

## Introduction

In Republic, Plato gives an allegory for knowledge. The allegory begins with people in a cave, shackled and staring at a wall. They ~~then~~ turn and see that ~~there are people~~ are carrying ~~the~~ items that cast the shadows they had ~~previously~~ seen. Eventually, one might free herself and wander to the surface of the cave – first gazing at horses ~~and~~, then at the sun. This allegory ~~can be stretched~~ stretches to the modern experience of technology. When we go to McDonald's and order a cheeseburger, our experience is mediated, not by the object ~~carriers~~ and the fire, but ~~instead~~ by the technology. Rather than having the experience of ~~the~~ food itself, of the social aspects of the hearth, we have a simulated experience ~~perfectly~~ orchestrated by those working hard at the food ~~service~~ chain. It is not until this system breaks down that we become aware of our dependence on an un-naturally devised system. In other words, it is not until the fire goes out that we realize that what we were seeing was just shadows on the wall. When we leave the cave of technology, and ~~revert back~~ revert to a more natural way of being – through focal practices, returning to the cave becomes dangerous. We are dependent upon our technology, but if we forget how to use it, or if it ~~doesn't~~ does not work, we are outside the system and are antiquated.

**Comment [RL1]:** Could combine these sentences to read: In Plato's Republic, an allegory for knowledge is given. It begins with people in a cave...

**Comment [RL2]:** Fall?

We have thus in our modern world, ~~thus~~, devised a system in which we no longer have direct experiences and focal practices, as Borgmann calls them, but rather where we rely upon the device paradigm. In this paper, I argue that Borgmann's device paradigm is a system of inauthentic being for Heidegger's *Dasein*. It removes us from our ~~true being~~ true being. It is only when the device paradigm breaks down that we become acutely aware of it. ~~In this respect,~~ I ~~will~~ examine Heidegger's ready-to-hand and present-at-hand distinction to help explain what I believe Borgmann to be getting at. Finally, I ~~will~~ bring in the metaphysical notion of *qualia* to

help make the distinction between what Borgmann calls “reality” and “virtual reality” in his book, *Holding on to Reality*.

### I. Focal Practices and the Device Paradigm

In Borgmann’s 1984 book, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life*, he makes the ~~important~~ distinction between focal practices and ~~the~~ device paradigms. To ~~make do~~ this ~~distinction~~, he first draws a distinction between things and devices. A thing:

is inseparable from its context, namely its world, and from our commerce with the thing and its world, namely, engagement. The experience of a thing is always and also a bodily and social engagement with the thing’s world. In calling forth a manifold engagement, a thing necessarily provides more than one commodity.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, Borgmann ~~is stating~~states that a *thing* is that which we utilize in multiple ~~situations, that~~situations -requir~~ing~~es us to be in engagement with it. Borgmann gives the nostalgic example of a hearth. The hearth ~~provides~~ provides a focus for the family – it is where they gather warmth, build fire using their bodily strength, cook dinner, sit around to read. In the past, the hearth was the place for all family relationships. In this way, the family ~~was physically~~ engaged with the thing. Borgmann writes:

Physical engagement is not simply physical contact but the experience of the world through the manifold sensibility of the body. That sensibility is sharpened and strengthened in skill. Skill is intensive and refined world engagement. Skill, in turn, is bound up with social engagement. It molds the person and gives the person character. Limitations of skill confine any one person’s primary engagement with the world to a small area.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, physical engagement with the thing involves know-how. ~~It~~ involves the ability to take the thing and utilize it in meeting needs. For example, if the family needs to be warm,

**Comment [RLL3]:** Awkward sentence. Perhaps reword to say, Borgman states that a *Thing* is utilized in multiple situations requiring us to engage with it.

**Comment [RLL4]:** Perhaps reword to: Borgmann uses the hearth as an example.

**Comment [RLL5]:** Provides or provided?

**Comment [RLL6]:** Tense change. See comment 5. Also, passive voice, perhaps change to read, “In this way, the family physically engaged with the thing.”

**Comment [RLL7]:** Two quotes within a page – can this be said in another way without the full quote?

**Comment [RLL8]:** Repetitive language – this could be dropped so this sentence reads: “Physical engagement with the thing involves know-how.”

**Comment [RLL9]:** Does “it” refer to know-how or to physical engagement with the thing?

<sup>1</sup> Borgman, Albert. “Focal Things and Practices”, reprinted in Kaplan, David M. ed. *Readings in the Philosophy of Technology* from Albert Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life: A Philosophical Inquiry*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, pp. 40-44, 196-210, 221-226. New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2004. P. 116.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Ibid.

then the engagement with the hearth is the creating of the fire in order to provide the heat to warm the family.

The device, on the other hand, ~~is something that~~ does not require ~~our~~ physical engagement. It is something ~~that is~~ made possible through machinery. Borgmann writes:

The machinery makes no demands on our skill, strength or attention, and it is less demanding the less it makes its presence felt. In the progress of technology, the machinery of a device has therefore a tendency to become concealed or to shrink. Of all the physical properties of a device, those alone are crucial and prominent which constitute the commodity that the device procures. Informally speaking, the commodity of a device is 'what a device is there for.'<sup>3</sup>

The device does not require a set of skills to operate. Borgmann uses the example of a central heating plant. Here, the ~~operator may need no more skill than pushing a single button~~. The machinery of the heating plant does all the work for the person, and creates the warmth sought. The heating plant does not require constant monitoring nor does it require any special skills. It simply does what it was created for.

**Comment [RLL10]:** Another long quote, look for ways to say what these quotes are getting at without using so many block quotes.

**Comment [RLL11]:** Perhaps reword to read: "...the operator only needs skill enough to push a single button."

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 116-117.