says a basis has complete domination of all phenomena that distinguish an age, but not all phenomena are distinguishing of that age. There are always things not conforming to the age: some are left over from the overlap between ages, some are new and have not yet been brought into the age.

The essential phenomena of the modern age is science. What is science?

Research. Research is what really defines our age, and science hasn’t always been research. Research is more systematic, it has a methodology, it’s what scientists do now, in contrast to something like alchemy.

There are whole other ways to get knowledge than science. What’s special about science is that you’re a subject dealing with objects. The old (non-research) sciences were not exact, because they could not be exact. To be exact you need universal characteristics, you need things to be either true or false. Science is special because it

defines exactly what it predicts, and there are no exceptions. Greek science didn't have this rigor, they had exceptions on things for monsters and such. Christianity had exceptions for god; miracles could bend or break the rules of science.

The central characteristics of modernity are science, machine technology, and art's moving into the purview of aesthetics. Since Heidegger thinks art is a huge deal and it reflects the culture of the age, then true art is not just a private, inner experience. He thinks that experience has replaced art and also the gods. The loss of the gods has changed religion (being told by god what to do) into just religious experience, where now we merely explore past and myth. When religion becomes just feeling, or experience, it is not godly.

Question: What would Heidegger say about extreme sports?

Answer: People don't do irrational things just for money or just for kicks. Heidegger isn't against them, he thinks you should take a risk if you have a calling, that it's necessary to do so if you believe it. The movie is bad because it seems to say that taking for the hell of it is okay, and that's not good. Don't "run forward into death" just for experience.

Heidegger is against turning important things into just personal experience. Religion and true art have qualities that are lost if you make them just experiences.

Adventure junkies are modern because they make even their own mortality an object. They, the subject, do what they will with any objects they deem have value. They also impose (or try to) their will on objects. Think of "conquering Everest".

Back to research now. It's different from the sciences of old because the scientist now projects a complete "ground plan" of how the science works, and there are no exceptions. The ongoing activity of science is to fix any anomalies that threaten the

theory. If you can't, the idea is overthrown and we have a scientific revolution. This is how science progresses now. You can falsify laws and entire principles now, and that couldn't be done in the old science because there were all those exceptions.

World picture means the world conceived as a picture. You get the whole world with nothing buried. The opposite of world picture was the idea of the Greeks that the world was looking at us. Now we say the self determines what counts as real, and this is what it means to be a subject: to set up the conditions of "real." The world open to the modern scientist can be completely understood, and anything that can't be understood isn't real. We describe the normative realm. We subjects are the source of all meaning. We dominate and expand everything. Before our epoch, an individual person could only see so much that was clear, and all the rest was hidden to him. The Greeks said "the 'I' is restricted to the horizon of what he can actually see." Now, everything has been decided for what is real. Since we decide what is real, we can cover everything. Anything we don't understand isn't real.

Subjects can have representations of the world that are totally clear; these are the pictures. The whole understanding of being can change, or the understanding can stay the same, but the picture can completely change independent of the understanding of being. World pictures are a bad way to think about epochs and state of being, but our understanding of being allows for world pictures imposed by man.

What about the values in things? Value isn't actually in the world. We put values on things, to what we interpret as objects (people don't have value). Value is the objectification of needs as goals. No one dies for mere values, because we put value on things and we can just as easily take them back.