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The Human Condition Between Technical Mastery and Introspection: An Arendtian Critique of Modern Rationality

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Abstract

Modernity emerges as an era in which the correlation between intelligence and technical mastery becomes the central axis of social and cultural development. These two concepts function as the *leitmotif* of the modern age, shaping the way human beings understand themselves and the world. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's analysis in *The Human Condition*, this article examines how technical rationality has transformed the philosophical tradition and the foundations of scientific thought. The relationship between observation and thought undergoes a profound reconfiguration, contributing to the re-formation of a "new human being." Paradoxically, introspection becomes a central source of meaning, mediating the tension between thought and action, intelligence and mastery. The principle of utility, a pillar of utilitarian philosophy, plays a dual role: it drives technical progress while simultaneously exposing the limitations of modern thought. This article clarifies the internal tensions of modernity and demonstrates how the modern age ultimately contradicts its own foundational claims.

Keywords: modernity; technical rationality; human experience; utilitarianism; intelligence; mastery; introspection; Arendt; Kant; Nietzsche; Foucault

1. Introduction

Modernity is often described as an epoch defined by unprecedented scientific, technological, and social transformations. Yet beneath these transformations lies a deeper conceptual shift: the reconfiguration of the relationship between intelligence and technical mastery. These two notions, though frequently treated as abstract, constitute the structural foundation of the modern worldview. Intelligence, understood as the capacity to discern patterns, solve problems, and illuminate the unknown, becomes the guiding light of human action. Mastery, by contrast, represents the achieved state of control over nature, systems, and processes. Together, they form the dialectical core of modernity.

This article argues that the synthesis of intelligence and mastery is not merely a historical development but a philosophical reorientation that reshapes the human condition. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's tripartite anthropology—*animal laborans*, *homo faber*, and *zoon politikon*—the analysis demonstrates how modernity elevates *homo faber* to the dominant figure of the age. The modern human being becomes a maker, an engineer of processes, and a producer of tools that, in turn, shape its own modes of thinking.

The consequences of this shift are profound. Modernity overturns the classical model of thought, replacing contemplative inquiry with instrumental reasoning. Scientific knowledge becomes increasingly tied to experimentation and replication, raising epistemological



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questions already anticipated by Kant and later developed by phenomenology. At the same time, the utilitarian principle of usefulness becomes the moral foundation of modern institutions, influencing political organization, economic systems, and social norms. Thinkers such as Bentham, Mill, Foucault, Arendt, and Nietzsche provide critical perspectives on this development, revealing the tensions between efficiency, freedom, and human dignity.

Finally, the article explores the paradoxical role of introspection in the age of technique. While modernity privileges external control and technical rationality, introspection persists as a counter-movement—an inner space, where meaning, authenticity, and the non-instrumental dimensions of human life can still be articulated.

The aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive philosophical analysis of modernity as an inverted structure: an age that promises mastery yet risks reducing the human being to a mere instrument of its own technical creations.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Intelligence and Technical Mastery

Intelligence and mastery constitute the foundational pillars upon which the modern age is constructed. Although these concepts may initially appear abstract, their meaning and function are profoundly practical for understanding the structure of modernity. Intelligence is, above all, a capacity: the ability to understand processes, identify patterns, solve problems, and navigate uncertainty. It becomes active whenever the human being confronts the unknown and seeks to illuminate it. In this sense, intelligence functions as the “light” that guides action and enables orientation in the world.

Mastery, by contrast, is not a capacity but a state: the achieved condition of having control over something. The modern human being commands techniques, machines, computational systems, and bodies of knowledge that allow for the manipulation of nature and the regulation of surrounding processes. Mastery manifests as the ability to use, manage, and transform the world through scientific and technical means.

When considered separately, intelligence and mastery appear distinct and clearly delineated. Yet, when placed in relation to one another, they reveal a dynamic essential to modernity: intelligence opens the path toward knowledge and action, while mastery represents the realized state of control achieved through that path. Intelligence is the process; mastery is the result. Intelligence illuminates; mastery possesses what has been illuminated.

This relationship forms the conceptual root system of modernity. The first shoots of modern thought emerged from the conviction that the human being is not merely part of nature but can dominate it through intelligence. Science and technology became the instruments through which the modern subject not only understands nature but transforms it. The human being ceases to be merely a poet who experiences the world; it becomes the engineer who constructs and governs it.

2.2. Arendt's Anthropology: *Animal Laborans*, *Homo Faber*, and *Zoon Politikon*

According to Arendt, *homo faber* emerges as the quintessential figure of the modern age. Modernity is defined by a worldview in which reality is perceived through the prism of utility—as a mere “means to an end.” The fundamental inquiries of the modern subject shift toward the technical: How can this be achieved? What means are required? How can nature be subjugated? In this context, intelligence is deployed mechanistically, strictly oriented toward efficiency and control. The ultimate objective is the domination of nature through the convergence of science and technology. Thus, the modern human being envisions itself

as the master of the natural world, symbolically actualizing the biblical ideal of humanity created “in the image of God.”

However, Arendt maintains a profoundly critical stance toward this model. A being focused exclusively on the cycle of means and ends becomes confined to the mode of fabrication, thereby forfeiting the dimensions of political action and genuine freedom. Arendt characterizes this as a “suicidal” trajectory of meaning: an individual who thinks solely in instrumental terms cannot transcend the self or enter the realm of authentic liberty. Consequently, she argues that the modern subject must undergo a fundamental cognitive shift to grasp the *eidōs* of the world and reclaim its status as a political and acting being—the *zōon politikon*.

3. Modernity as Conceptual Inversion

3.1. The Transformation of Thought

Historical shifts often arise from the subversion of inherited values and established cognitive frameworks. As human needs, interests, and horizons evolve, so too does the structural thought that orientates action. Adopting Arendt’s tripartite model—*animal laborans*, *homo faber*, and *zōon politikon*—it becomes evident that each stage of human existence corresponds to a distinct cognitive horizon. Therefore, the transition to modernity necessitates more than just novel tools or institutions; it requires a revolution in the very way human beings think, believe, and act.

Modernity represents precisely such a revolution. It does not merely append new knowledge to the old; rather, it inverts the classical hierarchy of thought. Where ancient philosophy positioned contemplation (*theoria*) at the apex of human activity, modernity elevates fabrication, production, and instrumental reasoning. This shift is not superficial but structural: it redefines the parameters of what constitutes knowledge, the nature of truth, and the essence of human flourishing.

3.2. The Inversion Theory: From the Protagorean Human Measure to the Technical Basis

In classical antiquity, the paradigm of human perception was defined by the Protagorean maxim “. . .that man is the measure of all things. . .” [1] (p. 41). Socrates, widely regarded as the progenitor of Greek philosophy, introduces this principle in Plato’s *Theaetetus* as the very essence of knowledge. Consequently, he employs dialogue as the primary vehicle for apprehending and unveiling the truth of things; thus, knowledge was to be constructed upon the tracks of discourse.

In this framework, dialogue was considered the embodiment of truth itself, as it remained directly anchored in human perception. By endorsing the Protagorean thesis, Socrates argues that the human being is the witness of that which is and that which is not. In doing so, he accords a supreme role to the human being, establishing them as the ultimate authority over reality. For Socrates, knowledge and perception are inseparable: truth does not exist as an external calculation, but rather as a lived experience, verified through human senses and reason [1] (pp. 41–43).

In modernity, however, a radical inversion occurs. The authority of the human measure is displaced. The human being is no longer the measure; the instrument becomes the measure. As tools evolve and expand their capacity to dominate nature, the human being becomes secondary to the technical systems it has created. The invention of the telescope demonstrated that a tool could reveal aspects of the world inaccessible to natural perception, effectively bypassing the human eye’s authority. Today, digital navigation systems guide our movement through space, replacing the embodied orientation that once defined human experience. The result is a profound epistemic shift: the tool becomes the mediator of *truth*. Authority has shifted from the sensory human measure to the calculated technical basis.

While for Socrates the *untruth* of a perception was impossible because it was anchored in the sensing individual [1] (p. 43), in the modern technical framework, truth is only granted to that which can be measured and verified by the apparatus, effectively rendering senses as potentially fallible bystanders.

If, for Socrates, the human being was the starting point and ultimate horizon of truth, this principle crumbles in the face of the contemporary technological landscape. Today, the paradigm of dialogue—once the primary vehicle for uncovering truth through direct discourse—is undergoing a radical transformation via Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems. Technology has not merely replaced the means of production; it is intervening in the very process of subjective interaction, reproducing simulated forms of dialogue that were once exclusively human.

In today's digital communication, whether through email or social networks, the subject faces a perceptual vacuum. We engage in linguistic exchanges without being able to absorb the essence of the interlocutor, as we lack physical presence and emotional intonation—elements that Socrates considered essential for verifying the truth of perception. Without the possibility of direct sensory perception, we find it impossible to decipher the intentionality of the other, reducing dialogue to a cold and often dubious exchange of information.

Modernity has created a situation where dialogue between two subjects no longer exists; instead, it is mediated by algorithms. This causes the entire Protagorean and Socratic trust in perception and truth to dissolve.

3.3. *The Rise in Technical Rationality*

Modernity is fundamentally characterized by the pervasive dominance of technical rationality—an orientation toward efficiency, predictability, and control. This mode of thought has permeated every fiber of the modern subject, acting as the “capillary” through which human reason flows. In this framework, rationality has been transformed into a calculating machine; modern life is dictated by the logic of practical and efficient action. Everything in the modern world appears to serve a predetermined purpose.

Even rationality itself, which the ancients regarded as a supreme human force resembling the divine in its reflective capacity and its ineffable nature, has been reduced to a practical instrument, operating in the simplest form of logic. It has been stripped of its unique, reflective essence, becoming merely a tool for goal-oriented orientation.

Hannah Arendt identifies this shift in *The Human Condition* as a form of “degraded politics” [2] (p. 230). She argues that if human thought and action were reduced to a single dimension of utility, the uniqueness and sublimity of the human being would crumble. Such a reduction would stifle innovation and spontaneity, as the attempt to eliminate the uncertainty of action contradicts the creative nature of the human being. As Arendt notes: “The attempt to eliminate action because of its uncertainty and to save human affairs from their frailty [...] has first of all resulted in channeling the human capacity for action, for beginning new and spontaneous processes [...] into an attitude toward nature which [...] had been one of exploring natural laws and fabricating objects.” [2] (pp. 230–231).

Technical rationality thus seeks to constrict the horizon of human possibility by privileging measurable actions. Ultimately, reducing the human being to a calculable entity undermines its sublime and unique essence—a condition that modernity, through its technical focus, continually attempts to impose.

4. Knowledge and Action in Modernity

4.1. The Tension Between Knowing and Doing

Throughout the history of philosophy, a persistent tension has existed between knowledge and action. Looking at this history, we can distinguish two divisions of science representing theory (knowing) and practice (doing): the social and the natural sciences. Both approaches realized that, if they were to travel the path of knowledge alone, they could not grasp the truth without close cooperation with one another. This demarcation of scientific branches brought to light the idea that thinking, without invention, specifically without technique, could achieve everything.

This division provided modern thought with the foundation upon which it would build itself: through technique, man would achieve what could not be reached by thinking alone. While this new intellectual foundation was welcomed in scientific circles, in philosophical approaches, this way of thinking about thought and technique encounters opposing barriers.

Kant, as a representative of rationality, noticed a discrepancy in the experiments of Galileo with spheres, Torricelli with air, and Stahl with lime and metals. He concluded that the processes of these experiments did not occur because nature behaved so in its own freedom, but because nature was compelled by man to yield what the latter desired. As Kant writes:

“They comprehended that reason has insight only into that which it produces after a plan of its own, and that it must not allow itself to be kept, as it were, in nature’s leading-strings, but must itself show the way with principles of its judgments according to fixed laws and compel nature to answer its questions; for otherwise haphazard observations, made in accordance with no prior planned design, do not actually cohere in a necessary law, which is yet what reason seeks and requires.” (*“Sie begriffen, dass die Vernunft nur das einsieht, was sie selbst nach ihrem Entwürfe hervorbringt, dass sie mit Prinzipien ihrer Urteil nach beständigen Gesetzen vorangehen und die Natur nötigen müsse, auf ihre Fragen zu antworten, nicht aber sich von ihr allein gleichsam am Leitbände gängeln lassen müsse; denn sonst hängen zufällige, nach keinem vorher entworfenen Plane gemacht Beobachtungen gar nicht in einem notwendigen Gesetze, zusammen doch die Vernunft sucht und Bedarf”*). [3] (p. 30)

Hannah Arendt expands on this Kantian insight, noting that in the modern condition, our scientific interference with nature means we no longer encounter a world independent of ourselves. As she poignantly observes in *The Human Condition*, the modern astrophysical worldview—which began with Galileo’s challenge to the senses—has led to a universe where, in the words of Werner Heisenberg, “man encounters only himself” [2] (p. 261). This shift implies that modern science has become less about discovering the essence of nature and more about exploring the structure of the human mind and the mathematical patterns we project onto the world [2] (p. 264).

Thus, as observed from the above, a problem arises in modernity that appears to enter a vicious circle. Nature seems to be merely an extension of human thoughts, or of the one who placed it under specific conditions to discover what they perhaps already desired. Consequently, the science of doing seems to reveal nothing other than certain perceptions of our own minds. This internal thought process remains hidden behind every modern invention.

One need only look at various machines: in production, we have invented machinery to produce as much as possible for profit because the mind, desires, and inclinations of man are oriented toward that goal. Nature, as an independent objective, is not found

transformed. In the foundation or essence of modern thought, we do not find nature, but our own reason. The science of doing simply illuminates the boundaries of knowledge but fails to grasp the essence of nature. This conditioned way of thinking forgets its fundamental capacity: that thought can be free, and in its free form, it can contemplate nature, discovering its uniqueness and grasping its true essence.

4.2. *The Circularity of Scientific Method*

Modern science is fundamentally constructed upon the principles of experimentation, replication, and the systematic verification of facts. This “symphony” of method is legitimized through the constant repetition of phenomena within controlled environments. For instance, the fact that water freezes at 0 °C is not merely observed but is proven through experimental settings that allow for the verification of predictable consequences. However, this introduces a profound epistemological paradox: as science relies increasingly on controlled processes, it moves further away from the unpredictable and spontaneous nature of reality. In this context, experimentation becomes a mere reproduction of facts—and reproduction, by definition, is neither discovery nor creativity.

At the center of this dilemma stands the scientist, whom Hannah Arendt describes as an observer no longer bound to a fixed, objective center. Instead, the scientist is granted the freedom to choose a point of reference “[...] wherever it may be convenient for a specific purpose” [2] (p. 263). Within this perspective, the scientist is transformed into a practical tool of production, aiming to generate results tailored to specific human needs. History—most notably during the World Wars—has demonstrated that a science driven solely by utility and predetermined requirements can lead to immense human tragedies.

Consequently, the scientific method risks creating a closed loop where nature is encountered only as a projection of human expectations. The experiment does not reveal nature as it is; rather, it reveals nature only as it has been forced to answer questions predetermined by the human mind. As Arendt implies, modern science has developed the capacity to act upon the earth as if from an external “Archimedean” point, effectively exposing terrestrial nature to “[...] universal, cosmic forces alien to nature’s household” [2] (p. 262).

This shift is analogous to the logic of modern agriculture. A farmer sows seeds in a specific time and space, creating the necessary artificial conditions for them to flourish. In this scenario, the farmer has not “discovered” or “invented” the plant; they have simply manipulated the environment to force a specific outcome. This process eventually becomes a routine ritual where the growth of a different, spontaneous plant would be viewed as an anomaly. Ultimately, science achieves a sense of universality only when the factors it combines are identical; under such fixed conditions, they inevitably yield the same results.

4.3. *Phenomenology and the Limits of Empiricism*

Phenomenology exposes the limitations of the inductive and experimental methods that dominate modern science. In this regard, Edmund Husserl challenges the alignment of empiricist methodology with the reality of scientific inquiry, arguing that the empiricist inductive method does not correspond to the actual practice of the scientist, particularly in the moments of significant discovery [4]¹.

As an approach that opposes the rigid structures of modern scientific methodology, phenomenology serves as a prime example of how knowledge breaks through the waves of ignorance. The primary goal of phenomenology is to perceive and grasp that which remains hidden behind the appearance. This raises a critical question: Can science, through its experimental method, truly capture the essence of a thing that lies behind its manifestation?

If we examine the scientific tendency to universalize results under specific, controlled conditions, it is likely that science falls prey to the surface-level appearance alone. This inductive approach often fails to account for the unique, lived-experience cases that fall outside the experimental norm. This represents a critical challenge for modern science. Perhaps it is time for modern science to develop a phenomenology within itself—a self-cleansing mechanism to move beyond mere repetitive methods and toward a deeper understanding of reality.

5. Utility as the Moral Foundation of Modernity

5.1. From Normative Morality to the Morality of Consequences

Modernity is experienced by those who live it as an era that is far ahead of previous periods, primarily due to its numerous technical and scientific achievements. The leitmotif of these achievements is utility. This means that every achievement is viewed exclusively through the lens of necessity and how it responds to our usefulness. Regardless of the nature of a discovery, if it satisfies the majority of society's members, it is considered worth pursuing; otherwise, it is judged as a waste of time.

Two key figures who developed the concept of utility are Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. Jeremy Bentham formulated the well-known “greatest happiness principle”, which suggests that the rightness of an action is determined by its contribution to the “greatest happiness of the greatest number” [6] (p. 11).

John Stuart Mill radicalized this idea by arguing that the morality of actions depends on their outcome. Specifically, referring to the social application of this morality, he emphasizes the need to establish an “indissoluble association between his own happiness and the good of the whole, so that a “direct impulse to promote the general good” becomes a “habitual motive of action” [7] (p. 131).

This line of thought is clear for those who feel part of the majority, but for members who think differently, this system violates their dignity within the community. A morality that sets aside universal norms and values makes society insensitive to pain, provided that the majority feels good. This becomes even more severe when institutions and organizations are built exclusively on the principles of efficiency and technical validity.

5.2. Foucault and the Biopolitics of Efficiency

Michel Foucault offers a powerful critique of modern utilitarian rationality, particularly in the fifth chapter of *The Will to Knowledge (Der Wille zum Wissen)* titled “Right of Death and Power over Life”. He argues that modern power has undergone a fundamental shift, moving away from sovereign repression toward a *productive force* that “mends the threads of life” through the systematic administration of populations. This power operates through dual technology.

Anatomo-politics of the human body: This treats the individual body as a machine that must be trained, optimized, and integrated into efficient economic systems. *Bio-politics of the population (Bio-Politik der Bevölkerung)*: This focuses on the species-body, regulating biological processes like birth, health, and longevity to ensure collective productivity.

In this framework, utilitarianism transcends being a mere moral theory and functions as a *political technology*. Under the guise of collective benefit, human beings are reduced to resources to be optimized, where efficiency becomes the ultimate moral imperative. Consequently, the individual is often forced to suppress their inherent sublimity and personal uniqueness to conform to the demands of a productive and useful collectivity, as all modern institutions align themselves with the goal of maintaining a functional society [8] (pp. 161–190).

5.3. Arendt's Critique of Utilitarian Morality

In her book *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt expresses a profound disagreement with utilitarian philosophy as a basis for human action and thought. She opposes the idea of action being strictly oriented toward a specific end, as well as the logic of creating means solely to fulfill those ends. For Arendt, the concept of producing for the “common good” within this framework loses its original sense.

An illustrative example of this thinking, which ultimately destroys nature, is the case of a harsh winter: if energy costs are high, utilitarianism would justify cutting down a forest to achieve the satisfaction of a large number of people who cannot afford the energy costs. In this case, achieving the end implies violating nature. According to her, the goal of morality, science, or even philosophy should not be founded on violence, but rather on the discovery and harmonic confrontation with all circumstances.

Arendt views the risk of this theory as an “instrumental logic” that leads to the fabrication of thought. The utilitarian “common good,” being so formal, favors violence in the name of usefulness, even against that which is considered less productive. This makes the philosophy discriminatory for certain social groups, as it considers only suitability and utility. This mode of thinking traps the being in a vicious circle, creating a “perplexity” where the relationship between means and ends becomes an unending chain of violence, where everything is replaced by another end [2] (pp. 153–154).

In human life, using people as a means simply to satisfy others is neither just nor moral. Adapting only for the sake of utility traumatizes those who wish to live outside this determination and halts authentic development. Arendt emphasizes that through this approach, unique human qualities are degraded; the user is declared the “supreme end,” who in turn degrades the world of things into “worthless material” [2] (p. 155).

As a solution to this crisis of meaninglessness, she proposes:

“The only way out of the dilemma of meaninglessness in all strictly utilitarian philosophy is to turn away from the objective world of use things and fall back upon the subjectivity of use itself”. [2] (p. 155)

Arendt's critique highlights the inherent dangers of this morality, as well as its practical problems in application. Most notably, there is an erosion of the objective world and an infringement upon the freedom and uniqueness of the subject. However, in the following section, we will introduce Nietzsche's thought on utilitarianism, which examines the issue from a different, psycho-existential perspective.

5.4. Nietzsche's Critique of Usefulness

Nietzsche's opposition to utilitarianism is rooted in his rejection of any morality that derives value from external utility or collective comfort. For Nietzsche, the herd psychology that drives the utilitarian approach is fundamentally untenable. In his work *Twilight of the Idols and The Anti-Christ*, he establishes a strict hierarchy of values, asserting that for something to be considered of the first rank, it must not be a result of utility. He explicitly states: “...Moral: everything of the first rank must be *causa sui*” [9] (p. 22). By this, Nietzsche argues that supreme values lose their rank the moment they are treated as mere instruments or consequences of a calculation.

In *Beyond Good and Evil* on page 72 (Aphorism 174), he employs a sharp metaphor to describe the superficiality of the utilitarian mindset, addressing them directly: “You utilitarians, even your love for everything that is *utile** is only for the *vehicle* of your predilections—don't you really agree that the noise of its wheels is unbearable” [10] (p. 72). For Nietzsche, the utilitarian focus on pleasure and the avoidance of pain is a sign of the “diminishment of man.” He contends that it is the “discipline of great suffering” and the internal tension of the soul that have historically elevated humanity to a higher rank.

This critique of pity as a form of moral weakness and the “sacrifice of the personal” is further detailed in *Human, All Too Human*. In aphorism 95, he argues that the focus on compassionate emotions for the benefit of others is secondary to the duty of individual growth. He writes: “To contemplate oneself as a complete personality and bear the welfare of better results than any sympathetic susceptibility and conduct in behalf of others. . . Capacity is, in fact, divorced from our personality in most cases, and a sacrificed to the state, to science, to the needy, as if it were the bad which deserved to be made a sacrifice” [11] (p. 84). For Nietzsche, the highest values arise from creativity and the affirmation of life, while utilitarianism produces a human being who sacrifices individuality for the comfort of the herd.

However, while Nietzsche’s critique effectively dismantles the utilitarian calculus, the potential for a new moral structure may be found in Kantian ethics. By shifting the focus from “utility” to the dignity of the individual, the Kantian framework ensures that the human person is always treated as an end in themselves and never merely as a means. This principle serves as a “compass” for a new moral edifice—one that preserves the integrity of the individual that Nietzsche sought to protect. In his famous *Die Metaphysik der Sitten* (*The Metaphysics of Morals*), Kant argues that man has an inherent duty to himself, as he must regard “humanity in his own person” (*die Menschheit in seiner Person*) as something that must be respected. This respect for the person and their internal freedom also connects with the respect for others [12] (p. 263). Such a foundation provides the stable ethical ground that Nietzsche’s radical perspectivism often lacks.

6. Introspection, Technique, and the Re-Shaping of the Human

Modernity does not merely transform the external world through science and technology; it also reshapes the human being’s understanding of itself. The expansion of *technical rationality* generates a new derivative of self-understanding. In the modern age, a specific “education” of the self takes place: as technique expands, so does the subject’s conception of its own nature. The human being appears simultaneously as the agent and the product of technical processes.

Yet the confrontation between these elements opens a new conceptual “construction site,” where inherited categories require reformulation and reality demands a different interpretation. What becomes necessary is a form of *critical introspection*—a self-examination capable of controlling and “purifying” one’s own perspective. Within this dynamic, a triad emerges: *nature–introspection–technique*. The philosophical task is to clarify how, within this new constellation, the human being perceives itself and nature. What is the place of the individual in an environment where nature is radically transformed by technical means? These questions compel philosophy to illuminate the truth of this confrontation, knowing that knowledge alters fate, behavior, and belief about existence. In the modern world, the untrue often acquires the appearance of truth by wearing its “costumes.”

This intellectual trajectory has a rich philosophical lineage. Immanuel Kant, as a rationalist, did not doubt the modern human’s capacity to reproduce the world. According to him, the human being possesses the power to make the world. Hence his well-known declaration:

“Give me matter, I will build a world out of it! That is, give me matter, I will show you how a world shall arise from it.”

(*Gebet mir Materie, ich will eine Welt daraus bauen! Das ist, gebet mir Materie, ich will euch zeigen, wie eine Welt daraus entstehen soll*). [13] (Preface)

This slogan captures the operative spirit of modernity: through technique, modernity can construct and reconstruct material reality. Between philosophical contemplation and experiment, science chooses the latter as the primary indicator of reproducibility. Here,

a dilemma arises that touches both introspection and technique: in introspection, the human being risks confusing subjective experiences with objective truths; in technique, it risks confusing the products of instruments with nature itself. This parallelism creates a distance from original reality. When we observe the universe through a telescope, knowledge does not come directly from nature, but from the way the instrument processes light. Likewise, our spatial orientation through digital maps is shaped by algorithms rather than embodied experience. Knowledge becomes less a direct encounter with the world and more a technically produced representation.

David Hume, by contrast, places little hope in introspection as a path to truth. In *A Treatise of Human Nature* (*Ein Traktat über die menschliche Natur*), he distinguishes between “constant and universal” imaginative impulses and those that are “variable and weak.” Focusing on causality, Hume grounds human understanding in the necessity of repetition. Yet this determinism can suffocate introspection: turning toward the unique aspects of the self appears as a sign of a “weak mind,” subordinating psychological depth to mechanical reasoning [14] (Volume 1, p. 295).

Where Hume treats imagination as a mechanical impulse, Sydney Shoemaker assigns introspection a different function. For him, the objectivity of self-ascriptions depends on the ability to distinguish one’s perspective from the reality of the subject, thereby avoiding *misidentification* [15] (pp. 6–11). This view offers a critical lens for evaluating Artificial Intelligence. AI is built upon a Humean framework of repetition and cause-and-effect, yet it lacks Shoemaker’s reflective autonomy. AI can simulate outcomes but remains trapped within deterministic cycles. As Žižek observes, within such a system, intelligence becomes an instrument of the machine, and the subject loses its singularity [16] (pp. 7–11, 95–103).

David Rosenthal, in the introduction to *Materialism and the Mind-Body Problem*, assigns a decisive role to introspection by asking:

“Does it follow from the fact that people are described in both psychological and physical terms that sciences such as physics and chemistry, which employ only physical terms, cannot deal exhaustively with human beings?”. [17] (p. 1)

Rosenthal emphasizes the fundamental distinction between describing the physical world—where entities appear as inanimate objects—and the psychological world of beliefs, desires, and perceptions [17] (pp. 1–2). According to his reasoning, modernity often overlooks this psychological realm, which preserves our unique character. Although internal states do not resemble physical descriptions of material objects, their existence is undeniable. A central problem of modernity, therefore, is that it reduces truth to repetition: what can be reproduced becomes true, while what cannot be reproduced becomes irrelevant. Yet modernity exposes its own limits precisely when it encounters the singular, unrepeatable moments in which the psychological descriptions defended by Rosenthal become the foundation and culmination of meaning. In this sense, introspection remains the final cell of meaning: the territory where the being encounters itself and transcends the *instrumental logic* of the modern world. Through this internal gaze, the individual reaches its true self, escaping the utilitarian version of modernity [17] (pp. 1–5).

In conclusion, technique emerges as the medium that now enables the very process of thinking. The modern human no longer merely thinks about technique but increasingly thinks through it—and herein lies the fundamental problem for introspection. We are no longer capable of autonomous self-reflection as long as technique dictates the structure of our thought. The method chosen by the technique does not aim to uncover our human essence; instead, it focuses on our function within a reproductive system. In this respect, modernity reshapes the human being not only externally but internally, transforming the criteria of truth into criteria of efficiency. The challenge that remains is to preserve the depth of introspection as an act of resistance in a world where function threatens to replace existence.

7. Conclusions

Modernity presents itself as an epoch defined by the unprecedented expansion of intelligence and technical mastery. Yet beneath this expansion lies a profound conceptual inversion: the shift from contemplation to fabrication, from intrinsic value to instrumental utility, from the human being as an end to the human being as a means. Through the lens of Hannah Arendt's anthropology, the modern subject emerges primarily as *homo faber*—the maker, the engineer, the producer—whose tools increasingly shape not only the external world but also the internal structures of thought.

This article has shown that the epistemological foundations of modernity are closely intertwined with technical rationality. Scientific knowledge, grounded in experimentation and reproducibility, risks reducing nature to a hypothetical construct shaped by human expectations. Kant's critique of scientific discovery and Husserl's phenomenological analysis reveal that modern science often illuminates the limits of human cognition rather than the essence of nature itself. The world encountered through technique is not the world as such, but a technically mediated reproduction of it.

Within the landscape of the modern world, a progressive tension emerges between two pivotal concepts: technical modernity and introspection. As the former expands, the necessity for the latter intensifies, positioning introspection as the ultimate refuge of being. This concept clarifies the teleological drive of modernity, where every development is dictated by a specific purpose. Introspection, therefore, serves to distinguish the human being as a creator from the human being as a mere instrument. This distinction is grounded in Rosenthal's [17] assertion that the internal psychological space remains fundamentally distinct from physical reductionism, rejecting any attempt to collapse these realms into one. Similarly, Shoemaker [15] provides a contemporary defense of the subject's unique access to their own mental states, reinforcing the autonomy of the inner life. Most notably, Žižek [16] offers a brilliant and timely critique of the technical tendency to erase its own creator. He upholds the idea of subjective singularity, arguing that while technique remains a reproduction of itself, it can never replicate the inherent singularity of the human subject.

Ultimately, the challenge of the modern age is to integrate the achievements of technical rationality without reducing the human being to a mere function of its own tools. Only by preserving the intrinsic value of human life—its unpredictability, plurality, and capacity for self-reflection—can modernity avoid contradicting its own foundational claims. Modernity must preserve a balance within its technical development and the ongoing *reformation* of the human. Instead of expanding the horizon of judgment, technique can obscure it, binding the subject more tightly to its own mechanisms than to autonomous reflection.

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Notes

- ¹ See also: ref. [5].

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