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Mechanistic Solidarity and the Diminution of Conscience

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Introduction- One of the main modes of other-directedness that has only been indirectly linked with anomie, and that is the technique and technology of the modern machine, both as a metaphor for mechanism in semi-conscious working states of affairs – the public life of our large and general social role as 'one of the others' and one of the mass, producer and consumer – but also the machine as a physical enabler, a force in the material world wherein it alleviates suffering with a view to assuaging anomie. The machine houses and promotes a new set of norms. It is never normless, although often mindless. It cannot suffer itself. It does not feel the wind chill, and though it breaks down it does not die. It represents, in its obliviousness to sorrow and to ennui, an ideal form for modern humanity. We would be as it is. Functional, able to work and nothing else, turned on and off in an instant.

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MECHANISTICSOLIDARITYANDTHEDIMINUTIONOFCONSCIENCE

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Mechanistic Solidarity and the Diminution of Conscience

G.V. Loewen

I. Introduction

One of the main modes of other-directedness that has only been indirectly linked with anomie, and that is the technique and technology of the modern machine, both as a metaphor for mechanism in semi-conscious working states of affairs – the public life of our large and general social role as 'one of the others' and one of the mass, producer and consumer – but also the machine as a physical enabler, a force in the material world wherein it alleviates suffering with a view to assuaging anomie. The machine houses and promotes a new set of norms. It is never normless, although often mindless. It cannot suffer itself. It does not feel the wind chill, and though it breaks down it does not die. It represents, in its obliviousness to sorrow and to ennui, an ideal form for modern humanity. We would be as it is. Functional, able to work and nothing else, turned on and off in an instant. No degrees of emotions, only degrees of power and output. The machine as a workhorse does not so much replace the human being but exhorts him to become as it already is. It is simply easier in every way to move through a dispassionate life ignoring the passions that have created us. Machines are at once a projection of our ingenuity and a reflection of our disingenuousness. They provide us with a soulless solace. No energy need be spent in self-examination. A diagnostic mode is all that is ever required; the checking of parts and functions, with form only being questioned according to external necessities like changes in commodity production or marketing. And even though we are rapidly approaching an event horizon passed which there can be no returning, the construction of the 'thinking machine', or perhaps better, a machine that actually 'is' something in a consciously ontological sense, the mindlessness of the current machine is not the machine's alone. Finally, a short critique puts out the fire of ardor that we have manufactured as an insulated gallery within which the machine might be shown and adored. Marx famously reminded us that 'the more we put into god the less we put into ourselves', but surely that is now somewhat outdated. What 'more' does exist supplicates the machine and in its turn, it messianically proselytizes the false hope that human beings can overcome their very humanity.

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a) What is Mechanism?

Yet the machine itself is also none of these things. It is neither friend nor foe, hero or villain. It is an object in the realm of objects, and only begins its dizzying ascent as the paragon of modern life when it becomes a surrogate worker. It works itself out, as it were, and then it is cast off, its castings perhaps salvaged for another of its class or a new generation of successors that will be even better at the tasks given to their forebears. Machines also 'evolve', but they do so through the cultural selection driven by the social world. The reason the machine can never quite be 'itself' alone is that it only functions within that world, and that world, as yet, is one of humanity and not the machine as a standalone form of being or type of consciousness. No, the machine by itself is useless, but this fact absolves it of any crime. The 'satanic mills' are human places that dehumanize, and their contents are merely an expression of a suite of human sensibilities – greed and lust, certainly, but also curiosity and a drive to overcome previous limits – and thus resemble in no direct way the manner in which the machine works itself out on our behalf. The real source of the 'tremendous order of mechanized petrification' lies in us. It is we who design the blueprints from which machines are then built. It is we who reap both their benefits and are impacted by their negative effects. It is we who defend ourselves and offend others through the prosthetics of advanced weaponry, and it is we who cannot survive the ultimate ends of machines. By the mid-eighteenth century in certain specific regions, we noted with chagrin that we were being turned into machines, and it is not too much to say that we wanted company as well as a role model. In order to have both, we also realized that our new companions, without character and personality – but this is, after all, what we also were fast becoming – still had to be cared for. The machine must be kept 'healthy', as is the worker, in the same sense that we hear, every flu season, about how many person-hours are lost to the workplace by inattention to inoculations, poor hygiene and the like. This is an example of 'neo-Nazism' even as it pretends to be about concernful being on the part of the state or the employer. No healthy person enjoys being sick, but the choice between illness and work is not always decided in favor of the latter. The companionate model of the machine –

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it is good to 'have around', it performs without rancor, one does not have to 'pay' it in any direct way, and it only produces things and does not consumes them (although of course it consumes energies and other resources) – makes room as well for itself as a model of behavior. Machines are the ideal workers. They cannot be unionized and it is always we who decide on their longevity and upkeep. The group of people fashioned to care for machines and related technologies are the technicians. In many circles today this word has about the same degree of negative connotations as does 'bureaucrat' or 'politician'. Technicians are seen to be kindred to the machines they construct and take care of. They are the human version of the machine, the most mechanistic, and hence 'soulless' of humans. They are almost perceived as a hybrid. They are subject to the harshest of blandishments, and they are typecast as villains in many quarters. But are we not all technicians in an age of machinery and technology? How is anyone exempt from both interaction with, and thus at least a modicum of care for, the technology of everyday life? We live in a mechanized culture through and through, and our nature today is to include machines as part of the character of what it means to be human. Given that machines can liberate us to consider other options, what is the nature of the technician's offense? "Now it is not nature, but the technicians, who would compel us to give up the idea of freedom. The behavioral scientist who has elaborated techniques of conditioning in his laboratory brings these forward as the basis of his claim that freedom is an illusion." (Barrett 1979:xiv). In a sense, the claim that we respond as does any other animal to inputs by exhibiting certain outputs and that these can be predicted according to the kind of sensory inputs provided is saying no more than we are animals who can learn and adapt to new situations. Freedom of a sort is built in to such a scenario. If we were not free in this adaptational sense we could not respond to new inputs and learn how to 'behave' in new contexts. But this is precisely what humans *are* able to do. The inputs of general learned behavior are culled from socialization or acculturation. In so far as behaviorism, even with all of the baggage of reduction, claims that human beings learn and respond to new adaptational contexts, or better, construct out of the bare sensory inputs of what is new or altered, an adaptational and hence a cultural context, then they have claimed nothing but a support for the idea of human freedom. Yet in spite of this, it is always the reductive facet of behavioral science that is targeted. In order to understand why this is, we need to cast a glance back to what we imagine our natures as humans to in fact be: "The theoretical attitude, and the science and practice in which it is elaborated, must be seen as a new, unnatural species of life. Western science and practice are not to be understood as an instrument that serves humanity; they do not exist for the sake of human nature." (Lingis 1989:20). Why on earth not? One might well argue the very opposite: that science represents the epitome of human nature. It is methodical, driven by both evolutionary and adaptational necessity as well as curiosity, and it seeks to respond to the pressing existential questions of a finite consciousness. Nothing about our lives is purely of 'nature' anyway, so the idea of the 'unnatural' seems to be a non sequitur. Now we are aware, of course, that the products of science do not always serve our best interests as a species, and any tool can be placed in the hands of the self-serving. But this is neither a characteristic of science or an effect emanating from it. It is also part of 'human nature' to become, or have the potential to become, quite self-absorbed. Science is merely another avenue by which one can walk the path to nothing if one chooses to do so. But it is this very ability to *choose* that once again underscores the ongoing and uninterrupted presence of human freedom.

II. Control and Controller

So far, in two forms of the critique of technique, we have come up against quite reasonable objections to the deadpan idea that science, scientists, and the technologies and skills they produce and enhance, are somehow in league with either a kind of genteel barbarism or further, the devil of unfreedom. Of course, hubris, also a characteristic part of human consciousness in most cultures, might get the better of us and our 'prosthetic godhead' might begin to indulge itself in the grandiose: "He prides himself on what he believes to be his self-control and the omnipotence of his will, and despises the man who lets himself be outwitted by mere nature." (Jung 1959:26 [1951]). Certainly culture and technology, language and symbolism set us apart in a radical way from the nature that we had in the past shared with all other known creatures. Indeed, it is old hat to claim that the combination of all of these wonderfully human traits can make us arrogant to the point of blindness. But once again, there is a contradiction of terms here. Whoever has an omnipotent will never need to exercise self-control. He can have anything he wishes. He also, because of his very omnipotence, never has to bear any consequences for the fulfillment of his desires. This may be a fantasy of the super-rich in today's world, and perhaps some of these persons approach a kind of finite reality that exhibits this culmination of human passion and lack of conscience. But precisely here is where the logic of the criticism of hubris breaks down. In fact, humans are not possessed of an omnipotent will. We have a voracious imagination, no doubt, but not only is the flesh ultimately weak, so is the will. And, when all is said and done, we are all defeated by 'mere' nature, because it is a fundamental part of our nature to die. 'The most toys' may be an advertisement for human arrogance, but even those who collect and flaunt such

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ensembles and accoutrements does so with the knowledge that this is but a passing fancy. Indeed, one might suggest that it is the very knowledge of our limits that drives the desire to show off in this way.

Not to be blithe, but there must be more to the argument that technique, technician, and even prideful arrogance are fatal to the idea of human freedom. It must have more to do with certain combinations of these attitudes. The sense that we might adore or fetishize a machine is not even enough, because we generally are attracted to whatever eases our suffering either individual or collective, and in our society, especially the former. So what is so wrong with a little genuflection directed at the soulless object that performs and outperforms our abilities? Surely it does not stop there, say the critics, and perhaps in some very specific, but important cases, they may be correct. One setting where adoration may supersede itself and bend our intelligence to the path of nihilism is when we imagine our science to be better suited to human needs in general than the sciences or the forebears of science, were for our ancestors. This is a different order of fetish than simply praising the ease and programmed skills of technologies: "The reality is that the object of his science, and his efforts to deal with it in his cults and rituals were just as successful in controlling and manipulating the inner forces of the unconscious as are modern man's efforts to control and manipulate the forces of the physical world." (Neumann 1970:210 [1949]). Now this is a little more interesting. It not only suggests that our cultural predecessors knew what they were doing in some way – this alone is sometimes offensive to contemporary attitudes about the past and about past cultures; much of our media and humor, and even the manner in which history is taught concentrates on the perceived lack of ability or even the outright ignorance of our ancestors – but that it is we who have inverted the focus and object of our attentions from the internal to the external. Does this mean that we now, or at some point more or less recent in time, have mastered the inner world? Can all of our efforts now, finally, be directed towards cosmic mastery? I doubt it. The prevalence of neuroses, addictions, depression and anomie in our contemporary social world argues strenuously against such a simple determination. New modes of life demand new skill sets. But these self-same modes also create new problems and wrinkles in our 'nature'. *There is no one human nature*. But it is true to say that modern science is 'outer-directed'. It is the discourse that fills in Riesman's tabulation of human perceptual attitudes. If the vocational Protestant was 'inner-directed' – in this he does not depart from his ancient forefathers in terms of the intent of his ritual, all he has done is further personalize it in a process that we saw begins at least with Augustine in the Christian West – and his contemporary compatriot is 'other-directed' in a manner that creates the mass, 'one-dimensional' man, then there must also be present that which is outer-directed and thus also that which is self-directed. We saw a great deal of evidence apportioning the space of discourse of the latter, but here we can concentrate on the discourse that occupies the space of the former, that of 'outer-direction'. How does it work? Is it all of what is external that comes into its focus? "It would appear to me more correct, however, to say that science makes possible knowledge directed to the power of making, a knowing mastery of nature. This is technology. And this is precisely what practice is not." (Gadamer 1996:6 [1972]). Succinctly put, science allows for the projection of practice. It thus creates not only a new *mode of* being in the world, that of the practitioner or technician, but also a new *model for* being in the world. It is technique that occupies the space of the second form. The first, as an existential qualifier, provides the sense that our wills can fashion more than those of our ancestors. There is certainly a new potency to this sensibility, though it is obviously far from 'omnipotent'. Yet this new aspect of our self-understanding does give rise to the imaginary sensibility that we might, over the course of further ages of similar development, approach a real kind of physical and indefinite godhead. We would become, in other words, our own prosthesis and have shed the mortal consciousness that originally created it. Instead of constructing ourselves through sometimes painful and painstaking socialization and the learning of techniques, we will have created ourselves, not as did the gods, but using the model of their 'behavior' as a guide. At that hypothetical point, the technique and the technology merge and become indistinguishable. 'Human nature', as we have known it, is automatically moribund and presumably would soon be forgotten. This is an empirically documentable dream even today, though as one would expect, those who pursue this kind of goal are already highly privileged in our very much still mortal and unequal world. Today, we are almost always still in the position of clarifying the relation of technology to technique and vice-versa, and the question of creation is moot: "Genuine creation is precisely that for which we can give no prescribed technique or recipe, and technique reaches its limits precisely at that point beyond which real creativity is called for – in the sciences as well as the arts." (Barrett, op. cit:22). Yet the idea that this must be the case, or if not couched in moral terms, will more practically always be the case, is not supported by the logic of the position. Just because something is the case today and for the foreseeable future does not mean it will always be so. Not long ago, the idea of a heart transplant was considered an unattainable fantasy by most. Today we scoff, but are still intrigued, by the news of a potential head transplant. Creativity in the sense used by Barrett was no doubt a major part of the process through which past scientific and artistic achievements, especially radically original and untried ones came to be. The whole of human

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history, including our proto-human progenitors, is based on this process. Creativity and freedom are inextricably linked, and it seems that once again, science and its techniques, methods, and even its products, are much more of an aid in this fundamentally human quest and vision than they are a limitation upon it.

Even so, we also experience novel limits that seem to impinge upon our abilities to not only 'feel free', but to in reality be free of practical or mundane concerns. By 'mundane' I do not mean that we should ever consider ourselves unfree simply because we have to maintain basic hygiene, cook and eat sustenance, or monitor the state of our dwellings and our relationships alike. All these too, as Heraclitus reminded us at the beginning of Western thought, are intimately part of human consciousness and thus also human freedom. These 'gods' do not limit themselves in their presence, and thus they continue to provide a model for human behavior in the world at large that speaks both directly of and to freedom in that world. Doing work in that world implies freedom and creativity, and may indeed, depending on the task at hand, require both. And all tasks require of us some skill and knowledge even if these are now to be considered routine. We have always to recall that we, sometimes as much younger persons, were once without the possession of this or that stock of knowledge at hand. Its 'at-handedness' was the province, and thus also the privilege, of others than myself. I had to learn it, but in doing so, I also learned that everyone had to do the same as I did. Learning in the specific sense does more than imply that in the general; learning means being part of a process that is both specific and general at once. Reading a book means learning about the object of the book, but it is also a course in literacy. Acquiring experience of a skill means at the same time becoming more skilled. This may seem trite. It is actually the more profound part of education in all of its senses. Can the same be said of feeling freedom or unfreedom? I think it can. But here we must investigate more fully before being able to lend credit to this more puzzling and seemingly subjective phenomenon. It is also a much more recent event in historical consciousness that persons should feel an unfettered desire of any kind. This, I think, is also the result of a burgeoning and gradually evolving technology and the methods and techniques that lie behind it and also maintain it. It is, in a word, the very technique of civilization as we know it today that prompts the will to believe in an ultimate human freedom, and not the other way round, where this apparatus works to extinguish such desires.

a) The Problem of Technique Unframed

But if this is correct, what of the problem of technology that distracts us from thinking in general, pretends to do our learning for us, makes everything 'too easy' and constructs fantasy worlds where nothing of real import can ever occur? What of the fetish of information for its own sake? What of knowledge framed only in a 'need to know' basis? "No doubt information in itself can be said to be 'value-free' but this is because information on its own has no value. It only begins to have a value when it supplies a need, when it is brought into contact with some existing system of aims and purposes and fills a gap in that system, when it becomes relevant to people's beliefs and attitudes." (Midgely 2004:15). But would any information even *exist* if it did not, from the first, have at least some passing relevance to people's current beliefs and attitudes? The 'value-freedom' of information, let alone knowledge or practice, lies in being historically conscious about those every attitudes, needs, beliefs and gaps that already *do* exist and hence call out for adjustment in some way. Information, and certainly not knowledge, cannot be thought of as stand-alone objects that can be 'brought into play' or applied to an existing system within which there was an absence that somehow was made to suit such an application. If this were the case, such gaps would not exist and would have been filled, if even seen as gaps, during the original construction of any system, technological or symbolic. Each system of signs is self-sufficient from the start. Alteration must be pressed from the outside in, and for that to occur one must already presume competing systems of thought and action that see the world just a little differently than each other. To understand this dynamic otherwise does not seem to make historical sense. At the same time, it is clearly more correct to suggest that information that is left to gather dust on a shelf somewhere is more or less useless, or at least, becomes so. The dust it gathers is the sign of its absence of value. But this is a gradual affair, things or techniques, pieces of technology or even symbolic ideas – the idea of God is the most famous example that modernists are apt to cite in this context – become moribund and once again gradually are completely forgotten. Why would not something like human nature also be one of these ideas in the future? Ideas maintain their relevance, and hence their value in human affairs by in part their 'fulfillment of needs' but also in part by a culture's collective loyalty to itself; that is, the way in which it 'worships itself', to borrow Durkheim's famous phrase. One might claim that there is at heart a function to this as well, but if so, it must be of the most radiant and abstract type. 'Society worshipping itself' occurs in more than the religious sphere, and though Durkheim was speaking most directly about social contract societies, his contemporary analogies of the collective conscience also sparked great interest during his own time. In point of fact, wherever there is taken public notice that there is a society to be worshipped, the adoration, supplication, and perhaps even sacrifice to it have already taken place. Memorial celebrations concerning historical conflicts are a case study in this phenomenon. However

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much state propaganda is involved, one is ultimately drawn to the idea that what we are as a group, and hence, by an easy extension, what one is as a person, hinges on our willingness to defend the forms and norms of what we take to be 'our own'. This is related, of course, to our previous discussion, but it takes it in a slightly different direction. What we believe we possess also possesses us, and it is this difference that provides both the notion of what kind of things are of value to us and when we should put these value-laden items into play in any cultural system.

It is also at this moment that we realize the difference between technology and technique. We can learn techniques and thus construct technologies from them, but for the most part, once constructed and programmed, the technologies newly present cannot of their own accord, learn new techniques let alone assign new meanings to them. Indeed, 'meaningfulness' is still an affair solely of human consciousness. We may well be on the cusp of seeing a sea-change regarding this absence of value-addedness, but generally we are still in the position outlined by Sorokin some sixty years ago: "As a matter of fact, the total operations of any machine are devoid of meaning whether it is scientific, or religious, or aesthetic, or even 'absurd meaning'. The machine's operations are just certain 'motions' of its various parts, prearranged and determined by human beings. These motions have meaning only insofar as it is imputed to them by man." (Sorokin 1956:204). Yet does this last point not in part obviate those previous? Machines do help humans make meaningful statements about the universe, though not of their own volition. At this time in human history the machine is the preeminent way in which we do make meaning. And there is more to it even that this. Machines can become part of us in at least two other ways: on the one hand, prosthetic devices allow humans to lead more meaningful, that is, more diverse and hence richer, lives. More meanings are constructed the more experiences one has. Machines and kindred objects allow more humans to do just this, and more of it in our day than in any other. On the other hand, some interactions between machines and persons take on meta-prosthetic dynamic. This extension of the subject through the object calls to mind Marx's sense of the transformation of commodity relations in ideal communism, where, instead of a subjection to the object, we have rather a fulfillment of a person's abilities by the tailored use of machines and objects. There are many famous cases of this even in capital. Lance Armstrong without his bicycle, or Eddie Van Halen without his guitar appear to us as somehow incomplete. This is no mere prosthetic, but an extension of a highly focused and practiced mastery of the subject into the world by virtue of an object that is no longer solely a machine. These kinds of specialized objects and their human possessors have created a category of machine that is a much fuller participant in the making of meaningful experience. In capital, such a phenomenon is severely limited in a way that Marx claimed it would not be in hypothetical communism, but it is still widespread enough to be recognizably distant from the simple sense that a machine is absolutely nothing without its human operator. This said, we could also call to mind Isaac Stern's famous comment about his Stradivarius on the Ed Sullivan show around the same time as Sorokin's comments were published. When in the post-performance interview Sullivan suggested that the violin had a beautiful sound, Stern retorted gently that he 'didn't hear anything'.

Now machines are one kind of object. This category has proven a little more diverse than just that which contains the material focus of a fetish. It also, and perhaps this is the first salient thing in our kind of social organization, contains objects that hold value within them. We are told that some things 'hold their value' better than others, down to details such as the color of a sports car versus some other shade. 'Resale red' is one adaptation of what appears to be an empirical statement. This kind of thing is trivial, of course, but the fact that it exists should give us a sense that the machine is a highly nuanced catalyst for meaning, even though it does not yet make meaning 'on its own'. But when is a machine ever 'on its own' in any ultimate sense. Perhaps the wreckage of disused machinery, shipwrecks that lie buried in sand or rest uneasily at the bottom of seas and oceans, might be examples of a kind of aloneness that regularly assails human beings, but these are no longer functioning artifacts. Even in their non-functional status qua machine they continue to make meaning, sometimes far more than they did while 'alive' in the mechanical sense of the term. *RMS Titanic* is perhaps the most famous example of this resonance from beyond the mechanical grave, as it were. It continues to exert a 'presence' on our culture, both in entertainment and in homiletic. And here, it was nothing about the machine *per se* that led to its demise. Human hubris created it, and human hubris destroyed it. Because of this relationship, objects like shipwrecks 'hold their power' in the way that other kinds of commodity objects hold their value. Their corpse contains a corpus, their body as artifactual and historical, yes, but also as something that can be read, a work about work and its demise. Work, overwork, the sensuality of romance and the daydream of nostalgia, the ever-pressing question regarding what it must have been like to 'be there', *RMS Titanic* among other objects of this sort remain the preeminent loci of false memory and fictive kinship. They give us an insight into what it might have been like to indeed be somewhere else, for instance, at the origin points of the great religions. This much more profound 'moment' is shrouded in a greater mystery, partly contrived by those who routinized the new callings, but also partly obscured by the simple vicissitude of a lengthy history where, the further it

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recedes from the present, the less record of it we possess in the present. These histories too have a corpus and a corpse, but the first reanimates the second in a perennial fashion. Just as a landmark film might pretend to have been there, whether on a ship or with a prophet, human beings rekindle romance and sensuality in general with one another every time we couple. These couplings are experienced as kindred to the 'extension of the subject through the object' that artists and musicians experience, for our love-partners are also desirable objects and we wish to invest ourselves in them in a specific manner. They also can 'hold their value' over the long term, even though the intensity of the experience of their value to us may, ironically, be heightened due to the briefer chronology of our affairs with them. The body of the person, exegetical text, shipwreck or some other disused or destroyed machine or for that matter, buildings – Hitler's forward eastern front command post in the vine-covered woods of Poland remains disused but it is considered to be a historical site of some value; less valuable perhaps but still extant is the Panzer construction and proving grounds complex, also shrouded in forest at present, in Germany proper – hold a power over us and also thus apply a power to us. Note that these kinds of places or things also have an aura about them, which approaches that of sacred venues. So does the person with whom I am in love, both before and after sex. It is not only a case of desire and nostalgia, or even reanimation: "At issue, rather, is the type of power brought to bear on the body and sex. In point of fact, this power had neither the form of the law, nor the effects of the taboo. On the contrary, it acted by a multiplication of singular sensualities." (Foucault 1980:47 [1978]). This sometimes geometric adumbration of a specific experience suits well the capitalist penchant for consumption and unit sales. One might take in a film, but there are present, almost as a kind of phenomenological envelope, all of the other accessories associated with the main attraction. A concert might have its t-shirts and caps, a museum display of artifacts from *RMS Titanic* the same. There are duplicates of the media produced for private use. There are gifts galore to be given to the lover, including those that animate the body via prosthesis and thus heighten the experience of sensuality and indeed, make it diverse. Such commodity complexes do quite literally 'go forth and multiply' and Foucault's language should be taken in this metaphoric vein as well.

It is not so much the presence of a machine, moribund, destroyed, fully functional and current, or slowly eroding or corroding in the backwoods of our imaginations, and not even its original purpose, that is key. Beyond both presence and purpose is the calling of the machine. Though we might have invested great time and thought into its construction, we now have the expectations that it will perform for us a feat that takes us not only beyond labor, but also beyond thought. The machine, increasingly, does our thinking for us, and it is *in* this way and this way alone that its existence begins to impinge on the freedom of our own.

b) Prosthetic Proscriptions

If we replace the subjectivity of human thinking with the objectivity of that of a machine, we begin to understand the difference between imagination and creativity and control and possession. The first includes and necessitates a certain 'freedom' to be found in human consciousness alone. The second seeks and constructs for itself the will to certainty, and the ability to be certain contains the truth of unfreedom and thus necessitates neither creativity nor imagination. On top of this, machine-thought inverts the relationship between essence and effect: "Control is a by-product, not the essence, of scientific verities. A by-product cannot be regarded as the necessary criterion of verity." (Sorokin, op. cit:44). For human thought to occur, freedom is essentially part of its source. Since science is a particularly adept version of human thought, whatever control it gives to us regarding the surrounding nature in which we live is an effect, and thus an effect of thought. But machine-thought in its essence is about control first, and necessitates the ultimate absence of freedom. Until we build 'thinking machines' – and note how we only manage to define thought in our own terms; are there other forms of sentient intelligence even on this planet that we do not recognize because of this species-bias? – this will remain the case. There is no 'ghost in the machine', after all: "The soul was still an accepted part of the model in Newton's day. But it has always been an unsatisfactory device. It was too simple to deal with the manifold functions of consciousness, and too disconnected from the physical mechanisms to be capable of driving them. So it was gradually sidelined." (Midgely 2004:50). Indeed, the machines that have 'soul' are, ironically, those that have been either destroyed or memorialized in some other non-functional manner. As long as a machine is working, maintaining its original purpose as something that produces something else that is also of material value – and perhaps, inevitably, of some symbolic value in many case – it provides the solace of the absence of conscience, the flight from soul. Its function alters dramatically when it becomes disused, and the manner in which it itself was sidelined or sabotaged can also mean much to us and thus to its power of regenerating its murky presence. So there is a continuity of value in a machine without that value being held to a continuity of purpose. One could argue that the 'purpose' of a fellow human is to fulfill their self-defined destinies. We decide the fate of a machine, though enacting these decisions may come as a surprise, or an unintended consequence of incompetence or arrogance, accidents and design flaws, warfare or other deliberate destruction. Note too

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that the line between destruction of this kind and desecration is difficult to discern. Just as science is the child of religion, the technologies constructed by scientific discourse are kindred to the sacred fetishes of worship. Modern discourse may bely or even be in outright denial of this relationship, but in spite of this, the history, the genealogy, the pedigree of this kinship is well known and cannot be overlooked in any simplistic or reductionist manner: "Within the atomistic idea of nature there lies a distortion of the natural picture of the world oriented toward the forms of things and living being and, along with this distortion, a *depletion of meaning from all events*." (Gadamer 2001:97 [1999], italics the text's). In general, this process has been associated with the 'objectification' of the world. The human, with her ambiguous being experiencing the world as a series of puzzling aporetic or even aleatory events, cannot be, it is claimed, fully objective. Along with the ability to objectify comes the ability to disenchant. Between La Mettrie and ourselves lies the giant analytics of Weber. But surely it is the presumed distance between subject and object that creates the loss of 'magic' in the world. For forces and meanings were objectified long before the advent of a serious and systematic scientific discourse and the rise of its technological enterprise. Whether the effect of the gods or other sources incompletely known to humans, the world and its effects, its fates and utter dismissals of human faculties and projects, were not 'subjective' in any meaningful manner. They stood, rather, as objects over against our desires and more often than not, thwarted our nascent scientific abilities. Indeed, they might be influenced and cajoled by the instrumental use of magic, since the language of magic was also their own language, but they could not be ultimately harnessed and controlled with any certitude. It is just this combination of control and certainty, as we just saw with the outcome of machine-thinking, that was absent from a pre-scientific symbolism and literacy. But this is only one form of objectivity, and a very recent one at that. Indeed, the ancient gods were not so much seen as being 'in control' of their powers, only as possessing them and apparently whimsically dispensing them in the world, underscoring our human sense that in spite of Prometheus and like figures around the world, that human life was still fragile and always on the edge of something other to itself.

Hence prediction was placed at a premium. Those who claimed to know the future were exalted. Those who made the further and more detailed claim that they knew how everything was controlled and for what purpose, past, present, and future, became so valuable that their priestly 'calumniations' gained them, after a fashion, a more or less permanent presence in history. The priest proper is not of great interest today, but soothsayers and fortune-tellers of other types remain with us, from the analyst to the economist, from the fashion critic to the Las Vegas odds-maker. Anything to get a better sense of what is going to happen. This desire to 'be there' before the fact is the obverse of the desire to have been there after the fact. Whether imagining that we trod the decks of the ill-fated vessel or the floors of the ill-lit and shadowy bunker, to consort with the vanquished or to be vanquished, to witness the finish of the derby as in a vision, or perhaps, more daringly, to attempt to know the hour of our own demise, this projected 'metaphysics of presence' has been an *objective* combination of anxiety and aspiration for likely most of the length of human history. I call it objective simply due to its shared meaningfulness in the social world and the distance that we feel as living subjects of our own time and no other - that is, we cannot in reality trade the present for either the past or the future – as well as the problem it presents to us as an historical object and element of discourse. 'Prediction' is not the same as predictability. The former is both an act and an object, the latter a process and a desire. They contain both a subject and an object. To objectify in this area is to do something quite specific: "Increase in efficiency at the cost of depth and intensity is the hallmark of this process." (Neumann, op. cit:401). This is the better-recognized part of the relationship today. Critiques of such systems are in great abundance, though not at all necessarily heeded in any general way, and there is no need to adumbrate them at this moment. But the subjectivity of the relationship is often still obscure, mainly due to the fact of our participation in it as well as our desire to exert that very predictive certitude that is predicated upon some kind of control of the situation, whether it occurred in the primordial past or has yet to happen. In a Kantian vein, we find ourselves torn between rationality directed to external events and social forces and the ethics of demanding that oneself be treated as an end in itself: "In his relation with external nature, the rational one is lord; the general name for slavish resignation to the goods of fortune, rather than dominion over them, is avarice or miserliness. In his relations with others, the rational one requires that he always be treated as an end; depravity in social dealings is not identified as hard-heartedness or lack of compassion but as servility." (Lingis 1989:51). Here we find the subject willing himself to be objectified in an entirely different way than we do the machine. I take myself as my own end – though I may be willing, pending the context and goal, to act as part of someone else's ends as well – as well as taking myself to be above, though not aloof to, the nature that surrounds me. The dignity of the rational subject contains the person and at the same time controls the self. The 'self', in this sense, is the space of desire. The person the space of the public and of community in the sense of the generalized other. Of course we can also desire community in the intimate sense, but this is not what is being spoken of directly here. Self and person must be

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distanced from one another in a way mindful of the distinction between public and private. Here too, the machine has none of these boundaries. There is no 'private machine', only privately owned mechanisms that are as such elements of the means of production and objects within the technical category of private property, and machines do not require 'privacy' in any sense of the word. Machines are only private or public because they are either deemed owned or used in these senses and spaces. Finally, there is no sense that the machine differentiates itself, or is differentiated by us, for that matter, along the 'Kantian' lines of public person and private self, or that desire and anxiety may both conflict or be allied to one another pending circumstances. The human self requires these distinctions lest it fall into the existential category that contains machines and other objects. If the self is too self-possessed, it collapses is conscience and thus these other ethical and rationally defined boundaries also collapse. Instead of desiring the ability to be more sure of things, historically and future-oriented alike, we desire certainty itself. That is, we desire to be the *source* of the certain, and not merely someone who is informed of it through other sources. These kinds of people have lost their person *per se* and have replaced it with a kind of one-dimensional personality: "Their ruthless energy is accordingly very great, because, in its one-track primitivity, it suffers from none of the differentiations that make men human." (Neumann, op. cit:391). Certainly single-mindedness allows one to focus one's energies and aptitudes to a very specific task at hand, with a view to an abstract, but still specific end-goal. In this, we humans are 'aping our ideals' in the way Nietzsche cautioned us against. The 'forms' or essential figures of Western idealism might be brought to earth, though not to ground, by our focus and energy if we direct it long and hard enough at their current position. This attempt at action at a distance implies a number of disconcerting things: it recapitulates the anxiety about historical happenstance and the inability to predict one's fate, either short term or long; it is mounted on the same horse of hubris that constructs grand artifacts and then might also destroy them; it collects to itself the ends of others and transforms them into its own ends; it ignores the reality of its own finitude and seeks to become immortal within its own material time, etc. Ultimately, it too finds the path to nothing so interesting – how could there be an existing way to something that does not exist? – that it resigns from the job of being human: "Even as it is carried out, however, the Platonic doctrine of ideas sees, as it were, no necessity to discuss how the things of nature in their individuality and multiplicity actually participate in the being of ideas." (Gadamer 2001:134 [1999]). This disconnect prompts the action to bring the ideas to earth, to make the forms incarnate. No doubt this sensibility played an important role in the idea of a God on earth, an incarnate version or corporeal doppelganger of an incorporeal deity, suddenly human, or akin to human being, and thus, on the ethical side of things rather than that ontological, somehow also able to represent all of humanity in this intensely focused being which is also and essentially Being.

This process can also be seen as a kind of *a priori* supplication or worship. One hopes to speak into being the forms while also suggesting that their presence constitutes a communion. Like the classical cults mentioned above, we humans believe that to access this other kind of being we must transcend our individuality – the corroborree or the orgiastic agape and a great number of other versions of collective conscience-raising – and our multiplicity because the forms or essences are said to partake in neither. But the error here is more or less obvious. To imagine that a category can represent itself in its essence is to dispose of the reality that the elements that have been so grouped together have relevance to the principle by which they are categorized. We imagine, in other words, an inductive procedure to be a deductive one. We have observed similarities in the world. Sometimes, and especially of late with mass and technically accurate manufacture of commodities, such objects may be basically the same thing. It is these things that appeal to our sense of order and the logic of sets. The principle, the terms of grouping, follow from the observations and connections we make in the world. No form can be imagined without some sense of material 'incarnation' first. To invert this relationship is to exalt the form over the substance: "This would be an interpretation of a formal principle of explanation as an actual force, which does not become any more real because men believe in it [ ] Worship does not transform an idol into a god." (Lösch 1967:243 [1945]). Indeed, one could more plausibly argue that while substance is given form by artifice and manufacture, the formation of things in the world, not so different from the socialization of persons, at once there is also a gestalt quality that is created by the presence of the formed object. Some correlate to human consciousness, though inert and non-sentient, may be seen in the material object, just as we append to natural forms the moniker 'nature' as a holistic set of forces tending to the same purpose over the long term. We see, for example, utility in this or that item in the object world. But these things are also items *of* that world, that is, they represent a class of things that are manifestly different from those who constructed them. Perhaps the ultimate goal of the incarnate god was to prove that the subject too could become as the object, or further, that the subject was also an object in its essence. Materialism as a 'doctrine of ideas' might have had its ironic beginnings in a discourse that promoted its very opposite.

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III. Discussion

If this is the case, then we have another way of looking at the messianic machine. It too becomes a full participant in the history of incarnation, the transfiguration of subjectivity through objectification into something that is both objective – we trust and believe in the measurements of machines, though we also understand that they can break down or make mistakes – and objectifying – in that the world itself now becomes more objective and certain because it has been measured by something that has no subjectivity to it. The machine, since it cannot become distracted by the world, does not see the world so much as it gazes right through it. It discerns something about the world that escapes us, but the value of this aspect of the social world made object is ambiguous, even objectionable. We might well ask what is it productive of? What more can we know concerning our self-understanding through this non-human incorporated gaze of the incorporeal made material? Surely what it lends to us is more on the order of another set of tools, akin to the ethics that a God on earth might bequeath to us, the 'teachings' of the messiah. The machine version of the messiah leaves us its teachings – data, in the broadest sense – and, akin to the gibberish of the logos that spoke forth from the classical temples, it now falls once again to subjectivity incarnate to interpret it and give it some meaning. It is our job, and our job alone, to make both the messiah and the machine meaningful in the social world as it is. No doctrine of forms, Platonic or otherwise, can accomplish this on its own. What we bring to data is experience, something a machine cannot have, and something that a messiah is not deemed to need – he is, after all, the God made subjectively real, but he loses nothing of his omniscience in being made so. Experience, including experience of interpreting the data generated by a machine, is the crucial element in any process of interpretation. Modern exegetics has nothing to do with scripture. It is completely oriented to the scripts that machines produce for us – measurements, numbers, and such things that by themselves rest no differently than the pure logos spoken in tongues. The tongues of the machine, like the tongues of the dead, speak a language wholly different from living human beings. But any language can be interpreted, and our experience tells us that in the case of the machine, at least, we have some idea of what we are about given the transfer of these data of forms into the world of substance and its measurable 'success' in that world.

Not that religious ideas have been an abysmal failure. There is more argument about them because we are less trusting, at least nowadays, of the vehicles by which they are said to appear among us. These vehicles, oracles, priestesses, sermonizers, and other sundry role players are human as well. We may be soon approaching the time when thinking machines will have to be distrusted in the same way that we are always and already aware that our fellow humans might have ulterior motives even if they are being honest with us. Indeed, the thought of machines will make the idea of the machine obsolete. These will be beings like ourselves, sentient and conscious, with the ability, we assume, to also possess a conscience. The moment there is a ghost in the machine the machine itself is transformed into something else. We seem to both desire this moment and fear it, given our entertainment fictions that serve us equal helpings of salvation and apocalypse to this regard. It is not enough to say that because persons of Jewish background produce most of these fictions that we are somehow being duped into believing them. No, such commodities are produced precisely because the anxieties and aspirations that make them recognizable and even entertaining are already widespread in the larger society, no matter what ethnicity is involved. Machines can save us, and hence save our souls, in the same way as could this or that messiah. But machines can also destroy us, as the vindictive godhead of the same traditions was said to have already planned. The millennial character of the machine must be recognized for what it is: easing suffering in the human world is tantamount to death, for it is only in death that all cares can be forsaken.

Of course, this too can be spun in a way that suggests that suffering is the true path to a more mature humanity. This is utter nonsense. What we are being cautioned against is rather the sense that one can alleviate the pain of being human and in this way humanity is saved. It is exactly the opposite of this. The way we are includes both sorrows and joys. Taking either away amounts to dehumanizing. Perhaps this is the ultimate goal, but we should recognize it for what it is. Like the diversion, pastime, or hobby, such energies that are given to it, supplications of their own sort and design, cannot be said to be entirely of no inherent merit. They may force the unimaginative to gain some sense of vision. They may improve the technique of a skill that had lain latent within one. They may enhance one's sociability and teach lessons in history. It is only when they duplicate writ small in nebulous and unconscious fashion the mode of production at large that they fail in their business of expanding the mind: "Under the prevailing conditions it would be absurd and foolish to expect or demand of people that they accomplish something productive in their free time; for it is precisely productivity, the ability to make something novel, that has been eradicated from them. What they then produce in their free time is at best hardly better than the ominous *hobby*." (Adorno 1998:172 [1969], italics the text's). Like the logos within the walls of the temple or held within the mouths of the oracles, a hobby by itself can have no meaning relevant to human life. This much and this far one can agree with Adorno. But a

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hobby enacted, as an interest in the world, can and often does depart from being another mere manner of replicating the more necessary commodity relations by which it is supplied with the goods and tools it needs to replenish its vitality and live on. Certainly, hobbies and interests do consume things. Almost any hobby has surrounding it a plenitude of things that one can or must purchase in order to 'do' the hobby in the first place. Thus hobbies too do not take one into another world. They are minor means of keeping the usual productive-consumptive cycle going. At the same time, these pastimes can become serious threats to the integrity of the proletarian relation to the means of production. The worker, in his or her 'free time', may in fact construct the 'free labor' of the communist. The interest may become more important than work. The interpretation of self that follows from this might turn our heads in the direction of humanity proper, rather than economy, as we begin to realize that there is much more to life than the work life. That hobbies seem to mimic work and require time in a similar manner is misleading. Such interests that are *not* demanded of us make us more human.

They may begin as a response to the hue and cry of 'finding oneself' or even the sentimental idea of vocation, but they can quickly depart from such models and idols and become serious, intense, artistic and even ethical. The idea of working on one's own at something that no one else may care about takes us some distance from both the ancient notion of collectivity as well as the modern sense that we should all become as famous as possible and seek as much recognition and reward from the world as we can get: "Everything modern is recognizable in the fact that it artfully steals away from its own time and is capable of creating an 'effect' only in this fashion. (Industry, propaganda, proselytizing, cliquish monopolies, intellectual racketeering). [ ] But they are only the masked cries of *anxiety* in the face of philosophy." (Heidegger 1999:15 [1988], italics the text's). The self-absorption of the hobby or interest contains a protest against the anxiety of the modern. It does not cry out as a plaintiff, it speaks its way into being a critique. It says to the wider world that there is not only time for oneself but that there is also energy left over from the apparatus of economy and politics for myself. The private interest that masks itself as individuated and perhaps even idiosyncratic consumption has the ulteriority of authenticity. Perhaps in our world this is the only way in which ontological authenticity may be had? We must work something out for ourselves. This demand is no different from those who petitioned the oracle for a response regarding the future, the past, or even a present trouble that persisted in the face of common sense and experience. Simply attending the temple is not enough. One must put oneself into a dialogue with what animates the place. Our modern temples are no different to that regard. They present the opportunity for dialogue, but they are, as we are, one thing and one being, and to interlocute with oneself is in fact that specialty of the private interest, including hobbies. Even here, the self is not alone, as history and technique, design and pedigree all come immediately into play. To affect a presence is not to be present and thus is to miss the opportunity to understand something new through an interaction that is itself novel: "We go to the galleries each season as we go to the salesrooms of the automobile companies – to see what new lines have been developed. Art styles become obsolete like the old models of cars. Art and the artist become assimilated to the production lines of the technical order." (Barrett, op. cit:240). This attitude is inevitable if we have forgotten the purpose of art. If the purpose of the car is utilitarian – no matter its technical qualities it is a point A to point B machine; its virtuosity of design no doubt has an aesthetic to it (a fine marque produces the feeling of superiority in its driver and finery for its owner) – the purpose of art has no such function. It is fair to assert that the car, amongst other commodities and mass manufactured objects, has ascended in the direction of artistry, if not art, while some works of art and their makers may have descended in the direction of mere manufacture. But this dual inclination towards one another is not a function of the lack of 'Culture' in modern culture. In fact, no society in history can boast of a more educated and literate general public, sad as that may sound to some ears. There is even great interest in becoming educated about consumption itself. We are aware that we are being exploited as workers. We are becoming more aware that human beings are destroying the earth. We do not wish to annihilate ourselves and are soundly suspicious of politicians who seem blithely unaware of the dangers on this score. Perhaps all of this is a case of too little to late, but we also are more willing to heed this chastisement as well. No, the working of utilitarian objects into art and the less obvious decline of the elite idea of what art should be tell us that we care *more* about our work in the world than ever we did before. The artist wants to be relevant to everyday concerns; the car manufacturer desires to improve the quality, and qualities, of his product. It is another error of judgment to think that art and function must be forever separated and, more critically, that the former can never stoop to the level of commodity while the latter can never overcome that same level.

Clearly even within the envelope of ratiocination – the unbounded rationalism of the forms set loose in the world of rationalized institutions and personal rationales – there remains room for human expression that is at once both humane and also has the potential to speak of inhumanity. It is both critical and ethical, in other words, and the space reserved for it is merely the ground zero of its always-immanent explosion onto the wider scene. The thinker who embodies both critique and ethic is responsible for the question of form in the

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world: "Nietzsche's task, the Zarathustran mission, is to find, now, in the midst of rational culture itself, the form of ancient joy that might still be possible." (Lingis 1989:74). Our response has not been a resounding affirmation that it continues to be so, but rather, a cautious but persistent murmur that says yes to the possible but not always yes to the actual, and never yes to the inevitable. We must work, in other words, to attain the space of the possible in all things human that seek their own humanity, joys and sorrows alike. It often seems that the latter are forced upon us, and that we would never do so choose them ourselves. But this is another error, this time in ethics and not aesthetics. This error – to see in sorrow only evil but at the same time to also see only insight in suffering – rests within a genealogy that contains the idea that we must make known both our sorrows and joys to others in order for them to be evaluated as being human or on the way to becoming humane.[i] Back to the hobby for a moment: these kinds of private spaces where it may well be that no one else cares about what we intensely work upon are the epicenters of a seismic existentiality that in turn can shake all mantles of discourse and rationality alike. Restoring antique automobiles or art lends itself to this quaking, this unsettling of the ground beneath us, that which we have assumed will always hold us upright and catch us if we fall. Here, in the space of the vision of the individuated interest, we move ourselves to fall harder than ever before. There are no witnesses. We must pick ourselves up. There is no doctrine of forms or soteriological manual, we must give ourselves incarnation, and we must save ourselves. These interests are introspective in the sense that we must work on them on our own, but they are not fundamentally divorced from the world or from history, because their material comes from both of these sources at once. The solace that is provided us is no mere opiate. It may begin without soul – it is only 'possible', in the sense that Nietzsche was interested in descrying – but its intensity and focus creates a new soul, or the sub-text of soul is brought to light, or the occluded soul within the being is renewed in some other way. The details of such a process are not important, in the same way as this or that ritual of the diverse cultures of our shared human heritage worked to the same purpose by different means. That joy is possible suggests that its plausibility remains in doubt without action on our parts. It will not simply happen to us; in the same way that Sapir famously critiques the idea that culture could simply occur to us while we were at rest within the very confines of the absence of soul that Adorno and Barrett rail against. There is no culture machine. Even a messiah must have disciples. There is no progression of maturity or emotion, experience of joy or sorrow without the fullest agency and focus of human beings. And it is this combination of action and interest that is precisely, in our own time of rationalization, found to a great extant within the private interest or 'hobby'. It's real ominousness lies in its departure from the norms and forms of the expected everydayness of decaffeinated decorum. For in general technology provokes an emotional, even guttural response from us, especially since 1945: "One must thus say the progress of technology encounters an unprepared humanity. It vacillates between the extremes of an affect-laden opposition to rational innovation and a no less affect-laden craving to 'rationalize' all forms and sectors of life, a development which more and more acquires the form of a panic flight from freedom." (Gadamer 1996:24 [1972]). To make everything more certain is, as we have already stated, one of the chief motives for and effects of the presence of machines. Just as the old messiahs told us that such and such was the revealed truth of things, and all we needed to do was convert to this new framework and work for its worldview in this world, the machine takes this very world and works it into its own framework. We can all the more easily follow its workings, and need much less of the faith that was called on us to hold within our breasts by the messianic machines' human predecessors. All the same, we are hardly the naïve and docile sheep that are extolled as one of the ancient metaphors for the faithful. In pursuing or opposing rationalization, in focusing our 'free' time in private interests or hobbies, in our political apathy we make concrete this-worldly choices to follow along and live within the new frameworks just as did our ancestors with those more traditional worldviews that somehow linger on in the face of the age of technology: "In fact, the capitalist is not imposing his will upon the rest of us. He is doing our will as much as following out his own, for we consume his products and want more of them." (Barrett 1979:227). Something sells because a desire for it exists. Now, it is true to say that modern advertising in large measure helps to create and maintain such desires for commodities, and their proliferation and diversity, that have little to do with authentic or empirical human needs. But did human beings ever need the latest religion? In an epoch where material goods were, for the vast majority of those alive, basic and necessary, symbolic goods performed a function that in our own time they have lost. That is, they constructed the desire for the other-world where material limits and needs, ranging from hunger to death, were permanently overcome. Now that in 'developed' regions of this world such material necessities are often met, the draw of the symbolism of another world that has nothing more to offer on that score at least has waned. We have seen, of course, that human finitude remains a limit to our desires, collective and individual, but the end-game of the presence of the messianic machine is the thinking mechanical consciousness, a form of being that places itself on the evolutionary stage as the next step in human maturity. Its ultimate card is its sense of dignity;

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not even organic death and decay can assail it, and it can thus move on to the stars.

IV. Conclusion

It is human dignity that is appealed to by, and is also the appeal of, both religious and technological suasion alike. The first, as we have seen, promotes the overcoming of death, that most grievous insult to our sense of self. The second promotes the overcoming of labor and suffering whilst alive, which is certainly attractive as well. In the longer term, machines must scale the most daunting wall of organic ends in order to impart the same order of desire upon us as did the religions. But we are getting closer. The extremities of anxiety when confronted by technology or becoming its unthinking acolyte will both be answered by the thinking and evolving machine or self-repairing and replicating cyber-organism. That such an apparently outlandish goal even exists suggests that for humans, "…their sense of dignity and the importance of preserving it even in extreme circumstances was not any the less vital to them. [ ] Imagination and fantasy are not on trial…" (Bravo, et al 1990:103). Perhaps not, as the messianic promise of indefinite life while remaining in this world appeals so directly to both. Indeed, both imagination and at least the phantasm of rational projection into the future are required by such plans and goals. Those who shun technology 'affectively' are content to believe that such worlds are only fantasy, while those who embrace technology no less emotionally are apt to entertain possible future ventures of this sort as part of the same category that includes what one might do for one's next summer vacation. Either way, we are not seeing ourselves, let alone the imagined otherness of machine being, in a very clear and rational light. The solace of escaping the burdensome soul of humanity acts like a light that draws the moth. Perhaps, after a certain large number had been burned, their Icarus-winged flights ended in ashen falls from grace, the weight and remains of their collected carcasses will put out the candle itself, and we will descend into the darkness of the nocturnal vigil once again.

In the meanwhile, the cult of technology fetishists continues unabated, while a rival group decries its existence. The presence of these two extremities, as Gadamer suggestively labels them, containing both proselytes and prosthetics, is hardly limited to concrete technological mechanisms, but pervades all of discursive and even social life. The interest in statistics and related programs of data collection and analysis arose around 1900, but it really took the stage after the Second World War: "The cult of 'social physics' and 'physicalist psychology' as a science of processes different from the physiology of the nervous system, has been growing indeed among modern sociologists and psychologists, and there is no clear sign, as yet, of its recession." (Sorokin 1956:187). Today such research paradigms dominate the social science scene. This to the extent that 'humanistic' work is seen, sometimes good-naturedly as part of the academic division of labor, and sometimes with a sneer, as being part of someone else's duties, such as history perhaps or even philosophy. Even qualitative research within the human sciences occupies a scarce minority share of funding and activity. Why has this become the case? Simply put, the messiness of the human endeavor does not lend itself to finely discriminating analytics. In order to keep the idea of 'the study of man' alive, those involved have had to adopt methods and developed faith in outcomes that resemble more and more their much more materially successful disciplinary cousins, the applied sciences. Most people are aware that natural science research has some relationship to applications therefrom, like chemistry and medicine or physics and engineering. All of us use the outcomes of this research dynamic every day of our lives. We rely on them in the same way as we rely on the machine. No social science can compete with either their presence in our world - not to mention the way in which they have, along with the machine, utterly transformed it – or their influence over it. At best the odd economist is seen on the news, and the perhaps even odder psychologist gains a cult following in entertainment media. Very little else from either the human sciences or the humanities and arts is ever so placed. Well, it is much more difficult to make the connections between these other forms of thought and research and daily life, and indeed, often enough there is no such connection to be made. At most, such conceptions that are traditionally part of historical and philosophical inquiries lie hidden at the bottom of our more mundane arguments, never brought to light because they are either taken as givens by everyone involved, or assumed to have become moribund and thus irrelevant. The harshly sardonic but commonly used phrase 'its academic' speaks to this sensibility of thinking aloud being quite extraneous to anything of practical human import. But cases do arise where historically influential conceptions come to light, such as when we are trying to evaluate the presence of machine consciousness or technological prosthesis in our lives. But when they do, we are unsure of what to think about them or how they apply: "We need some conception of human nature that we think they ought to fit as a criterion for judging them. We are always developing and updating that notion, but we never try to do without it." (Midgely 2004:107). Here, Midgely is speaking about institutions in general, but the point holds all the more so for developments that in fact will alter the conception of 'human nature' in a permanent fashion. The whole idea may have to be discarded, and it is this that requires the enlistment of all human beings in the action of philosophical work. For the ultimate irony in all of this would be if, in working so hard to overcome our own

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humanity and its limits, that we give over the final judgment on the presence of our work to that which is patently non-human, and thus has no real responsibility to carry such humanity along with it into its brave new world.

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[i] Foucault has charted this historical dynamic with detailed aplomb: "From the direction of conscience to psychoanalysis, the deployments of alliance and sexuality were involved in a slow process that had them turning into one another until, more than three centuries later, their positions were reversed." (1980:113 [1978]). One can now desire the alliance that before had limited the very desire that was its most shunned object, the most objectionable thing about it, and thus constructed as the most abject absence of solace – 'sex without love' even today is stigmatized, but what is love without sex but a return to the doctrine of 'Platonic' forms, aptly given its vernacular metaphor and suasion through the abstinence which supposedly directs us to a higher form of desire.

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