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Leisure, Technology, and The Human Good: A Note on the Human Roots of Political Reform

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Why is leisure good for human beings? This question is extraordinarily difficult to answer coherently within the context of a democratic, technology-dependent regime. Nevertheless, it is one we are compelled to confront thoughtfully if we are to lead purposeful or "complete" human lives. If we cannot convince the world of the significance of our thoughtful answer to this fundamental question, it is a sign of our freedom or potential for "self-determination" that we can move beyond the general limits of our time and place in transforming our own, particular lives. With this conclusion both the followers of Jesus and the followers of Socrates agree.

We must begin by remembering that ours is a world in large part defined by technology. If we define technology as the use of the energy liberated and controlled by the methodical use of human intelligence to maximize the comfortable self-preservation of the great mass of human beings, then we can agree that what appear to be our two great economic and political alternatives—capitalism and socialism—are both essentially technological in spirit. The genuine debate between capitalism and socialism is largely conducted within the "economic" perspective of determining which system provides the greatest happiness for the greatest number, when happiness is materialistically understood. Perhaps, in principle, there is no real difference between East and West. Both are linked together as "European" proponents of the technological spirit of the modern scientific and philosophic project.

Human beings must regard technology as a means to an end. The argument for the primacy of technological or visible and tangible success in moral and political calculations is that such success is an indispensable precondition for all those things human beings regard as good. Even St. Augustine and St. Thomas Aquinas can agree with the rest of us that self-preservation and comfort are real goods to beings with bodies. Certainly this understanding of the human good is not exhaustive, but beyond it agreement is not possible. Given our fallibility and our obstinacy, attempts to define a more comprehensive understanding of a common good lead to always potentially violent quarrels. Such quarrels, of course, can cause us to forget our common dependence on the products of technology for our pursuit of any good. We can disagree on the answers to the "classical" questions concerning the nature of the soul and of human excellence—and we will, given our propensity to identify "human" excellence with "one's own" excellence—and still agree to contain our disagreements in a way which prevents the "illusions" of pride from overwhelming our candid acknowledgement of the implications of our common fears. We define our

own good in any way we please which does not obstruct the effectual pursuit of the agreed-upon common good, and we cannot do this without permitting everyone else to do the same.

In this light, it would be easy to conclude that the purpose of technology is the production of leisure. Overcoming with a continually growing effectiveness the constraints of bodily necessity, technology provides us with ever-expanding horizons of "free time." The necessary amount of individual toil is constantly decreasing, and we are living longer and more comfortably. Freed from fear, hunger, and even the necessity of giving birth, each of us can devote our time to our own particular form of "self-actualization."⁴

But there are reasons for questioning the view that technology can produce leisure. Leisure, properly speaking, has almost always been understood as an aristocratic phenomenon. An aristocrat is someone who understands himself as not essentially "body" but as "soul." He decisively rejects the visible and tangible evidence that he cannot be distinguished from the rest of nature because, like the rest of nature, he is essentially a body which comes into being and passes away. He denies that he is essentially limited by his mortality. He conquers his body's fear of death through his soul's angry pride. He takes pleasure in his consciousness of his particular human excellence, and he tends to forget his dependence on his own body, other human beings, and his "environment."²

For an aristocrat, all technological activity is for slaves, that is, those who are compelled by some necessity to be slavishly concerned with their own material well-being. The aristocrat loves his own idleness above all, which is really the serene contemplation of his own self-sufficient excellence. All is well with him; he is in need of nothing. Although he is never "productive," he is not always purposeless or motionless.³ He engages in "beautiful and useless" activities, which are good for their own sake and timeless in their meaning. They are leisurely in their freedom from necessity, and his performance of them is a manifestation of his freedom.⁴

Leisure might be defined, in the aristocrat's eyes, as consciousness of one's freedom and forgetfulness of one's dependence on one's own body, other human beings, and one's environment. It is redundant to add that it includes a lack of consciousness of the necessary constraints of time. Its "completeness" essentially precludes its presence "in time."⁵ Leisurely activity must be at least akin to the activity of the gods.⁶

As Aristotle shows, the aristocrat must somehow possess the courage of the warrior (Achilles) and the self-consciousness of the philosopher (Socrates). Aristotle's description of the magnanimous man, which may be best viewed as a profound effort to "make sense" of what is suggested by Plato's portrayal of Socrates as the new Achilles in the *Apology*, might be called a synthesis of the warrior's courage and the philosopher's *eros* and *logos*.⁷ The warrior who does not philosophize or give a *logos* of his own activity is not really self-sufficient; he cannot satisfy his erotic longing

through his courage alone. He is dependent on the "honor" of others for the *logos* describing the human worth of his courageous deeds. Hence he is enslaved to public opinion, a public composed of those whom he regards as his inferiors and hence incapable of recognizing him for what he is.

Despite its manifest insufficiency, the warrior who is not a philosopher has no choice but to enslave himself to the unpleasurable activities related to war to manifest his excellence publicly, and he really cannot take pleasure in the self-sufficiency of leisurely self-contemplation. Even that form of conflict most akin to peace, political action, is unpleasurable because it cannot be understood as choiceworthy for its own sake.⁸ It is action on behalf of a particular "regime" or ideal, and the warrior who is not a philosopher cannot even show that the ideal for which he fights is truly choiceworthy.

If the warrior needs the philosopher's self-consciousness, the philosopher needs the warrior's courage. The philosopher asserts that the pursuit of knowledge is choiceworthy for its own sake and the foundation of a way of life worthy of human beings. Like the warrior, he asserts that he is, and deserves to be, free from bodily necessity. He, too, defines himself according to this "soul." In order to show that his assertions are not merely illusions or rationalizations but something real, he must show that he, too, can face death fearlessly.

A complete account of the philosopher's freedom from bodily necessity no doubt would include a large place for the warrior's spirited self-overcoming. He, however, emphasizes the distinction between the origin of his freedom and that of the warrior's. The warrior's courage is fanatic because he believes he knows that death is terrible; he believes he must be willfully unreasonable to assert his humanity. The root of his assertion is unbounded anger at the terrible truth of time; it is his revenge against time.⁹

The philosopher realizes he really knows nothing of death. He also knows it is irrational to oppose what is beyond his thought and power. He faces death thoughtfully and openly as an occasion for the greatest curiosity and as an experience that simply cannot be avoided. He knows it is foolish to risk his life gratuitously, but he is willing to see his life end when the time has come. As Socrates showed, moreover, he is, if necessary, willing to risk his life to defend his freedom.

The philosopher asserts that his own life, thought admittedly temporary, is good. He agrees with those who criticize the warrior's perspective by holding that it is impossible to show that human life is good if pleasure is not a human good. He argues that his characteristic activity is pleasurable, but its pleasure is "of the soul."¹⁰ It exists essentially apart from the body and time and is a genuine manifestation of human excellence.

He calls his activity "contemplation," which he identifies as the activity of the gods. What else would gods do, who have neither bodily desires nor social or political responsibilities? Surely they would not have the concern with power and will of self-conscious and contingent beings.¹¹ Contemplation includes or perhaps is even primarily self-contemplation; in its purely

divine form, it is "thought thinking itself," and it is still "very pleasurable."¹² The philosopher imitates divinity when he sees himself as essentially thought and knows that he is good. He transcends the perspective of moral and political concern, and he has no desire to use his thought to produce power to change the world. He, like the gods, is radically untechnological, and he is at leisure. He is the real aristocrat.

Aristotle justifies the goodness of philosophy on the aristocrat's own terms: excellence, self-sufficiency, freedom, leisure and so forth. He does so, in part, to defend theoretically the possibility that aristocratic striving is not in vain. The aristocrat, in principle, can reasonably hope to enjoy in leisurely tranquillity the consciousness of his excellence. He can do so, however, only by seeing the limits of and transcending morality and politics; moral virtue and political activity are too close to bodily desire and too un-leisurely in their "other directedness" to be genuinely aristocratic.¹³ The "city" is part of the "external equipment" required for individual excellence.¹⁴

The individual really depends on political order and technological prosperity for his excellence, but he cannot be too concerned with these needs if he is to be truly excellent. Such matters are too intimately connected with the body to be of central human concern. Excellence is "proud" and hence technologically "sterile."¹⁵ It is best to consider the preconditions of excellence as the products of "chance" and not to delude oneself slavishly by believing that they can be willed into existence by reason.¹⁶

The aristocratic philosopher holds that to liberate technology from its subordination to some aristocratic perspective would destroy humanity.¹⁷ In one sense, our environmental and nuclear crises have shown that he has not yet been proven incorrect. In another sense, in which he has also not been proven incorrect, he meant that the liberation of technology would be the cause of humanity's self-brutalization in the pursuit of a freedom from necessity that is impossible to obtain. This is why he chose to call human beings godlike not by virtue of their power, but by virtue of their thought. He points to a "complete life" that is really possible for human beings, and he shows us why it is unreasonable to dwell on the necessity of its eventual cessation.¹⁸

Consider that a "liberal education" is good for its own sake because it gives the most genuine satisfaction to our "aristocratic" desires. Its critics say that it causes us to forget about our bodies, yet it does not really conquer human contingency or eliminate our dependence on and hence our indebtedness to other human beings. It obstinately and uncharitably refuses to prove its real worth. The aristocratic response to this criticism is that the real endurance of the philosophic interpretation of human excellence over time can be traced to its proud assertion of the immortality and autonomy of the soul.²⁰ It is Socrates' prideful reinterpretation of aristocratic virtue as self-consciousness and not the self-conscious hedonism of the philosophical materialists that is "the vortex and turning point of Western civilization."²¹

We admire, and remember, above all, Socrates' warrior-like risk of life in combat with Athens and the leisurely way he met death. *Logos* may well be worthless unless it can show the nobility of the human soul. The stock objection to the aristocrat, however, still retains *some* force; the assertion that the soul does not depend on the body contains a strong element of illusion or obfuscation. It has the practical effect of underestimating what technology can accomplish in the service of human freedom.²²

The technological view of the world stands in stark opposition to that of the aristocrat's. The partisan of technology accepts only visible and tangible evidence, and hence he denies the aristocrat's assertion that he has really become something other than body through his own efforts. He holds we can only understand humanity in terms of what human beings have really made; humanity is nothing more than its concrete achievements or history. He denies that anything human is truly timeless, and he holds that God or the gods are a creation of illusory human pride. He is obsessed with time and with controlling the future. He knows there is no genuine appeal beyond historical or technological success, and he knows that victory is always associated with physical power.²³ Hence for him there is no leisure. There is no escape from the pull of natural necessity, and there is no support in nature for proud assertions of human particularity. Human beings will never have enough power to achieve genuinely what they genuinely desire—to be freed from the fact of their absolutely contingent existence in an infinite universe. They are compelled to conquer a hostile environment, and they can achieve remarkable success. But human victories can never be definitive. Life is ceaseless motion in pursuit of an impossible goal.²⁴

The partisan of technology's identification of humanity with effective work reflects, then, a candid recognition of the consequences of human mortality. It is indebted in a fundamental way to the Christian judgment concerning "this worldly" existence. Human beings cannot find a genuine home here because its attachments and satisfactions do not do real justice to the deepest human longings. Consider the following telling remark by Pope John Paul II, which is found in the midst of a message articulating the human dignity of proper work:

There is yet another aspect of human work, an essential dimension of other, that is profoundly imbued with the spirituality based on the Gospel. All work, whether manual or intellectual, is inevitably linked with toil. The Book of Genesis expresses it in a truly penetrating manner: the original blessing of work contained in the very mystery of creation and connected with man's elevation as the image of God is contrasted with the curse that sin brought with it. "Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life." This toil connected with work marks the way of human life on earth and constitutes an announcement of death. . . . (*Laborem Exercens*, Section 27)

For Christians, the necessity of toil, consciousness of time, and the inevitability of death casts a shadow over every human activity. "Aristocratic" leisure is simply prideful self-deception; it is a fundamentally fraudulent attempt to escape what appear to be the ultimate consequences of one's own embodiment.²⁵ In genuinely Christian communities, such as the Benedictine abbey, the aristocratic distinction between free leisure and servile work disappeared.²⁶ Work was sanctified as a way of acknowledging one's enslavement to bodily necessity and one's inability to free oneself from this enslavement through one's own efforts.

Yet there is also an activity which might be called Christian leisure. The Benedictine monks were not only workers but thinkers. Like the "aristocratic" philosophers, they held that contemplation was good for its own sake. Unlike the aristocrat, however, they held that genuinely leisurely activity is available not only to a privileged or gifted few, but to all human beings. Knowledge of God is literally self-evident through reason, revelation, and conscience. Thoughts of what is genuinely eternal and of the promise of one's own personal immortality make it possible to bear the necessities of this life with genuine happiness. God grants freely to the Christian that of which the aristocrat can only achieve a semblance in moments of profound self-delusion. Humble acknowledgment of one's dependence and "hope in things unseen" replace prideful consciousness of one's own self-sufficient excellence as the foundation of personal serenity and hence genuine leisure.²⁷ The Christian can philosophize without being a warrior.

To understand our technological view of the world which came into being with the audacious founding of modern political philosophy and modern science by Machiavelli, Bacon, Hobbes, Descartes, and others, it is not too misleading to imagine the Christian critique of aristocratic leisure in the name of candid self-analysis combined with a dogmatic, atheistic rejection of the possibility of any form of salvation through supernatural means. The result, as we have seen, is the view that all human beings are compelled to labor continuously to satisfy materialistic desire. Aristocratic pride is subordinated to democratic fear; "theory" is formulated in terms of what is required for successful practice (the production of power, the liberation of energy).²⁸

For the partisan of technology, leisure, strictly speaking, does not exist, because we can only know what we make. To cease to work is to lose our humanity, which is the product of our dissatisfaction with our mortality. Moments without labor are not filled with self-contentment, but with "boredom, restlessness, and anxiety."²⁹ To be freed from thoughtless materialism is freedom for the nihilistic realization that we do not know that there is anything but thoughtless matter and arbitrary human will.³⁰ The resulting "uneasiness"³¹ sends us immediately back to work. Leisure is something from which we escape, because we are unable to lose ourselves in aristocratic or Christian dreams which would make it seem worthwhile. We

cannot escape from our consciousness of time; we identify being with time. Even our vacations are filled with constant motion from place to place and "recreational" activity and not genuine release from the rigors of technological striving.³² Even our religion is progressively becoming a "theology of liberation," in which we understand "the Kingdom of God" to be a project to be realized through human labor, a project we know will never really be fulfilled because we know that no political or social reform will satisfy the whole of human desire. The atheism implicit in modern science has long been in the process of destroying the supernatural and aristocratic components of our inherited beliefs.³³ One of these beliefs is the goodness of leisure for human beings.

It still offends reason to say anything other than the goal of technology is leisure. We can still say that its purpose is to satisfy bodily need. Once these needs are satisfied, then leisure is possible. The realm of necessity gives way to the realm of freedom, not just in the "alienated" imaginations of the few, but "in reality" for everyone. We aim at the radical freedom which Socrates associated with genuine democracy, the regime defined by the absence of any compulsion and under which every "leisurely" activity is available at all times to every human being.³⁴ This is also what is described so lyrically as socialism by Marx in *The German Ideology*.

But we also have reason to believe that technology will never achieve its goal. The goal of technology is to eradicate fear and pain: to really conquer human mortality and contingency by dealing with the body on its own terms. This goal simply cannot be achieved by human beings. The more successful we appear to be in achieving it through our growing power, the more it eludes us. The more preoccupied we become with technological success, the more fearful we become. If we managed to eliminate human death as a necessity (which Bacon and Descartes recognized as the central goal of modern science), we would still not be able to eradicate it as a possibility, because we cannot eliminate all contingency from the infinite universe. Hence fear would increase immeasurably; death and courage would lose their meaning as constituent parts of the human condition. We can risk our necessarily "finite" lives for something we believe of "infinite" worth—a friend, our family, a principle, and even our reputation. But when life is no longer finite, our calculations change radically.³⁵ They would be based on fear and nothing else, because death would be understood as *the* indefinitely avoidable evil. We would all live in lead houses and never venture outside. We would certainly have no leisure. The more successful and prosperous we materialists become, the more unhappy we are.³⁶ We are "really" no more successful in conquering death than aristocrats and Christians, but we deprive ourselves of what we call their illusions which give their lives what they call human meaning.

According to the technological view of human affairs, we know our own death to be ultimate evil, and the purpose of reason is to calculate how best to avoid this evil. Yet our insatiable desire for the absolutely secure

possession of our life undermines our satisfaction with it. We cannot enjoy our present health if we dwell on its contingent and temporary nature. The same can be said of our property, friendships, and loves. When we define reason solely in terms of what is required for bodily need, then we cannot rest until we achieve the impossible. The "existentialist" articulates the foundation of this technological view by defining humanity as simply consciousness of this lack of definitive satisfaction. The technological and existentialist ways of understanding humanity with reference to the inevitability of death are fundamentally misanthropic in denying the possibility of genuinely human leisure.³⁷

We can conclude that the typical resident of a democratic, technologically-oriented society is in constant motion in pursuit of wealth and power to increase his "well-being." As we have just seen, this motion, from one perspective, never ceases because it is never possible to ever have enough well-being if one understands it materialistically. This perspective, however, is not complete if it is thought to be circumscribed simply by fear.

Because even the single-minded partisan of technology is still a human being, he cannot be understood as being without pride, without the "aristocratic" desire for consciousness of his own self-sufficient excellence, although the power of this desire varies greatly from human being to human being. Because he is a partisan of "applied" science, he requires visible and tangible evidence of the truth of his opinions about even himself. Consequently, he desires to have as much wealth and power as he can acquire—certainly more than any other human being—in order to prove his superiority or excellence.

A consistent aristocrat would say that this prideful materialist or "capitalist entrepreneur" accumulates matter to gain *quantitative* evidence of his human *qualities* and hence that his self-understanding is monstrously incoherent because it is vulgarly reductionistic. He is willing to take any risk, even "heroically" risk his life, in pursuit of merely "economic" goals, those which can be traced ultimately to the body's fear and not the soul's pride.³⁸ His avidly "competitive" pursuit of wealth can be criticized by the Christian as selfishness run rampant, but the aristocrat would criticize it as a manifestation of his insufficient appreciation of himself. It is a sign of an inability to regard oneself as a human being and hence of a lack of genuine self-sufficiency.³⁹ No attempt to define human excellence in terms of quantities can ever provide the foundation for the tranquil stability which is the precondition for genuine leisure. From the perspective of the partisan of leisure, the illusions of the consistent aristocrat are infinitely preferable to the illusions of the entrepreneur.

It is now commonplace to say that we long for illusions. We envy those who can be genuinely proud or pious. We want to escape from the homogeneous materialism of our time which democratically defines all things, including the human things, in terms of limitless quantities and to a "horizon" which limits by distinctively defining the human perspective.⁴⁰

Because we have not purged ourselves of our pride, however, and perhaps we cannot because we are not really free to will the soul out of existence, but merely distort it in monstrous ways, we cannot embrace a "horizon" we know merely to be a "horizon," a "value-system" we know merely to be a "value-system." We are proud of the "will to truth" which constitutes the dynamic of our tradition and is the source of our critical situation. Consequently, we take a certain Socratic pride in affirming theoretical conclusions which deny the existence of human distinctiveness and show that we are no better than brutes.⁴¹ We even understand ourselves to be superior to Socrates in that we are too self-conscious to take any pleasure in our consciousness of ourselves.⁴² We are proud of our inability to enjoy our moments of "free time."

Because we—perhaps dogmatically—eschew "salvation" by aristocratic or Christian means, we are compelled to seek relief from our misery within the context of the homogeneous materialism on which the technological view of the world is based. If self-consciousness is our problem, as Rousseau first recognized, then homogeneous materialism really does suggest a solution. If humanity really cannot be distinguished from the rest of nature, if there is really no cosmic support for our humanity, then we are mistaken to define ourselves with reference to our particular self-consciousness. Perhaps self-consciousness and its byproducts—such as reason, fear, and pride—can be understood as accidental, unfortunate and inessential acquisitions of some evolutionary or historical process and not as part of our genuine being. If we are true to ourselves, then we reject the "unnatural" unhappiness produced by our unnecessary desires. Surely the modern, technological, "bourgeois" preoccupation with time and mortality is not healthy or "life-enhancing" and probably not even really conducive to mere self-preservation. It could only be viewed as natural if one deviates from a wholly consistent materialism, and the partisan of technology knows there is no unproblematic method for accounting for such deviations.

If our humanity prevents us from being genuinely happy or content and there is no cosmic support for our "godlike" pretensions, then we can only be happy by "forgetting" our humanity and lapsing into animality. The most significant discovery of the technological view of the world is there is no such thing as human happiness. Stripping away our "historical" acquisition of reason or self-consciousness and the insatiable desires it generates, we find that our natural state of being is a simple and sweet sentiment of existence.

This feeling, in its way, is godlike in its self-sufficiency. Its "reveries" take us away from awareness of our neediness. It allows us to be wholly idle without guilt. We may still desire to engage in activities, but only those which require no mental or bodily exertion and the significance of which we do not feel compelled to give an account. We can only be wholly content with what we are when we are only aware of our "feelings" at the present moment. Time has disappeared, and we are, in a way, at leisure.

We are only conscious enough to affirm simply the goodness of life. We have no "historical" sense of our past or "technological" calculation for our future. "Scarcity" has been overcome not through our unparalleled productivity, but by purging ourselves of those human desires which brought scarcity into being. The ultimate scarcity is scarcity of time, and this scarcity can be overcome by beings which are really mortal only by losing consciousness of the fact of their mortality or at least of its significance.⁴³

We have freed ourselves from the materialist's self-conscious "knowledge" that his own death is the ultimate evil. We resemble Socrates in our ignorance concerning the nature of death, and we resemble the "Stoic" in our freedom from the fear generated through preoccupation with the fate of our bodies.⁴⁴ Hence our leisure resembles that of the aristocrat in its freedom from materialistic necessity and in its forgetfulness of the significance of our dependence on our bodies and on other beings. It lacks, of course, the aristocrat's consciousness of his own human excellence.⁴⁵

Marxism, critical theory (the Frankfurt School, particularly Herbert Marcuse), and behaviorial or behaviorist social science all follow Rousseau in criticizing the technological view of the world and its human product—the fearful bourgeois individual—with reference to a project to eliminate human self-consciousness or, in other words, to bring history to an end. For Rousseau, the disappearance of self-consciousness points to the apparently austere and lazy existence of beings which are easily satisfied. For critical theorists, the disappearance of self-consciousness means the end to repression or sublimation. There will no longer be any reason to defer immediate gratification of bodily *eros*. Losing ourselves in this *eros* will somehow be both the cause and effect of our overcoming of time's scarcity.⁴⁶

Rousseau is more consistent than the critical theorists in seeing that the disappearance of self-consciousness will radically simplify the polymorphous character of human *eros*. Even human sexual response owes its distinctiveness to the fact that it cannot help but be affected by the phenomenon of self-consciousness.⁴⁷ But contemporary radicals are more effectually moved by critical theory's promise that it is possible to retain the joys of human self-indulgence while losing the "alienation" of human self-consciousness. It promises that at the end of history universal leisure or freedom from necessity will somehow be human leisure, forgetting or ignoring that this promise is inconsistent with the homogeneous materialism on which the Marxian idea of the end of history is based. Similarly, the attractiveness of contemporary radicalism to the intellectual as an ideal is only possible because he does not recognize that everything that makes an intellectual happy—art, philosophy, literature, and so forth—will also disappear with the end of history. As Alexandre Kojève, the individual who in our time has thought through most thoroughly what the end of history

would mean, observes, "post-historical animals of the species *Homo sapiens* (which will live amidst abundance and complete security)" will "construct their edifices and works of art as birds build their nests and spiders spin their webs, would perform musical concerts after the fashion of frogs and cicadas, would play like young animals, and would indulge in love like adult beasts."⁴⁸

The beast is *wholly* an animal. Consequently, he should not be confused with Nietzsche's "last man" or Tocqueville's "gentle, peaceful" slave—both of whom still display residual humanity in their total domination by bourgeois fear. An animal is really content; his fear is merely instinctive and momentary and not an essential part of his being. Everything the "last man" wants—freedom from fear, suffering, and toil—the animal actually possesses in a self-sufficient way. He can really enjoy leisure.

Although socialist intellectuals and political leaders are dissatisfied with their own and humanity's present condition, they do not, as we have said, view themselves as destroying humanity itself. They themselves are dominated, in a way even greater than the capitalist entrepreneur, by aristocratic pride. They have devoted their lives to activities which are characteristically understood as special opportunities to manifest one's own freedom from materialistic necessity. Accepting the truth of technology's homogeneous materialism, however, they also need visible and tangible evidence of their excellence. Consequently, they must successfully pursue the concrete actualization of an ideal which is consistent with the truth of homogeneous materialism. They see the self-contentment of aristocratic leisure as a parasitic illusion based on the unjustifiable enslavement of beings essentially no different from themselves. They have no right not to be "productive," to change the world in the service of human need democratically and materialistically conceived.

As we have seen, the only ideal really consistent with technology's homogeneous materialism is the destruction of human distinctiveness and the reintegration of humanity into "brute" nature, which is the "end of history." The socialist thinker characteristically hides this truth from himself, at least to some extent, because he does not want to deny his own humanity. Why should he heroically risk his life to create a world in which heroism could not be recognized? Why should he "apply" his thoughts to create a world in which there would be no self-conscious thought? Hence he usually understands himself as engaged in quasi-Christian quest to universalize human dignity, forgetting that dignity will always be a problem whenever there is consciousness of one's own mortality and where there is no such consciousness there can be no human dignity. The socialist intellectual really resembles the capitalist entrepreneur in his immersion in a "selfish" illusion which really stands in opposition to both aristocratic leisure and the leisure he is working to create. The aristocrat would say that he, too, is unable to regard himself as a human being. His problem is not excessive pride but an insufficient appreciation of his genuine self-worth.

It is remarkably difficult to distinguish the prideful materialism of the social scientist from that of the socialist intellectual. They share the same task: the transformation of human beings into docile, cooperative, "species beings" which will be wholly content with their environment. While the socialist intellectual acknowledges the need to use revolutionary terror, the social scientist holds that the task can be completed through the proper use of persuasion. The social scientist is accused by the Marxist of being blindly naive concerning the sternness of political life, and he replies that there is much evidence in our time that things are progressing his way.

The social scientist diffuses the view that human freedom and dignity are illusions, that there is no distinction between human and non-human nature, that homogenous materialism is wholly true. In this way, he prepares the world to accept social conditioning based on his technological expertise. He will eradicate poverty, misery, and other social problems by purging humanity of the illusions which generate pride, aggressiveness, and competitiveness, or, more generally, individuality. Like the socialist, he will eliminate privacy in the name of social harmony, but he will do it in a peaceful, "evolutionary" manner. He will abolish humanity in the name of a herd-like contentment which resembles leisure, but its slavish dependence on a socialist or social scientific bureaucracy makes it something different from leisure.⁴⁹

The social scientist in his pride exempts himself from his homogeneous materialism, although he has no coherent argument for why he can do so. By reducing human beings to brutes which can be controlled by him the way a shepherd controls his flock, he has, in a way, turned himself into a god. But is the manipulation of thoughtless and will-less beings in task worthy of a god or even of a genuinely human being? Like the socialist, the social scientist strives to create a world in which he will have no place to manifest his excellence. Eventually, he must come to realize that his destruction of humanity necessarily includes his own humanity. At best he will be bored, at worst he will fall into profound despair. He will not experience the self-contentment which is the foundation of leisure.

We have yet to account for those who accept the technological view of reason and still oppose the destruction of humanity. Here it is easy to point to Nazism, Fascism, and certain variants of existentialism. The grandfather of all these movements is Nietzsche, who attempted the noble but probably impossible task of giving modern materialism an aristocratic interpretation. The history of reason, Nietzsche argues, with Marx (and perhaps Hegel), is the history of the progressive destruction of the "aristocratic" illusions which make humanity possible. The progressive unfolding of the technological view of the world shows that the Socratic quest for rational self-knowledge necessarily culminates in the experience of nihilism.⁵⁰

Nihilism is the mood or view in which nothing matters because there is no support for the distinctions which give human life meaning—such as the ones between good and evil and noble and base. If rational self-

consciousness is equivalent to nihilism, Nietzsche asserts, then one must subordinate reason to instinct. If one wants to oppose humanity's "rational" project of self-destruction, then one must find a foundation for aristocratic distinctions in physiological phenomena. "Homogeneous" materialism must be replaced by "aristocratic" materialism. If the death of God means that man can no longer exist as a being "inbetween" beast and god, then he must will to become more than man—a superman.

Nietzsche, of course, cannot give a *logos* for why he opposes man's brutalization in this way. He cannot say why anything should matter to someone who has experienced nihilism, or, what is the same thing, the full significance of the death of God. Because he lacks such a *logos*, his project comes to sight as pure spiritedness or will. Part of its "effectual truth" will be to motivate blindly fanatic warriors—not aristocrats properly understood. To go down fighting freely and fiercely is man's final revenge against the nihilism of self-consciousness; "man will rather will *nothingness* than *not* will at all."⁵¹

Because Nietzsche opposes the nihilism he sees in both Socratic self-consciousness and bestial self-contentment, then, he sees man as essentially a courageous but not a thoughtful being. In so doing, he opposed the possibility of human leisure. The leisure of the aristocratic philosopher and the Christian are based on lies which are now incredible. The leisure of the beast is not worthy of human beings.

Nietzsche is superior to his socialist and social scientific adversaries in his candid acknowledgment of his pride and his partisanship on behalf of his own excellence. Consequently, he asserts that he will not accept a world in which a man like himself could not exist. He, however, shares the incoherence of his materialistic adversaries because he cannot articulate why his pride does and should exist within the materialistic perspective he accepts as true.

Consider that the unintentional but real product of Nietzsche's teaching, National Socialism, bases its aristocratic assertiveness on "scientific racism"—a monstrous combination of aristocratic pride and modern materialism which, in a vulgarly Nietzschean manner, claims to discern humanly relevant distinctions in physiological phenomena. National Socialism, of course, is a distortion of Nietzsche's teaching, but one which seems inevitable in view of the incoherence and obscurity of his own aristocratic alternative. Because of its continuing attachment to "scientific" standards, National Socialism was destined to fail as a project to destroy the tyranny of technology's homogeneous materialism.⁵² Nevertheless, its constant and unprecedentedly destructive motion was a sign of its fanatic opposition to the nihilism inherent in the technological understanding of "free time."

What links Nietzsche together with his modern opponents is his conclusion that the technological view of truth is true. What is rational can be determined only according to the "empirical" criterion of visible and tangi-

ble evidence. Consequently, human reality is nothing other than history, that is, what human beings have made. If realism is equivalent to historicism, then there is no possibility of human leisure. Yet this possibility, as we have seen, must be available if we are to be satisfied with our humanity and hence if we are to control by transcending the monstrous creations of technological thought. It would be foolish and futile to attempt to overcome technology by destroying its useful products, but it is essential to show how these products can contribute to living a purposeful or complete human life. Otherwise we will continue to attempt to lose ourselves completely in materialistic economic, social and political projects to destroy the source of our dissatisfaction.

We have no choice but to question the view that the technological view is a complete view of the world. Even if we doubt our ability to change our world, we still have ourselves to consider. There are no doubt many ways of undertaking this project, but I will mention only two. We can join Stanley Jaki and others in pursuing the possibility that recent developments in "cosmological" studies really do not support the technological conception of a homogeneous, infinite universe. Perhaps there is growing evidence for the Aristotelian or Christian view that the world exists for and even was made for man, and we need not understand ourselves as ceaselessly striving to establish our humanity in a wholly hostile environment. Realism may be something other than historicism.⁵³

We can also, in a more "anthropological" fashion, attempt to show that the technological view that death is the greatest evil for human beings (who are essentially bodies in motion) is not true. This is possible, I think, without affirming what seems to be the inhuman and incredible Socratic view that fear of death is unreasonable because we know nothing certain about it. We know enough to suppose that death is in some sense an evil unless supernatural salvation is available. Without consciousness of our mortality, however, we would not be *human* beings, and we have presented ample evidence of our great—if perhaps unreasonable—attachment to our humanity. If "humanity" can be conceived as the greatest good for human beings, then surely death is an acceptable evil.⁵⁴ Only at this point can we affirm the goodness of the technological product of "free time": freedom from necessity is only good if it is freedom for human beings.

NOTES

- ¹See Jacques Ellul, *The Technological Society* (New York: Viking Books, 1964), p. 400.
- ²To me, the most thorough description of the aristocratic consciousness is found in Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*.
- ³Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans G. Lawrence (New York: Doubleday, 1969), pp. 375-76.
- ⁴*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1125a11-12.
- ⁵*Ibid.*, 1174b5-9.
- ⁶*Ibid.*, 1177b26-31.
- ⁷*Ibid.*, 1123a24-1125a17. See also *Posterior Analytics*, 97b15-25, where the term magnanimity (*megalopsychia*) is used as illustration of the difficulty of formulating univocal definitions. It can refer to Achilles' intolerant and self-righteous anger or to Socrates' indifference to fortune. For Aristotle, the term's instructive and useful charm is this ambiguity.
- ⁸*Ibid.*, 1177b6-18.
- ⁹See Plato, *Republic* 386a-391c.
- ¹⁰*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1099a8.
- ¹¹*Ibid.*, 1178b7-24.
- ¹²*Metaphysics*, 1072b24.
- ¹³*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1178a8-22.
- ¹⁴See Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (New York: Rand McNally, 1964), p. 49.
- ¹⁵Tocqueville, p. 543.
- ¹⁶*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1119a8-13. The "liberal" man is concerned with giving but not with acquiring.
- ¹⁷See Leo Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1973), p. 37.
- ¹⁸Consider *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1101a14-21.
- ¹⁹See Carnes Lord, *Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), pp. 57-67, 98-104, 180-219. Consider especially his instructive remarks on Aristotle's "broadening [if possible] the meaning of philosophy itself (p. 202)."
- Many of the distinctions made in Lord's admirably thorough analysis must be ignored here in the interest of maintaining the integrity of the "surface" of Aristotle's teaching on leisure.
- See also my "Tocqueville on the Place of Liberal Education in a Democracy," *Liberal Education*, forthcoming.
- ²⁰See Tocqueville, p. 544.
- ²¹Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, XV.
- ²²Consider Harvey Mansfield, Jr. "Machiavelli's Political Science," *American Political Science Review* 75 (June, 1981), p. 304: "[T]he Christian God . . . was the effectual truth of the classical motion of soul [for Machiavelli]."
- ²³The modern or technological project of the "enlightenment" philosopher-scientists probably begins in Chapter 15 of *The Prince*, where Machiavelli asserts that it is more "useful" or "profitable" to take our bearings from "the effectual truth of the thing" than from some "imaginary" standard.
- Consider also the assertion in Chapter 18 that "in this world there is no one but the vulgar." For Machiavelli, there is no effectual way of opposing the vulgar standard of success. As Hobbes and Locke show more clearly, the technological perspective is necessarily democratic in its goals.
- ²⁴See Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 250-51 for a classic statement on the "joyless quest for joy."
- ²⁵St. Augustine, *City of God*, Book XIX, Chapter 4.
- ²⁶See Jude Dougherty, "Intellectuals with Dirt Under Their Fingernails," *Communio* 9 (Fall, 1982), pp. 224-37.
- ²⁷St. Augustine, *City of God*, Book XIX, Chapter 4.
- ²⁸See J. Weinberger, "Hobbes's Doctrine of Method," *American Political Science Review* 69 (December, 1975), pp. 1336-57, especially 1349-51 on "Method as Rhetoric."
- ²⁹Tocqueville, p. 535.
- ³⁰Pascal, *Pensees*, ed. Brunschvieg, fr. 139.
- ³¹In the ambiguous, Lockean sense.
- ³²See Tocqueville, p. 536 and Ellul, pp. 376-77.
- ³³Consider Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. A. Bloom, trans. J. H. Nichols (New York: Basic Books, 1969), p. 57: "[T]he whole evolution of the Christian world is nothing but a progress toward the atheistic awareness of the essential finiteness of human existence."
- It is in this Hegelian-Marxian context that the theology of liberation (and "the theology of hope" and so forth) must be viewed and evaluated.
- ³⁴Plato, *Republic*, 372c-373c.
- ³⁵See Michael Platt, "Would Human Life Be Better Without Death?" *Soundings* 63 (Fall, 1980), p. 331.

³⁶Consider Alexander Solzhenitsyn, "A Word Split Apart," *Solzhenitsyn at Harvard*, ed. R. Berman (Washington, D.C.: Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1979), pp. 6-7 on "Well Being."

³⁷Consider, from a classical perspective, George Anastaplo, *Human Being and Citizen* (Chicago: Swallow Press, 1975), pp. 214-21. Also, from a "post-historical" perspective, Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), p. 216: "Theology and philosophy today with each other in celebrating death as an existential category: perverting a biological fact into an antological essence. . . ." According to Marcuse, who is, of course, not a Christian: "The necessity of death does not refute the possibility of final liberation."

³⁸See Tocqueville, p. 403.

³⁹See Joseph Cropsey, *Political Philosophy and the Issues of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p. 216.

⁴⁰See Nietzsche, *The Use and Disadvantages of History for Life*.

⁴¹See Tocqueville, p. 544.

⁴²Consider Pascal, fr. 397: "The greatness of man is great in that he knows himself to be miserable."

⁴³The account of the preceding four paragraphs is based on Rousseau's *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, Walk Five read in light of his teaching on nature and the emergence of humanity in *Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality*. I am indebted to Charles E. Butterworth's helpful "Interpretative Essay" appended to his translation of *the Reveries* (New York: New York University Press, 1979).

⁴⁴Rousseau, *Discourse on the Arts and Science* in *The First and Second Discourses*, trans. R. and J. Masters (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964), p. 44 and *Discourse on the Origin and Foundation of Inequality*, trans. Masters, p. 179.

⁴⁵Consider *Discourse on Inequality*, Note i, p. 195 and Note o, pp. 221-22.

⁴⁶See George Friedman, *The Political Philosophy of the Frankfurt School* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 279-88.

⁴⁷Consider *Discourse on Inequality*, Note 1, pp. 214-20. Also, Plato *Laws*, 782e and Kojeve, pp. 9-11.

⁴⁸Kojeve, p. 160, note 6. Kojeve thinks we have entered the "post-historical" period and all that remains to be done is to work out its details.

For a brilliant and fascinating account of Kojeve's astounding footnote, see Tom Darby, *The Feast: Meditations on Politics and Time* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press), pp. 171-227.

⁴⁹See Harry Jaffa's polemical but logically correct connections between the tyrannical projects of the Marxist and the social scientist in his "Introduction: On the Necessity of a Scholarship of the Politics of Freedom," *Statesmanship: Essays in Honor of Sir Winston S. Churchill*, ed. Jaffa (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 1981), pp. 3-9. See also Darby, p. 213.

⁵⁰My remarks on Nietzsche here owe a great debt to Stanley Rosen, *Nihilism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1969) and to the work of Harry Neumann. See, particularly, Neumann's review article in the *Independent Journal of Philosophy* 3(1979), pp. 139-41 and his "Science and History: A Nietzschean Interpretation of the History of Philosophy," *Nietzsche Studien* 6 (1977), pp. 64-74.

⁵¹*Genealogy of Morals*, III, 28.

⁵²Consider, in this respect, the similiarity between the American South's and National Socialism's incoherent, ineffectual, and monstrous criticisms of modernity. See my "Tocqueville on Slavery: Ancient and Modern," *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 80 (Autumn, 1981), pp. 476-77.

⁵³See Jaki's remarkable "The Universe and the University," *Freedom, Order, and the University*, ed. James R. Wilburn (Malibu, CA: Pepperdine University Press, 1982), pp. 43-68. Also, Jaki, *The Road of Science and the Ways to God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) and *Angels, Apes, and Men* (LaSalle, IL: Sherwood Sugden, 1982).

⁵⁴An impressive beginning here is the article by Michael Platt cited in note 35 above. See also Darby, p. 227.