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The dominant force of the modern world is instrumental reason. This is what dictates the flow of capital within an ever more integrated global economy, what compels our submission to the demands of the computerized manipulation of data, and what subjects us to the dehumanizing possibilities looming over the biotechnology horizon. The problem of modernity becomes conscious in the realization of modernity as a problem. We sense a fatal entrapment from which all avenues of escape have been foreclosed. Neither technology nor its benefits can be surrendered. We can no more live without electricity than we can live without water, as periodic breakdowns vividly remind us. But the costs of our access to electrical energy are measured not just by our monthly utility bills. They are also purchased by the dependence on which our independence has been built. Our putative mastery of light and heat and power is purchased at the cost of our entanglement in the vast network of grids by which we are held fast. Power and powerlessness seem coeval moments.

Normally the irony passes without remark. It is only when the realization of our predicament is propelled into consciousness that the contradiction becomes explicit. Then we cast a glance over the whole development in which we have become entangled and bemoan the loss of our freedom. We see that it has been an ever more comprehensive project of liberation that has paradoxically led to our ever greater confinement. Our subordination to the tools of our domination becomes transparent. But in that realization we simultaneously transcend the fatality of our situation. We can step outside of who we are and ensure that we are never just the sum of our constituents. The failure of our mechanical schemes of perfection gives way to a wry satisfaction. Like the prankster, the human spirit refuses to be captured by the rationality it has imposed on itself. It is this mood of detachment that ensures that the levels of

ironic self-observation can finally not be fathomed. We are unlike the machines we have built because we are capable of delighting in their failure. The bounded rationality of the “iron cage” is continuously surpassed by the boundless rationality of the human spirit.

This is why a technological society is never simply what it appears to be. Its pervasive instrumentalization is haunted by the awareness of its non-instrumental source. Technological society becomes a problem to itself. All around us we see evidence of the refusal to submit to the demands of rigorous efficiency. Nostalgia for the old, monuments of spiritual aspiration, the worldwide revival of ancient religious forms, the power of orgiastic political movements of destruction, and the protest impulse that has driven artistic expression for more than a century all testify to the profound ambivalence with which the success of instrumental rationality has been greeted. The incoherence of the attitude is perhaps best captured by its defining aspiration that we rid ourselves of the dehumanizing consequences of a technological society while retaining all of its benefits. Fundamentalists with their technical expertise and their spiritual ignorance best embody this lethal conjunction. But it would be a mistake to regard them as unique. The underlying attitude is pervasive. It can be countered only by a direct confrontation of the challenge posed by the instrumentalization of reason in the modern world. Ghosts may spook, but they cannot illuminate our technological problematic. Only reason can grapple with the self-imposed limitation of reason. Instrumental rationality is primarily a challenge for philosophical reflection, and its engagement has given rise to the formidable modern philosophical development whose scope and coherence are still not fully understood.

The task of establishing a boundary to the reign of technology is generally taken to be so great that the efforts of resistance seem at best to be inconclusive. Pressures to bend every aspect of nature and of life to the demands of mastery seem relentless. Nothing is sacrosanct; nothing is immune to exploitation so long as it can be put to service. Yet this very critique is the fruit of modern philosophical reflection. Technology, which treats everything as a means and nothing as an end, cannot furnish its own purpose. Instead, it undermines all final goals, refusing to acknowledge anything as an end in itself. Everything is drawn into its imperious grasp, and nothing is allowed to stand in judgment over it. We are left with a technique of control that can direct everything except itself. The project of technological mastery, our philosophical reflection has shown, can remain rational only if it is subordinate to a noninstrumental finality beyond itself. Man himself cannot submit to

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the same instrumentality; otherwise the instrumentality ceases to have any purpose. The problem, however, is that we seem to have struck a Faustian bargain. We have been able to obtain this vast technical prowess only because we have been willing to override all presumptive limits. Neither nature nor tradition nor mystery has been allowed to hinder the enlargement of man's estate, which now threatens to include humanity too within its reach. The exigency of instrumental rationality has been well understood philosophically.

The crisis of meaning that has confronted modernity is inseparable from the technical drive. Not only can nature no longer provide a guide when we subject it to universal dominion, but even the coherence of nature as a concept begins to fall apart. Nature may be the means by which we dominate nature, but the boundary between the natural and the artificial can then scarcely be maintained. All becomes simply raw material for homogenization and manipulation. Nothing is simply given as fixed or permanent; everything is drawn into the process of transformation. The dream of universal mastery finds no limit except one. Mastery cannot master itself. In the end the vast expansion of power is itself unmastered because it is left without purpose or guide. Technology has no goal. But in this realization our philosophical reflection has at the same time illuminated the self-limitation of all instrumentality. Nothing can really be an instrument unless it somehow serves a goal that is not instrumental. Just as in each case the object pursued is regarded as a relative end, so the scheme of instrumentality as such can function only if it is embedded in an order of things that limits its expansion. The process cannot continue indefinitely. It is only because of the overwhelming power of technological development that we gain a sense of its omnivorousness. The reality is that the whole structure crumbles unless it is sustained by an order of limits that defines and guides it. Formal rationality may seem to exercise unchallenged dominance, but without a substance of ends it falls apart. The pursuit of means is always structured by ends.

Correlative with the great philosophical critique of instrumentalization is the growth of the alternative by which it is judged. The still incompletely acknowledged revolution in modern philosophy consists in the progressive articulation of substantive reason. Modern science may have succeeded by virtue of its restriction to the world of phenomena, but modern philosophy has correspondingly found itself within a substantive reality it knows from within. Technology, too, is ultimately known from the inner perspective of participation, and this in turn is what enables

our philosophical reflection to escape the realm of technique. Unlike the superficial expectation that a technical solution will be found to all the problems of technology, our philosophical meditation unfolds at the heart of the technological project. Refusing to be limited to the realm of appearance, the philosophical penetration of the underlying reality is an opening toward being as such. It is a disclosure of reality from within, in contrast to the illusion of domination from without. In place of the subject standing over against a world of objects, we expand the meditative knowledge of our participation within existence. Illusory superiority is replaced by submission to truth. This is the shift of perspective that has been under way in modern philosophy against the subject-object model whose dominance has been so great that the countermovement has scarcely been noticed.

The pattern begins with Immanuel Kant. His so-called Copernican revolution in epistemology attracted so much attention that its setting within his own thought was often overlooked. By reversing the epistemological question from “How does the subject know reality?” to “How does reality conform to the categories of our understanding?” he seemed to have installed the priority of the subject on a permanent basis. Our minds no longer had to conform to reality; rather reality had to fit within our minds if it were to be known. This yielded, of course, not knowledge of things-in-themselves but only knowledge of appearances as the only form of knowledge available to us. What lies beyond the realm of phenomena cannot be known. This seemed to spell the death knell not only for any metaphysics but for any knowledge of transcendent reality. Kant himself famously remarked that he had limited knowledge in order to make room for faith. Not as well recognized, even by Kant himself, was that the assertion of knowledge as merely phenomenal implied a knowledge of what was more than phenomenal. The status of Kant’s own knowledge claim concerning knowledge was more than phenomenal. This was a line of critique and development from Kant that went through the idealists to culminate in Heidegger’s assertion that Kant, while appearing to prioritize epistemology over ontology, had in fact demonstrated that all epistemology is founded in ontology.

A more general version of the same non-transparency prevailed over the whole “death of metaphysics” and “death of God” preoccupation. The critique of objectivist metaphysics and of an externalist theology drew its energy from a deeper faith it could scarcely acknowledge to itself, for to assert that truth no longer lies in dogma is already to employ some sense of the real character of truth. Propositional metaphysics and theology

are opaque on their own terms. Only when the experiential sources of truth can be touched do the symbols function as paths toward the truth of being. Cut off from the moving forces of their origin, dogmas of every kind must appear to be an alien imposition over against the isolated subject. Marx's declamation against all forms of fetishism arose from some prior sense of what a nonfetishistic relationship would contain. In place of an objective power over against the subject, there would unfold a structure of openness already present from the start. It is from that deeper level that Marx's critique drew its resonance, for it was fundamentally a cry of revolt against the perversion of truth when both God and man had been reduced to their functional parts within an instrumentalized whole. Dead matter had come to dominate living existence. This is why it is a great, though understandable, mistake to view Marx as a materialist. Far from enclosing humanity within the horizons of material satisfaction, he sought to drive us toward the most transcendent possibilities within our nature. If religion was the cry of an oppressed creature, surely Marx gave voice to the religion of the nonoppressed creature.

The tragedy was, of course, that it inaugurated a new kind of oppression. Revolt against the objectification of truth and the commodification of life was still not enough to prevent a possible relapse into the same patterns. Dreams of dominance still held too powerful a hold on the imagination. Opposition to one form of exploitation did not safeguard the revolutionary from the temptation to adopt other, even deadlier modes. In particular, there was the perennial inclination to leap over the historical struggle toward the truth of existence in order to establish its definitive attainment within time, even though this would signal the end of all human development. It is perhaps the greatest irony that it was the movements that struggled most vociferously against the objectifying factors of our world that carried the logic of objectification to its ultimate conclusion. Impatience at the failure and variability of the movement toward truth had finally abolished the process completely. The government of men had indeed been replaced by the administration of things when humanity had surpassed the very struggle that constituted it. When history is over, there is no further inquiry, conversation, disputation, or reflection. The instrumentalization of man has been carried to its limit when he has found his place within a totality that no longer requires him to think.

The one thing a revolutionary regime would have no place for is revolutionaries. No such challenge of epic proportions would any longer confront humanity, and heroes with the requisite greatness of soul would

no longer be forthcoming. The betrayal of the revolutionary impulse, the self-defeat of an excess of idealism, is a powerful testament to the power of the totalizing tendencies as well. Even the highest motives provide no moral bulwark. They may even make us more vulnerable. Outrage at the injustice we behold becomes a substitute for doing anything about it. Having placed ourselves on the side of the revolutionary apocalypse, we conceal from ourselves the failure to mitigate the sum total of evil in existence. We have even given ourselves permission to perpetrate its extension. Justice is no longer the constant unsurpassable measure of our existence. It has become the future whose advent will abolish all need of morality. Revolutionary justice will become a total presence in the world rather than the abiding absence by which all presence is measured. By “dreaming of systems so perfect no one will need to be good,” we finally provided a moral justification for the abolition of morality. What the objectifying lust of domination could accomplish only with a bad conscience now had been set upon the world with the most exalted sense of mission. The tyranny of virtue was far worse than the tyranny of power because it justified cruelty on a mass scale. It became possible only when justice itself had become an instrument of world domination.

Resistance against one form of oppression can all too readily justify a far more total strain of dehumanization. Spiritual perversion is, however, no reason to abandon the life of the spirit. It is rather a call for greater vigilance, more humility, and a deeper respect for the nature of the challenge before us. Almost since the moment the ground of things was differentiated from the cosmos that compactly contains it, there have been attempts to lay hold of being within the world of beings. The temptation to find the way toward the ground through victory over the cosmos itself proved to be perennial. It is a fascination that recurred despite the impossibility of the project, for no victory could be any more than a mundane achievement, and the aspiration ultimately betrayed the tension of existence from which it arose. Attainment of wisdom would abolish the love of wisdom. This remains the ineliminable paradox of modern science, just as it is of the drive for global expansion. The goal is the eradication of its own possibility. Power in pursuit of power does not, of course, continue unchecked. Reality repeatedly escapes the grasp of power that is ultimately not creative but only manipulative, just as science does not really know but only grasps relationships. Even the tenuous hold we have on reality is made possible only by our capacity to be held by reality. Our mastery is a mastered mastery, as our modern world has finally begun to realize. Having reached the end of the unlimited

scientific self-confidence, we are now perhaps in a better position than ever to appreciate the conditioned possibility it represents.

The difficulty is that we lack the language to articulate a boundary to the authority of science. Philosophy has spent much of the past few centuries apologetically carving out a role for itself as the mere under-laborer to the great empirical investigation of reality. Even when philosophy has exerted a more ambitious claim, the notion that there might be a form of knowledge more authoritative than science has met little public response. If science holds a monopoly on truth, how do we validate the truth of this monopoly? Occasionally it has been possible to puncture the self-assurance of scientific authority by raising such awkward questions. It has even been possible to suggest that the claim to such a monopoly is not itself a scientific proposition, but the struggle to elaborate the consequences has found no readily identifiable form. A plethora of individual initiatives has yet to be seen as part of a coherent whole. The reason is not hard to discover, for it lies in the hold of the instrumental model of reasoning on our minds. If all grounds are themselves only intermediate grounds for something else, the notion of uncovering an ultimate ungrounded ground is difficult to imagine. Philosophy's struggle to unfold the groundless that can never be objectified is fraught with the difficulty of intimating the ephemeral. How can something so unsubstantial provide the foundation for the far more massive reality surrounding us? The challenge has seemed so daunting to many in the philosophical community that they have abandoned all talk of foundations as impossibly chimerical, although it may well be that they thereby draw closer to the inarticulable ground than they themselves admit. Either way, the problem is that we have not found our way toward a language of the unconditioned that can be rendered publicly coherent. The present work may be viewed as yet another within that line of nondefinitive "raids on the inarticulate."

One of the reasons for being somewhat more sanguine about the task is that I approach it not merely as a philosopher. My political science perspective confirms that what has perhaps never worked in theory turns out to work pretty well in practice. No society waits for philosophy to arrive before it enjoys a self-understanding, and the reason for this is obvious. A concrete society is constituted by the meaning that it bears in the lives of its members. It is therefore not surprising that the modern world, too, has articulated its own moral order that has endured despite the inability to provide it with compelling intellectual justification. The universally authoritative language of human rights has created the basis for our

common world. Disagreements certainly arise about their meaning and application, but there are few efforts to call into question the underlying conceptions of human dignity and worth. Indeed, one would be looked upon as rather strange if one seriously asserted that human beings are not worth valuing as unlimited ends in themselves, or suggested that they have such a status for any reason other than their common humanity. Not only is this the language of international debate, but it has continuously demonstrated its power in the face of the most abusive political regimes of our history. It is noteworthy that this enormous practical authority of rights has been validated not only in the absence of philosophical support, but even in the face of the philosophical abandonment of all such claims to truth.

The vital sources of authority are, in other words, quite unlike the conclusions of syllogisms. We respond to the pull of obligation before we have even begun to think about it. Only afterward do we search for words that might explain our heart, which has “reasons of which reason does not know.” This is why we are capable of sustaining convictions whose justifications are only dimly intuited, affirming them unshakably even in the face of our evident lack of intellectual ability to explain them. Not only is it demonstrable that our moral intimations do not await their philosophical defense, it is very good that our moral commitments do not have such notoriously unreliable origins. We are, rather, moral beings even before we reflect upon ourselves. There is no going back to a pre-moral self that might be able to engage other similarly situated selves in an original condition. Rawls’s “veil of ignorance” is not a visualization of that pre-moral condominium but a powerful indication of our inability to arrive at a point in which the pull of justice has ceased to count. It is this irrevocable moral undertow that explains how it is possible for the most profound resonances to persist within a social setting in which the regime of quantification seems to have assigned every item its value in the universe. Each human being still stands as an inexhaustible center of meaning and worth in existence.

Given the rigorous demands for efficiency in our vast economic enterprises, it is astonishing that the individual ultimately escapes the maw. This has, after all, been the point of the great historical effort to subordinate the energy of the capitalist mode of production to the human beings who sustain it. Marx was correct in pointing out the dehumanizing logic of a capitalist economics, but he was wrong in assuming it could never be brought under political control. Rather than abolish the efficiency of markets, we have found it possible to restrain them for the

sake of the human beings who stand outside of them. The struggle for control remains real, but the outcome has hardly been in doubt given the conviction that human beings outweigh all other values. Everything can be measured in the universe but the person who does the measuring. As soon as we submit ourselves to a yardstick, we are no longer what is being measured, for we have escaped in the flow of what Jacques Derrida has called *différance*. Every reality we attempt to affix by reference has already deferred away from us, but in the case of human beings we cannot even retain the semblance of controlling their presence. In fact, the ineluctability of reality is most manifest in connection with ourselves. The mystery of human beings is penetrated only in the awareness of inexhaustibility. Enumeration can never reach its end. The infinite mystery of each human being is not in this sense a principle from which we derive our language of rights; it is the language of rights that gives support to the notion that each individual is an inexpressible depth hidden even to himself. “Human beings trump all other goods” is more than a slogan. It is the abiding intimation of our existence.

The massive undertow of living moral truth, despite its conceptual inarticulateness, testifies to the existential character of modern philosophy. Deeper than the drive to dominate a world of objects is the existence in which such an enterprise becomes possible. This nonobjectifiable background for all objectification is the theme that becomes increasingly the focus of our philosophical development. Each of the thinkers we will review struggled mightily with this new mode of philosophizing in which the challenge is to deal nonobjectively with what is nonobjective. To yield to the temptation to objectify what is nonobjective is to lose the emerging luminosity. It is to fall back on the light one can shed from the isolated position of the subject, rather than to open to the revelatory movement that unfolds from being itself. What could be more tempting than to draw the whole within the mastery of the self? The glamour of the project can be broken only by the awareness of the falsity of the instrumentalization of all truth, for everything can be assigned a price only if there is that which is beyond all price. The urge to reach such definitive possession of truth that it renders all further quest for truth obsolete can often prove too powerful. Yet that is the task to which modern philosophy has repeatedly called us. It does nothing less than return us to the Greek beginnings in which philosophy was primarily a way of life, before it lost its way in becoming a set of ideas available for control and commodification. The modern revolution in philosophy consists in rediscovering not the concepts by which we might further dominate reality but the

powers by which we are ourselves judged and saved. When we abandon the effort to stand apart from reality, we can behold the reality by which we are sustained.

The movement of “existentialism” is only a minor episode in this far deeper and longer existential shift in the history of modern philosophy. We might even consider the familiarity with “existentialists” to be one of the principal obstacles to the recognition of the radically existential character of the modern philosophical revolution. Some measure of the problem is indicated by the tendency of many of the best-known “existentialists” to reject that label. Heidegger is perhaps the most obvious case, but there are many others, including Kierkegaard, who predates the appellation. Their reluctance arises from the self-referential character of what is commonly understood by existentialism. Instead of enlarging the perspective of existence toward the order of being in which it is embraced, “existentialism” seems to place the subject in supreme isolation over the whole of reality. When “man is condemned to be free,” he stands aloof from all by which he is challenged and sustained. From that closed self, no bridge can be found toward the other; there is only the endless circling within a universe of one’s own making. Absurdity is the limit of this self-closure. Only by being more existential can existentialism reach the openness of being in which disclosure can ultimately take place. Rather than carrying to its extreme the logic of the subject dominating the whole, existentialism must reverse the direction by submitting to what is present as its own possibility from the start. The misdirection of existentialism indicates the difficulty of resisting the hold of objectification.

Nothing less than a revolution in thinking is required. It is not the work of a generation or of a handful of thinkers. The whole course of the modern world seems to culminate round this necessity. An unending sense of crisis has pervaded the progressive movement by which we are carried forward, so that we might characterize modernity as the age defined by its self-questioning. Modernity is a problem to itself. This is not an accidental disturbance, but a structure of uncertainty that goes all the way down without escape. “Crisis” seems to suggest the episodic, from which recovery may be made. The reality is that modernity cannot overcome the problematic that is the permanence of crisis within itself. In other words, there is no crisis. There is simply the insufficiently understood constitution of a world that periodically erupts into consciousness as a crisis to be addressed or solved. The obliqueness of such resolutions is best demonstrated by the discovery that solving the crisis would require