

The empirical in the empirical turn

During the second half of the 20th century, several philosophers, like Martin Heidegger and Jacques Ellul, were criticised for reflecting too abstract and pessimistic on technology. According to the critical philosophers, studying technologies empirically would result in a more nuanced image of them. This led to the empirical turn at the end of the 1990s. During this turn, several strategies were proposed to develop an empirical informed philosophy of technology. Despite that these philosophers all found ways to relate empirical information to their studies, it is striking that there are hardly any elaborations on what they exactly mean by empirical. Empirical turn philosophers did not elaborate on questions like what they regard as a priori and what the place of ontology is in an empirically focused philosophy of technology. The problem is that the empirical turn remains implicit as long as it is not clear what is meant by empirical. This brings us to the following question: What counts as an empirical study in the empirical turn philosophy? The background of this question is, that we also want to commit ourselves to an empirical informed philosophy of technology, but in order to stimulate this debate, we want to explore what the scope of such a philosophical subdiscipline is. As a first step to this aim, we will reconstruct in this article what empirical turn philosophers regard as empirical, which will be done by means of a hermeneutical analysis.