



## The Palliation of Dying: A Heideggerian Analysis of the “Technologization” of Death<sup>1</sup>

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*The modern West has vigorously sought to overcome death, or at the very least minimize the suffering that it entails. Whereas the former has been predominantly pursued through modern scientific medicine, the minimization of the adversity of death and dying has been sought through ‘death technologies’. This technologization of death is analyzed in light of Martin Heidegger’s phenomenological philosophy. The analysis begins with an outline of the fundamental tenets of Heidegger’s ‘philosophy of Being’. In turn, his philosophical framework is utilized to highlight the manner in which the technologization of dying serves to conceal the central existential questions about being and finitude that dying gives rise to. The paper concludes with a discussion of how Heidegger’s work can inspire a more authentic stance toward dying. Leo Tolstoy’s *The Death of Ivan Ilych* is referred to in order to illustrate Heidegger’s construal of this existential struggle toward dying.*

### On thinking about death

When thinking here is not done ‘fundamental-ontologically’ with the intention of grounding the truth of being, the worst and most absurd misinterpretations creep in and spread – and, naturally a ‘philosophy of death’ is made up (Heidegger, 1989/1999, p. 199).

### The Death of Ivan Ilych

Ivan Ilych saw that he was dying, and he was in continual despair.

In the depth of his heart he knew he was dying, but not only was he not accustomed to the thought, he simply did not and could not grasp it.

‘If I had to die ... I should have known it was so. An inner voice would have told me so, but there was nothing of the sort in me ... And now here it is!’ he said to himself. ‘It can’t be. It’s impossible! But here it is. How is this? How is one to understand it?’

He could not understand it, and tried to drive this false, incorrect, morbid thought away and to replace it by other proper and healthy thoughts. But that thought, and not the thought only but the reality itself, seemed to come and confront him.

And to replace that thought he called up a succession of others, hoping to find in them some support. He tried to get back into the former current of thoughts that had once screened the thought of

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death from him. But strange to say, all that had formerly shut off, hidden and destroyed his consciousness of death, no longer had that effect (Tolstoy, 1886/1960, p. 129-130).

### Introduction

Tolstoy's Ivan Ilych is overcome with dread and anxiety toward his own imminent death. He struggles to retrieve his usual everyday ways of putting death out of his mind. Yet he does not succeed. Ilych becomes distressed by death's omnipresence as it transforms every aspect of his being.

Tolstoy powerfully portrays a distressing stance toward death that stands in sharp contrast to the prevalent 'philosophies of death' in modern Western life that seek to bring comfort and peace to those that are dying or grieving.<sup>i</sup>

The aim of this paper is to discuss the prevalent view towards death in the modern West in light of Martin Heidegger's 'philosophy of Being.' I begin with a sketch of what the current stance toward death commonly looks like - or at least attempts to look like (throughout this paper, the discussion is devoted exclusively to the modern Western context). I then analyze this phenomenon in terms of Heidegger's account of modern science and technology. Then, I will discuss an 'authentic' conception of death in light of Heidegger's philosophical analysis of Being (the terms 'Being' and 'Be-ing' will be used deliberately to distinguish the diverse significations implied by Heidegger in his respective earlier and his later thinking<sup>ii</sup>). The 'Heideggerian' outlook does not stand in opposition to the modern scientific view of death. Rather, it includes the latter into a broader foundational conception of Being. I will end by outlining the significance of *poiesis* in arriving at an authentic stance toward death.

### Dying 'Western Style'

Death is surrounded by a mix of 'traditional' as well as largely contemporary practices. In the presence of death (imminent or actual), many ideas and ritual comportments are called upon from tradition and religion. Prayer and religious sacramental acts are engaged, frequently even among persons who do not ordinarily live 'religiously.' The practices enacted toward the final disposition of a deceased person are particularly religion-oriented, commonly turning

to funeral services followed by burial or cremation practices that can be conducted with varying levels of religiosity. This 'modernization' of religion, wherein selected rituals are retained while the underlying spiritual and ontological worldviews are discarded, accords with Charles Taylor's analysis of morality in the context of modernity. The rise of secularized mechanistic individualism in the modern West has resulted in a prioritization of procedures while forgetting about the substantive moral values that once gave such procedures meaning (Taylor, 1989).

The focus in the context of death is heavily centered on the proper handling of the deceased body, while religious ceremonial acts commemorate the person's spiritual life. In cases where the body cannot be retrieved (as was the case for so many in the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks), the death and its accompanying grief are profoundly deranged and destabilizing. Indeed, this is so profound that extraordinary 'heroic' efforts will be pursued in order to find the body in order to 'correct' the wrongful death.<sup>iii</sup>

Upon this traditional corpus of ideas and practices, we have seen in recent decades, the emergence of 'death enhancement' initiatives. Efforts that strive to make death less distressing. These include various formulations of 'death philosophies,' like the work of Elizabeth Kübler-Ross (1969). These have drawn on an extensive body of research to depict how death and dying commonly (i.e., 'normally') unfold. For example, various stages of dying have been mapped out such as disbelief, bargaining, anger, depression, and acceptance. Experts have emerged with expertise in 'grief therapy' who employ instrumental strategies that aim to foster 'normal' dying or grieving.

This has become part of a larger initiative that I shall refer to collectively as *death technologies*. Medicine has created a field of sub-specialization, palliative care, which aims to foster 'a good death'. This typically means a death that is peaceful with minimal or no pain and discomfort. Palliative care has developed various pharmacological regimens to help control pain and other symptoms associated with dying (e.g., nausea, muscle spasms, or depression).<sup>iv</sup> Interestingly, it could be noted that this medical specialty emerged in part to counter the increasingly 'violent' deaths that many were enduring subsequent to the rise of high-

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technology *resuscitative* medicine. Marijuana is becoming increasingly popular in this domain. On occasion, pharmacological strategies are combined with a 'useful' *use* of the arts - such as music or visual arts - to help foster comfort among the dying.

Popular opinion polls increasingly demonstrate an interest in euthanasia (which has been legalized in the Netherlands). This seems to be related to a profound preoccupation with the possibility of dying a painfully tormented death. Many people would like to be able to decide *when* and *how* they should die. Euthanasia essentially assures this, while palliative care (in areas where euthanasia is not legalized) attempts to allow the dying person and family also to have some control over the process of dying.

A further recent phenomenon has been the emergence of advance directives - commonly referred to as 'living wills'. This legalized instrument enables a person to decide in advance how he or she would like to be cared for in the face of a life-threatening illness, and who should serve as a surrogate decision-maker in the event the person becomes unable to speak for him/herself. This 'empowers' persons with some capacity to define how they *ought* to die. The legal status of advance directives has normalized such wishes as formal duties for those around the dying person (i.e., family members and health care professionals).

#### **Preliminary Critique**

The emergence of the death technologies described above can be characterized as a technologization of death - a turn to technology (predominantly medical) to mend an ailment. Just as medical technology has helped 'heal' many other modern ailments, it has now offered to research and intervene upon death.

A common thread that can be identified throughout the various initiatives described is the pursuit of self-determination. Indeed, a central tenet of palliative care (and in particular euthanasia where it is accepted) is respect for a person's autonomy. That is, a primacy has been attributed to enabling persons to be self-determining such that their wishes ought to command profound recognition. This can be related to the rise of individualism in modernity, whereby each person should be allowed to map out their own destiny to the greatest extent possible (Carnevale, 1999; Taylor, 1992).

Consequently, medical and legal means have been created to enable such self-determining persons to pursue these ends.

A critique of this outlook could challenge this underlying premise of self-determination. Does it necessarily follow that a stated preference expresses *self-determination*? It would seem important to examine what signification of 'self' is implied here. We could likely infer that one's 'true self' is intended. It is commonly recognized that if one is mentally incapacitated, then one's capacity for self-determination is regarded as compromised because one's true self is no longer accessible. However, this legalistic / psychiatric stance toward personal autonomy privileges the faculty of *discernment* without any regard for the 'essence' of such thinking. The notion of self-determination should be linked to a substantive consideration of the *nature* or substance of *selfhood* that discernment is oriented toward.

A skeptical critique of this modern orientation to death could also refute it as a technological encroachment upon human life: modern scientific technology that has gone too far. Although some merit could be found in such a negative stance, Heidegger's work on being, death, science, and technology offers the possibility of construing such criticisms within a positive account. Heidegger offers us a way to recognize science and technology as part of a broader human striving. According to Heidegger, a fundamental problem arises when science and technology are regarded as an ultimately *primordial* framework for understanding.

#### **Analytical Plan**

I have turned to Martin Heidegger's philosophy for this paper, aiming to illustrate the merits of his phenomenology for the health and social sciences. Various formulations of phenomenology have emerged within these disciplines, including medicine (Toombs, 2001), nursing (Benner, 1994), psychology (Giorgi, 1985), anthropology (Geertz, 1973), and sociology (Schutz, 1971-1972). These formulations are variously referred to as phenomenology, interpretive phenomenology, interpretivism, or hermeneutics. Drawing on the philosophies of Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Charles Taylor, these

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important works strive to counter the prevailing universalized objectivism of the scientific paradigm with an orientation that is centered on experience, arguing that understanding is necessarily a subjective meaning-centered phenomenon.

However, these initiatives are confronted by the methodological conventions of science that call for verifiable and generalizable truths in order to justify changes of policy or the provision of services. Consequently, considerable attention has been devoted toward enhancing the instrumental rigor of these approaches, to help ensure a correspondence between the findings of such phenomenological analyses and the 'reality' that they are examining (Carnevale, 2002; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This risks a drifting away from the fundamental tenets that underlie these approaches.

In this paper, I have attempted a phenomenological analysis of a health and social problem - death - within a Heideggerian framework, which is an ontologically-oriented phenomenology. My aim has been to remain as 'authentically faithful' to Heidegger's ideas as possible. Moreover, this analysis examines the phenomenological significances of *technology* and *being* as a precondition for unconcealing *death* in Heideggerian terms.

This work draws on four principal texts: *Being and Time* (1962), *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)* (1989/1999), *The Question Concerning Technology* (1962/1977), and *Science and Reflection* (1977). The first two have been selected because they provide explications of Heidegger's (early and late, respectively) overall philosophy of phenomenology, whereas the latter two specifically examine science and technology.<sup>v</sup> My discussion of the modern Western view of death and its technologization (largely through medical science) will be related to Heidegger's phenomenology of science and technology.

Writing from the perspective of both a phenomenologist and a palliative care health care professional, the position that I have adopted is congruent with that of Heidegger: I seek neither to criticize nor endorse the technologization of death. Rather, I am proposing the utility of a phenomenological contemplation of the existential significance of this technologization. In particular, such a contemplation enables an

illuminated understanding of the meaning of death and our relation to death, which is a necessary condition for authentic dying and being, but which technologization threatens to conceal.

### Technology, Science, and Being

In *The Question Concerning Technology*, Heidegger asserts

Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology ... But we are delivered over to it in the worst possible way when we regard it as something neutral; for this conception of it ... makes us utterly blind to the essence of technology (Heidegger, 1962/1977, p. 4).

Heidegger is concerned about our lack of questioning regarding our relationship to technology - most importantly, toward its *essence*. He offers an analysis of technology related to its implied essence, beginning with how it is commonly regarded.

In the prevalent instrumental view, technology is seen as a means and as a human activity. Something that we aim to master. As a means, this is something whereby a thing is effected or attained - implying causality. This seeks to unlock concealed energy from nature and order it into a *standing reserve* stockpile (i.e., a resource that can be manipulated or controlled by humans). Heidegger refers to this stance as *Enframing*: the containment of nature by humans solely to serve the instrumental ends of humans (Heidegger, 1962/1977, p. 15-19).

Such Enframing can consequently prescribe the manner in which all history is determined (*destining*), whereby the unrecognized domains of Being remain concealed. That is, since it is only *one* way of understanding the phenomena of Being, Enframing risks the danger of misinterpreting everything within a cause-effect coherence - oblivious to the existential phenomena that underlie our striving to contain and control nature through cause-effect technological theories.

In *Science and Reflection*, Heidegger traces the signification that has been attributed to *theory*. In ancient Greece, theory meant to look at something attentively 'wherein what presences becomes visible and, through such sight - seeing - to linger with it' (Heidegger, 1977, p. 163).

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Through the 'ages', theory has been transformed within modern science into an observing that seeks to entrap and secure - refining the *real* (Heidegger, 1977, p. 167). Consequently, the *real* in nature presents itself as surveyable for an entrapping representation within an instrumental coherence. Heidegger goes on to assert that such a view of the real will necessarily give rise to a compartmentalized science - fixing it into *one* object-area at a time whereby science claims to stand in an objective stance toward nature (objectness).

Yet Heidegger argues that the sciences will ultimately be impotent because objectness represents only one kind of attuning for any given time and place. That which remains inaccessible to such a science will be constantly concealed. For example, the study of nature through physics represents only one manner in which nature is present - the whole of nature cannot be enframed through this one way.

In the light of science's inability to access that which cannot be enframed, Heidegger calls for a different kind of questioning: *reflection*.

[Reflection] is calm, self-possessed surrender to that which is worthy of questioning ... In reflection we gain access to a place from out of which there first opens the space traversed at any given time by all our doing and leaving undone ... [R]eflection first brings us onto the way toward the place of our sojourning (Heidegger, 1977, p. 180-181).

Heidegger's analysis of technology outlines two distinctive forms of thought: *calculative* and *contemplative* (Buckley, 1992). Calculative thought is centered on measurement and is oriented toward manipulation and control, striving to attain certainty and security. In contrast, contemplative thought seeks to question the meaning of things, particularly, the meaningful thinking of *Being*.

Buckley (1992) highlights how *representational thinking* is central to Heidegger's explication of the above distinction. Essential to traditional philosophy and modern science,

Representational thought treats the world or reality itself as if it were a picture ... wherein so much energy has been spent on how the subject gets a correct picture of the world, how this

picture is given, how the picture is 'focused' (Buckley, 1992, p. 236).

This distinction between calculative and contemplative thought is qualitative rather than quantitative. That is, the former should not be regarded as a lesser version of the latter. They are essentially incommensurate.

Buckley also points out that Heidegger does not view calculative thought - central to modern science - as negative. 'The problem occurs when calculative thought becomes exclusive' (Buckley, 1992, p. 238). This risks the potential for science to become a mere technique without true understanding - 'an activity in passivity.' Heidegger's challenge seeks to demonstrate that calculation is but one form of thought, while arguing for a *leap* toward contemplative thought.

Heidegger's (1962/1977) *Question Concerning Technology* provides an illustration of such contemplative thought. Parallel to his analysis of the prevalent modern understanding of technology (outlined above), he traces the signification of *cause* to Greek antiquity. Here he reveals that although *cause* is related to that which brings about effects, it is also that to which something else is indebted - that which is *responsible* for the effect (Heidegger, 1962/1977, p. 7). This responsible way of being correspondingly brings things *to presence*.

Every occasion for whatever passes over and goes forward into presencing from that which is not presencing is *poiesis*, is bringing forth ... It is of utmost importance that we think bringing-forth in its full scope and at the same time in the sense in which the Greeks thought it. Not only handcraft manufacture, not only artistic and poetical bringing into appearance and concrete imagery, is a bringing-forth, *poiesis*. *Physis* also, the arising of something from out of itself, is a bringing-forth, *poiesis* ... For what presences by means of *physis* has the bursting open belonging to bringing-forth ... Bringing-forth brings hither out of concealment forth into unconcealment ... within what we call revealing (Heidegger, 1962/1977, p. 10-11).<sup>vi</sup>

This revealing was referred to by the Greeks as *aletheia*. In other words, the instrumentality of technology is responsible for poetically bringing forth a revealing unconcealment.

Whereas *technique* in the modern sense refers to an essence-less skill, *techne* in the ancient Greek sense is linked to *episteme* - knowing in the widest sense - belonging to bringing-forth, to poiesis (Heidegger, 1962/1977, p. 13). Knowing, in the *techne* sense, reveals and opens up.

This analytical explication reveals the *essence* of technology for Heidegger. He argues that the essence of modern technology lies in Enframing. When we experience the Enframing of technology as such, within its essence, we will experience that it

in no way confines us to a stultified compulsion to push on blindly with technology or ... to rebel helplessly against it and curse it as the work of the devil. Quite to the contrary, when we once open ourselves expressly to the *essence* of technology, we find ourselves unexpectedly taken into a freeing claim (Heidegger, 1962/1977, p. 25-26).

The revealing that comes from the *contemplation* of the essence of technology gives rise to a truthful *freeing*.

But despite this, how are we to understand the predominance of calculative thought? Heidegger relates this to the preponderance of *machination* inherently concealed within Being. Machination - linked to *techne* and *poiesis* - is rooted in the human capacity for making. It is governed by a logic of calculability, speed, and enormity (Heidegger, 1989/1999, p. 84-85).

Machination as the essential swaying of beingness yields a faint hint of the truth of be-ing itself ... It seems to be a law of machination ... that the more powerfully it unfolds ... the more stubbornly and more machinationally it hides itself as *such* (Heidegger, 1989/1999, p. 88-89).

Thus, technology needs to be understood in terms of Heidegger's ultimate ground for questioning: the question of Being. His thinking on the question of Being is most notably worked through in *Being and Time* (1962), while he provides what could be called an extension of this work in *Contributions to Philosophy* (1989/1999), among other later works. I shall now very briefly outline these works, as a prelude to reviewing Heidegger's discussion of death.

### The Question of Being/Be-ing

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger (1962) argues for a fundamental ontology, through an existential analysis of Dasein, along with a deconstructing of the history of ontology.<sup>vii</sup> While Dasein is the type of being that struggles with its own question of Being, it also lives in the average everydayness of 'the they' (*das Man*), while struggling to 'Be' in a communal 'We.' Everyday life in 'the they' refers to a routine mode of living 'among the masses' focused primarily on being expedient and instrumentally effective, without regard for any underlying existential worries.

Through the course of this analysis of Being, Heidegger argues that the formal existential totality of Dasein's ontological structural whole is defined by *care*. He highlights that 'Temporality reveals itself as the meaning of authentic care ... Temporality makes possible the unity of existence, facticity, and falling, and in this way constitutes primordially the totality of the structure of care' (Heidegger, 1962, p. 374, 376).

Temporality makes possible the structure of Dasein's Being-in-the-world (i.e., Being's absorptive presence in its world). This is characterized as a three-fold structure of care: futural (Being-ahead-of-itself), present (Being-alongside), and past (Being-already-in). These temporal horizons determine the basis upon which entities are disclosed to Dasein.

Criticizing the limits of conventional ontology in analyzing the question of Being, *Contributions to Philosophy* (Heidegger, 1989/1999) focuses principally on a call for a fundamentally new kind of ontology. Heidegger also discusses the *between* - wherein Be-ing sways between the prevalent ontology and the new one that he is calling for. He further analyzes the *leap* that is required for *crossing* into the new ontology (a new beginning), to assume a form of Be-ing that he characterizes as Enownment. Enownment refers to a resolute authentic stance toward Be-ing.

### Being-toward-death

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger construes death not as a *factual* (i.e., possible ways to be, such as roles) nor an *ontical* (i.e., regarding beings as things and not as a way of being) moment, but as a positive possibility of Dasein's existence, that contains the possibility *not* to be. Through

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encounters with the death of others, Dasein discovers that it cannot die for another Dasein, nor can another Dasein die for it. It is revealed to Dasein that death is one thing that is its ownmost - that 'the they' cannot possess.

The full existential-ontological conception of death may now be defined as follows: death, as the end of Dasein, is Dasein's ownmost possibility - non-relational, certain and as such indefinite, not to be outstripped. Death is, as Dasein's end, in the Being of this entity towards its end (Heidegger, 1962, p. 303).

Death discloses to Dasein that its Being is temporally futural. It is not a point that Dasein approaches. Rather, it is something that comes to Dasein. Death is not something in the future that is not yet present, but it is very much a part of Dasein's existence.

Authentic Being-towards-death - that is to say, the finitude of temporality - is the hidden basis of Dasein's historicity (Heidegger, 1962, p. 386).

For Heidegger, only Dasein is capable of authentic dying. He construes Dasein as a Being-toward-death. The hyphens imply that this is not a subject toward object relationship.

In its authentic encounter with death, Dasein reaches a completeness, its totality of possibilities, never to be added to. As Dasein understands the possibility *not* to be, all other possibilities are placed into a new light. Death reveals a ground for Dasein's freedom, in that it is free to take up possibilities of 'the they' as its own. Dasein can truly choose freely in light of its understanding of its own finitude. In such a light, Dasein will see the factual life in 'the they' differently - as inauthentic and as 'pseudo-possibilities.' In this way, Dasein's confrontation with death can provide a way out of its 'crisis of forgetfulness' (i.e., its own concealment of its distress toward death) (Buckley, 1992, p. 170).

Thus, freedom can result as a consequence of Dasein's Being-toward-death. However, that which is revealed in the face of death can also overwhelm Dasein toward seeking refuge in some form of concealment, just as Ivan Ilych attempted (Buckley, 1992, p. 170).

In relation to encounters with the death of others, Dasein will be inclined in the everydayness of 'the they' to *leap in* and attempt to try to take death away from others.<sup>viii</sup> In an authentic Being-toward-death, Dasein will *leap ahead* and strive to give death back to the other.

In *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger argues that the uniqueness of death for Dasein opens up what is most non-ordinary to it. Being-toward-death is not a nullity but an opening of time-space. Heidegger cautions that when thinking in the face of death is not grounded in the truth of Being, this can give rise to mistaken 'philosophies of death' (he refers to misinterpretations of *Being and Time* that have contributed to this) (Heidegger, 1989/1999, p. 199).

Being-toward-death is to be grasped as determination of Da-sein and *only* as such. Here the utmost appraisal of *temporality* is enacted ... Thus *not* in order to negate 'be-ing' but in order to install the ground of its full and essential affirmability ... But what is at stake is not to dissolve humanness into death and to declare it for sheer nothingness but the opposite: to draw death into Dasein in order to master Dasein in its breadth as abground and thus fully appraise the ground of the possibility of the truth of be-ing) (Heidegger, 1989/1999, p. 200).

This discussion of death in *Contributions to Philosophy* builds on an analysis of *machination* and *the abandonment of being* presented earlier in the book. Heidegger refers to the contemporary era as 'the epoch of the total lack of questioning' (Heidegger, 1989/1999, p. 76). Herein, the interpretation of Being has been relegated to *machination* (i.e., a mechanization of human life), subjected to 'calculation, production, and execution' such that nothing that is question-worthy is pursued (Heidegger, 1989/1999, p. 76). This is characterized as *the abandonment of being*.

The abandonment of being refers to a withdrawal from the question of being. '*Abandonment of being* means that be-ing abandons beings and leaves beings to themselves and thus lets beings become objects of machination' (Heidegger, 1989/1999, p. 78). 'To this abandonment belongs *forgottenness of being* and at the same

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time the *disintegration of truth*' (Heidegger, 1989/1999, p. 79).

Heidegger elaborates three principal concealments of the abandonment of being: (a) calculation (the machination of technicity grounded in mathematical knowing), (b) acceleration (a mania for what is fleeting and not-being-able-to-hear the stillness of hidden growth), and (c) the outbreak of massiveness (what is common to the many and to all) (Heidegger, 1989/1999, p. 84-85).

Through this concealment of the abandonment of being, the distress of Be-ing is forgotten into a *lack of distress* (the concealment of the distress of Be-ing). Heidegger describes this lack of distress toward the distress of Be-ing as the utmost distress (Heidegger, 1989/1999, p. 79).

#### **Toward an Enownment of Palliative Care**

How can Heidegger's philosophical work illuminate the topic at hand - the 'death technologies' in modern Western life that seek to bring comfort and peace to those who are dying or grieving?

In the prevalent Western view, death is commonly regarded as an adversary to life that ought to be overcome. This was grippingly revealed in the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, as extra-ordinary efforts were devoted toward the 'rescue' and 'retrieval' of victims.

Immediately apparent in death technologies is a prevailing tone of *leaping in* that strives to minimize the 'negative' impact of death. This has been institutionalized through a systematic machination that has created various pharmacological, psychological, and legal tools. These are sought after and applied with the aim of diminishing the distress of dying.

When the life-saving efforts of curative modern medicine 'fail' at preventing death (an ultimate form of *leaping in*), palliative care ought to ensure a 'good death.' These strategies are fashioned within the expedient instrumental ideals of modern scientific technology, grounded on calculative thought. Scientific theories are formulated through research that conveys a representational thinking about death. Death is ontified (i.e., wherein Being is concealed) through explanatory models that depict what a 'normal' death ought to look like - and how

'abnormal' dying can be adjusted to this representative image.

Such coherent theoretical and research representations of death suggest an Enframing challenging of the *nature* of death. These presume a nature of death as a calculable *real* entity that can be entrapped and refined into a reserve of *objective* 'death knowledge.' These strive to arrive at a stance of *certainty* and *security* toward death.

Also, the performance of religious rituals, without a broader questioning of the *meaning* of Be-ing and death, and the modern expression of self-determination through living wills, without a contemplation of the sense of *self* (or *will*) that is implied, disclose a machinational orientation that privileges *technique* over a foundational *grounding questioning*. On occasion, all of this is complemented with the use of art to further comfort the experience of death by providing some aesthetic respite from the distress of death.

All of these could be regarded as forms of 'activity in passivity' (i.e., everyday activity that is passive with regard to its questioning of its own Be-ing).

Heidegger would neither praise nor criticize these initiatives. They resonate with Dasein's life in the average everydayness of 'the they' striving to conceal and forget the distress of being that is disclosed to Dasein in the face of its finitude. These disclose Dasein's *abandonment of being* - a struggle that was revealed so vividly by Ivan Ilych's search for refuge from death.

Death technologies also reveal Dasein's machinational inclinations. That is, it is remarkable that even in the face of an abstract intangible phenomenon such as death, Dasein searches for instrumental means with which to control (and entrap) its own finitude.

However, when such a concerted machinational effort dominates being toward death in an unquestioning way, Dasein (be it the *dying* Dasein or the *witnessing* Dasein) does not encounter death as a *limit*. A central truth of Be-ing is concealed from Dasein. Death technologies examine and 'care' for the dying, but this is only one way in which Dasein presences in death. Dasein, in its Being-toward-death cannot be enframed.

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Although a calculative outlook toward death may be *useful*, this is not sufficient. Heidegger turns to an ancient Greek sense of theoretical understanding, whereby we look at something attentively such that what presences (i.e., death) becomes visible, and through such seeing, we linger with it. This strives toward an aletheia unconcealment of Being-toward-death - a responsible bringing forth *poiesis*. This would disclose to Dasein that death is ownmost, non-relational, an existential possibility, and inevitable - the authentic unconcealment of death to Dasein (Heidegger, 1962, p. 303).

Heidegger calls for an authentic Enowned stance toward death. That is, Dasein's encounter with death provides it with a possibility for contemplative questioning of the truth of its Being. Such questioning would unconceal Dasein's distress and reveal the limitations of its own finitude. An authentic Be-ing-toward-death reveals the temporality and omnipresence of the truth of Be-ing.

Also, the 'nothing' of Be-ing-toward-death will be disclosed to Dasein, but not as the absence of life. The 'nothing' is unconcealed as would the *dark* if it were examined without throwing a light onto it, which would otherwise make it become 'not dark.'

This contemplative thinking about death is not directly oppositional to the calculative efforts of Dasein. Rather, in the light of such foundational thinking, the latter would be understood in relation to Dasein's sway of Be-ing. That is, it would be seen for what it is - an attempt to flee from the distress of Be-ing made manifest by this encounter with its own finitude. From a perspective of Enownment, which contemplative thought would foster, the *techne* of the calculative efforts of death technologies can be seen as a bringing-forth *poiesis* - albeit not an exclusively primordial one. As stated earlier, the instrumentality of death technologies can poetically bring forth a revealing unconcealment.

Heidegger does not explicate how a contemplative stance toward death ought to unfold, because such a form of Be-ing is ownmost (i.e., particular to one's own experience) and therefore cannot be prescribed as a universal (das Man) objectified set of practices. However, his writings suggest that this would involve a silent presencing in Dasein's Be-ing-toward-death, swaying in the distress of Be-ing.

Despite Dasein's attempts to retreat into the lack of distress of 'the they,' the *distress of the lack of distress* will call on Dasein's contemplative thoughts (as was the inevitable case for Ivan Ilych).

In relation to an 'other,' Dasein would resist the urge in 'the they' to *leap in* and attempt to try to take death away. Rather, Dasein ought to *leap ahead* and strive to give death back to the other. In other words, a Heideggerian approach seeks to foster a contemplative awareness of the dying of an other, and its existential significance for the other as well as one's own experience, rather than primarily trying to comfort or diminish the profound dread and anxiety that dying entails.

An Enowned knowing of death would be grounded on a bringing-forth *poiesis*. Art would not be regarded as a simple means of distraction from the distress of being. Rather, that which dwells in the distressing finitude of Be-ing that is revealed by death - *is* artful, poetic.

Art can enable such presencing (as Tolstoy attempts to convey through the voice of Ivan Ilych). Drawing on Aristotle's theory of tragedy, Gadamer has argued that the misery of tragic art can 'overwhelm man and sweep him away' (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 130). 'The elevation and strong emotion that seize the spectator in fact deepen his *continuity with himself*. Tragic pensiveness flows from the self-knowledge that the spectator acquires' (Gadamer, 1960/1975, p. 133). In other words, the authentic sway of Be-ing itself poetically reveals the truth of Be-ing. The art of *poiesis* is not a *means* but an *end* in itself in Dasein's swaying toward its own Enownment. Turning to artful expressions of the existential realm of dying can help foster an authentic understanding of human finitude.

The instrumentality of death technologies is based on a premise of respect for self-determination. Heidegger's work enlightens our understanding of death, as an existential dimension of the Be-ing of Dasein. This calls for a contemplative leap into an Enownment of Be-ing-toward-death that provides a foundational grounding for a truly authentic self-determining freedom.

In addition to the helpful contributions that death technologies, such as palliative care, can offer to our concern for death, a primordial importance should be attributed toward an authentic

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recognition of our Be-ing, as one that exists within its own finitude. This will require contemplative attention, instead of technological, toward the existential realm of our Being-toward-death. This can be fostered through the (poetic) arts, wherein figures such as Ivan Ilych can help illuminate this contemplation. Finally, the very process of this contemplation is in itself a poetic artful engagement.

Death here enters the domain of foundational mindfulness, not in order to teach a 'philosophy of death' as a matter of 'worldview' but in order to put the question of being above all onto its ground and to open up Da-sein as the ground that is held to ab-ground, to shift Dasein into projecting-open, that means under-standing in the sense of Being

and Time (not for example to make death 'understandable' to journalists and philistines) (Heidegger, 1989/1999, p. 201).

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#### Notes

<sup>i</sup> The term 'modern Western' is used here in the sense developed by Charles Taylor (1989; 1992). This refers to the dominant contemporary Euro-American cultural worldview characterized by extreme individualism and technical proficiency that conceals underlying questions about the existential meaning of being.

<sup>ii</sup> *Being* is capitalized to indicate that Heidegger refers to a particular sense of being. In his later work, he added a hyphen, to create Be-ing, in order to highlight the active signification of the term that he intended.

<sup>iii</sup> Such 'restorative' acts seem rooted in widely held modern Western cultural beliefs, values, and rituals regarding the living and dead body (Taylor, 1989; 1992).

<sup>iv</sup> It should be highlighted that this discussion of death technologies does not refer exclusively to palliative care medicine, but includes various other forms of death-oriented therapies and services. I would like also to note that some models of palliative care do not limit themselves to the technologized construal of death that this paper critiques. Rather, some forms of palliative care practice are highly congruent with the Heideggerian authentic stance toward death that I describe in this paper.

<sup>v</sup> This brief synthesis of Heidegger's philosophy employs numerous terms that have been italicized to indicate that he construed these with particular meanings. Although these terms are defined here very briefly, to not impede the flow of the discussion, it should be noted that most of these imply highly complex and contested meanings. A discussion of these controversies is beyond the scope of this paper.

<sup>vi</sup> Heidegger has drawn the term *Poiesis* from ancient Greek philosophy to refer to a creative artful making from within, that is aimed at revealing the truth about fundamental questions. *Poiesis* refers to an existentially-grounded form of art that *reveals the truth of being*, facing the deepest dreads and worries of human life, rather than art that merely aims to momentarily delight the viewer through its *technical* beauty.

<sup>vii</sup> Heidegger employed the term Dasein to signify his specific conception of being human. Every Dasein is torn in a struggle between (a) what Heidegger refers to as life in 'the they' (or das Man) which implies an

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average everyday instrumental existence that conceals fundamental existential questions and (b) an authentic attunement to Dasein's own questioning about the meaning of its being.

<sup>viii</sup> This can relate to some forms of grief or death 'therapies' that attempt to lessen the distress of dying. This is mistaken, according to Heidegger, because of the existential fact that death belongs solely to the one that is dying – a fact that is most apparent in an authentic confrontation with one's own mortality, as expressed by Ivan Ilych.

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