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**Between Emotion and Calculation
Patterns of Modern Life**

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1. Idiot! Bore!

People design their lives in the same way that they curse and insult one another, only in different terms. In the days when men were still gripped by the idea of honor, and women by that of virtue, there were many widows who were not especially merry. But since then the semantics of contempt have changed; its former wellsprings – honor, morality and God – have dried up. These days, a driver who has been cut off by another doesn't shout "Dishonorable clod" or "Whore" or "Godless heathen," but screams "Idiot!" or else he twirls his finger at his temple, designating the anatomical area where he believes his opponent's greatest deficit to lie.

If it is true that invectives typical of a given culture always aim at what one presumes to be another's most vulnerable spot, then the culture of modernity in its present-day phase is revealed as one of incessant striving. Everyone sees him- or herself as constantly being tested, the greatest insult to which they are vulnerable being the assertion of failure, as expressed by such epithets as fool, mindless, stupid, feeble-minded.

But there are insults that hurt even more: boring, bourgeois, colorless. Such blows stigmatize the other as suffering from an emotional shortcoming, as someone who does not carry his load. Never has there been so much talk about "the meaning of life," about grand passions and the flight from the dry calculation of everyday life, described by Max Weber as a steel shell. The more intimate people are with one another, the more they expect their opposite number to provide happiness, interest, and widespread understanding.

Thus our culture of insult rests on two main pillars: calculation and emotion. If we take "Idiot" and "Bore" and flip them over, we get today's image of the perfect individual: intelligent and sensitive. The Internet is full of self-descriptions of this kind. Whether or not they are apt, they express – like the insults – certain patterns of life: what people expect of themselves and of others.

This two-dimensionality is noteworthy. In the past, there has generally been a definite one-dimensionality. We need only think of periods when emotion was despised, indeed

pathologized as “hysteria” or “perversity.” Self-restraint and discipline were the main goals of child-raising in the 1950's, for example, but they also dominated earlier periods (e.g., when seen as “Prussian virtues”). On the other hand, there have been repeated periods when emotion has gained the upper hand, bringing disdain and contempt for reasoned thinking. The last cultural wave elevating emotion above calculating thought began with the Flower Children, the almost ritual smoking of joints, and the Rolling Stones; it was carried forward by Baghwan disciples, gurus of the early psycho-boom and alternative lifestyles, and finally, with the recognition of same-sex marriage, has achieved legal status under tax and social-security law.

At the same time, the undisguised disdain for rationality as typified by images of the pin-striped suit, the fancy briefcase, computers, money and “cool,” has retreated from everyday life, though this time there has been no counter-attack against untrammelled emotion. Despite the return of an emphasis on the values of reason, the high estimation in which emotions are held has not faded. For example, it is commonplace and generally accepted for a person refusing to do something to give as the reason, “Because I just don’t want to.” And these days Western-minded people take no umbrage at the anti-fashion of formless, baggy clothing or the visual sexualization of everyday life. In these and countless other cases, we see feeling shining forth as the *ultima ratio* against which there is no argument.

Many people no longer see a contradiction between calculation and emotion. They want both. In German-speaking theater, however, which has become the museum of the emotion-laden Seventies, managers, technicians, economists, politicians and scientists are still cast as villains, comparable to the “time thieves” in Michael Ende’s novel “Momo.”

2. Modernity’s Limping Gait

New prophets of emotion have arisen time and again during the history of the modern era: pietists, Romantics, *Wandervögel*, mystics, propagators of *Blut und Boden*. But theirs were repeat performances, with no chance of long-term mastery. The ideal of the man of reason has stubbornly hung on, like a floating cork which could not long be kept beneath the surface by the enemies of calculation, optimization and rationalization.

There is an irregular pendulum-swing between emotion and reason. The progress of modernity is like a limping gait, with reason as the strong leg bearing the main load, and emotion as the weaker limb, dragging behind but still inclined to kick and stamp.

But modernity would not have come far hopping on the stronger leg alone. It would be like those patients in whom a neurosurgeon has had to sever the connecting nerve pathways between the areas of the brain controlling analytical intelligence on the one hand and the emotions on the other. Modernity would not have known what it wanted, would have been incapable of acting. Purely instrumental reason can do everything, except one thing: it cannot provide ultimate goals, only interim objectives. The i-Pod is just one of countless examples of the triumphs of instrumental reason which would be literally inconceivable without a frame of reference *outside* instrumental reason itself. There would be no i-Pod without music; no automotive industry without romanticism; no Internet without curiosity, adventurousness and the instinct to play; no supermarket without sensuousness.

3. Artificial Opposites

There have been endlessly repeated versions of the ostensible polarity between emotion and reason: Romanticism vs. the Enlightenment; religious revival movements vs. modern, text-critical theology; left brain-right brain; the natural sciences vs. the humanities; the West vs. the “Noble Savage”; technology vs. nature; labor vs. leisure; even male vs. female. But these are only ostensible polarities, *models* of reality. No one can claim that these constructions replace reality. We can only ask whether there might not be better models, ones more life-affirming, holding out greater promise of happiness.

The question of happiness has preoccupied many Westerners in recent decades, and continues to do so increasingly. Material and historic circumstances have been favorable enough to allow us to finally turn our attention to the subject which has supposedly been the goal of the modern era from the outset: the freedom of the individual, and personal happiness within that freedom.

For a long time, the model of a conflict between reason and emotion has provided the framework within which ever-new variations on the theme have been propounded. Sometimes the technically inclined have come out on top, at other times the emotionally driven. Some individual lives have traveled a zigzag path of radical conversions: a creature of feeling in early childhood; then a hesitant, years-long process of learning to control emotions, apply the calculations of reason and, if crowned by success, achieve a solid career; then “dropping out” and movement in the opposite direction, a search for meaning, for self, for self-forgetfulness, spirituality and pure subjectivity, or, to use a much-belabored term, for *the essential*; then again a reversal of the dropping out and an attempt to gain a foothold in normal Western patterns of life.

Seen from the perspective of the polarity model, such biographies are like Alpine switchbacks, looping first one way then another. But if we take a longer and a more abstract view, we see a sameness arising from the fact that a person always sees himself at one pole or the other. “But of course, what else?” one might ask. One answer to that question appears to reside in the title of Herbert Marcuse’s famous book, “One-Dimensional Man.” The phrase is intended critically; Marcuse is calling on people not to be one-dimensional.

Logically, Marcuse’s influential work should propagate at least the two-dimensional man. But there is nothing about that in the text. The author does not rise to the heights of his own terminology. What he advocates, and what aroused a tremendous response in the 1960s and ‘70s, was actually the same old song, the old one-dimensionality, but again turned on its head. People, Marcuse said, should cast off the attributes of reason in order to allow the naked human being to emerge. “Power to the children,” sang Herbert Grönemeyer. Everyone should become like the eponymous Momo. They should reject the tyranny of calculating reason and trust their feelings. Marcuse, then, was calling for precisely the thing which he was attacking: one-dimensional man. He never got beyond polarized thinking, nor did his disciples. That is the thing which makes many people shake their heads when they look back at those years: the either-or, concretized in theories, in life stories with dramatic conversions, and in sub-cultures which made a virtue out of their own narrow-mindedness.

4. Dichotomies vs. Dimensional Thinking

But what would have been the alternative to the one-dimensional man? Actually, the term “dimension” says it all. At this point I cannot avoid a bit of linguistic analysis. If one views reason and emotion as dichotomous categories, they are as mutually exclusive as Catholic and Protestant. On the other hand, if one views them as dimensions they permit degrees of mixture. Dichotomous categories are like two buckets; dimensions, on the other hand, define a field. In the former case there are only two possible locations, in the latter there are many.

If you were the Pope and had to decide whether the two modes, Catholic and Protestant, were to be understood categorically or dimensionally, what would you do? Would you permit any number and degree of combined religious life patterns? If we consider the state of the Church, the sharpness of religious divides, and the simplicity of the experience of faith, the answer would inevitably be the categorical model. But if we consider the freedom of a Christian individual, the answer is just as clearly the dimensional model. The categorical model favors the creation of churches, clearcut separation, community and obedience. The dimensional model leads to uncertainty, effort and individuation.

Popes want categorical models. But do people always want popes? Yes, they do at least tend that way. Marcuse’s book “One-Dimensional Man” remained mired in dichotomous thinking, and so Marcuse himself was eminently suited to be elevated to the status of a pope. At the same time, a parallel pope appeared on the scene: Erich Fromm, whose widely read work “To Have or to Be” expressed dichotomous thinking with classic clarity. The words are different, but the content remains the same. According to Fromm, “to have” is the world of calculation, technology, economics, instrumental reason; “to be” is the world of experience, of feeling and of art. “To have” is the objective, “to be” the subjective. Life patterns based on “having” alienate us from ourselves, while life patterns oriented toward “being” lead us to ourselves. Fromm’s book left deep traces in the history of our culture; people read it as a revelation and absorbed his message into their lives. They had been supplied with a clear demarcation between the right and the wrong way to live.

Today the old blanket criticism of calculating reason is like the snows of yesteryear. Most young people now do not want to drop out, but rather to have a rewarding career. What used to be known as the “terrorism of achievement” is today termed “furthering the elites.” Politicians use the mantras of calculation so frequently that their words seem like the rustling of leaves in the wind: innovation, growth, competitiveness. Talk of education and training these days nearly always has an economic undertone: a substitute for raw materials, a production factor, geographic advantage. Cities beautify themselves in order to attract corporations. The psycho-boom has ebbed, the spotlight of everyday self-reflection has moved on – away from the inner life, and toward dealing with life’s everyday problems. Self-management once again counts for more than self-knowledge. Consultants are having a heyday, and with them the calculating, strategic behavior toward others. Diplomacy and politeness are valued, but you have to watch out for “authenticity” – it could look stupid. At first glance, the modern age appears to be limping along as usual; Marcuse and Fromm were the stubborn stamping of the weaker leg of emotion, but now the well-exercised strong leg of calculating reason is once again taking a giant step. But when we look again, we see that the realm of feeling is energetically marching along with it.

5. Toward the Origin of Modernity?

Is modernity now returning to its origins? In the Renaissance, the Reformation and the age of Humanism, the emphasis was on the whole person, the expansion of “having” and “doing” as well as of “being,” of reason *and* feeling, not reason *or* emotion. The reason why this evolved into a limping gait is primarily to be found in the sociology of knowledge: The conceptual world of reason had clear, objective points of reference; virtually all its participants could more or less agree on right and wrong, better and worse, progress and regression. Over the decades, science, technology and economics, the great systems of calculation, grew into global interpretive communities. Modernity achieved its progress in those areas where progress was definable with particular clarity; it traveled the path of least resistance in orientation and greatest possibility of reaching consensus. It became one-dimensional – it became calculating modernity.

But the original idea of the free individual remained vital and enjoyed a resurgence time

and again. The basic idea of two-dimensionality is strikingly simple: What's the good of all the "having" without the "being"? It is absurd to continue building and expanding a house without truly living in it. But in the articulation of this anthropologically undeniable idea, the idea of the house as a whole has often been left in the dust: Do we need a house at all? Wouldn't a little hut be enough? Isn't nature itself enough? The critics of one-dimensional modernity have tended to fall into the same trap, merely in the opposite direction.

Whenever in the course of the modern age the voices of feeling have been raised against calculating modernity, they have bewailed what has been lost and demanded a turning back. Of course, in doing so they merely confirmed the model of the limping gait. Calculation has acted, emotion has reacted, sometimes rising, sometimes diminishing. With increasing success, the forces of what we have termed calculation progressively created a public sphere in which there is a lively exchange of ideas. But in the realm of feeling, that remains inconceivable to this day. Emotion has remained a private matter, a publicly protected sphere of the individual and his sub-cultures, supplied by the marketplace. Public movements driven by emotion have most often been protest movements, expressing themselves most clearly and comprehensibly in destruction, while remaining empty of constructive content (except for certain works of art). And when large, emotion-driven groups arise, they are not generally discursive in nature, but consist rather of priest-like leaders and their herds of followers. Feeling-driven protest movements are thus usually as impressive and as short-lived as a brush fire. The weakness of feeling-driven protest has always been that it rears up against something clear-cut without being clear-cut itself.

It would seem, then, useful to examine the present moment in the cultural history of the modern age in terms of the old pattern: Calculation (i.e., reason, science, etc.) is once again taking one of its giant steps forward, thus provoking the next uncontrolled gestures of emotion – the next phase of Romanticism is on its way. But this projection is a bit too simple, because it regards the human mind as a constant. Nearly all cultural patterns have an expiration date, and that may apply as well to modernity's "limping gait." Perhaps the modern age may soon start limping the other way – that would mean the end of it. But perhaps it may learn to walk properly. Perhaps it will succeed in breaking out of the constricting dialectic between reason and emotion; perhaps it is on

its way back to its origin, about to step over the threshold between one-dimensional and two-dimensional thinking.

6. The Advance of Two-Dimensional Thinking

This distinction seems simpler than it is. It would appear to favor the stereotyping of people, but that is not what is intended. What it is supposed to clarify are life patterns, projects, concepts, world-views. Classifying people leads to mistakes. People do not belong in pigeonholes; they are too changeable and too complex for that. They resist the analytical longing of their observers for simple categories. Infected by the desire for clarity, many observers of human behavior fall into the epistemological trap of insisting on typologies, which ultimately leads them into a kind of programmed lack of insight. On the other hand, typologies of life designs rather than of people can serve as instruments of understanding. They prepare one to examine the question of what particular individuals have in mind. In the long-term view, each individual may be regarded as a medley of projects; when viewing a collective we see a complex amalgam of many individual medleys. This is the quasi-statistical framework of my premise: Multi-dimensional life designs are on the march, and one-dimensional ones are declining. All examples of one-dimensional thinking may be seen as pairs of opposites: labor and leisure; the public and private spheres; career and family; skill and improvisation; technology and art; the natural sciences and the humanities; superimposed systems and the “Liefeworld” in Husserl’s sense. What have people in the modern era done with these dichotomies so far?

They certainly have not tried to smother feeling by reason. Rather, they have attempted to keep the two strictly separated. In many cases they have organized the separation socially. They established specific role assignments for men and women; they professionalized diverse activities – on the one hand, professions in the category of *homo faber*, on the other hand those of *homo ludens*; they distinguished between the sphere of value-neutral discourse and that of matters of taste which each individual must decide for himself; they divided broad areas of knowledge into provinces, between which – all rhetoric about interdisciplinary activity notwithstanding – there is about as much communication as there is between North and South Korea; they established two

stereotypical avoidance imperatives with which to mark each sphere of activity: “Be objective” on the one hand, and “Don’t be so uptight” on the other.

In the course of the modern era, the borders between the two spheres have become more porous, and people’s life designs have become more mixed. A corporate manager may go to a monastery to meditate; a mother several times over opts for a political career; a tax adviser abandons the “rat race” and tries his hand as an artist. Are these examples of people rising above the one-dimensional man? Generally not; for the most part these are patterns of sequential one-dimensionality. Leaping from one conceptual world to another does not necessarily mean bridging their separation. But with knowledge of both worlds comes the ability to integrate them, and the realization that two-dimensional thinking can often be meaningful. By “integrate” I mean applying reason to emotions on the one hand, and drawing emotions into the calculations of reason on the other.

What does it mean to apply reason to feelings? For a long time, the dominant idea was that it was reasonable to suppress them. Then came the idea that it was reasonable to “let them out.” Both those approaches are classic expressions of dichotomous thinking. Rationality as a central element of modernity, however, means something quite different from either suppressing or giving free reign to the emotions. The new formula may be expressed in these terms: Let the calculations of reason serve as an aid to feeling, instead of either beating it down or giving way to it.

Too often, though, that formula remains little more than words, and those who advocate it have a rather odd experience: they find themselves running through a wide-open door, and at the same time painfully slamming into a brick wall. The open door is found at the meta-level, while real life provides the brick wall. Everyone nods in approval when the concept of Yin and Yang is introduced, when people are described as unified entities and when Nobel Prize winners talk about the synergy of nature and the humanities. But that is merely the meta-level of self-elevation and elevating thought. When things get concrete, Yin and Yang often clash mightily with each other.

In dealing with feelings, much can be learned from the history of the natural sciences, technology and economics. In the history of calculating reason, rationality has never

meant anything but good description, self-observation, self-criticism, goal-oriented change, and methodical thinking. The time would seem to have come to apply this core idea of modernity to the sphere of feelings as well. We see individuals searching for a meaningful life; couples searching for gratifying relationship; managers searching for a positive corporate culture; urban planners and urbanites searching for livable public spaces; natural scientists and technologists searching for answers to the ethical questions raised by their innovations; producers seeking to understand consumers; publications in the arts and humanities seeking inter-subjectivity. As to the last-named category, Marcel Reich-Ranicki has recommended “passionate subjectivity” – the living out of emotions – as being quite enough. But is that the final word?

It is difficult to escape the mental and spiritual appeal of one-dimensionality, but it would be alien to the spirit of modernity to acknowledge it as a kind of cultural law, as an insurmountable barrier to rational thought. It certainly is a difficult task, however, a collective spiritual challenge of which we are just now becoming aware.

7. Who Gets the Message?

Perhaps Western man’s enthusiasm for modernity, which has long since ebbed, can be renewed by this challenge. But perhaps the people of the West are tired of modernity, filled with longing for a return to the realm of emotion, for simple images, myths and charismatic leaders. Perhaps they long to once again be part of the flock under the care of a good shepherd. And perhaps, in the 21st century, we will again pass through what many Greeks experienced more than two thousand years ago after the Classical period, after that remarkable first flowering of skepticism, free thought, a searching attitude toward life and a yearning for new horizons, without which there would have been no modern age millennia later. A return to magic began as early as Alexander the Great, a return nourished by a yearning for simplicity and untrammelled feeling.

In Tolstoy’s “Anna Karenina” we encounter a pure homo faber in the form of a German clockmaker who winds the clocks in the homes of the nobility. His customers joke that he himself is a clock. In so doing, they express the absurdity of one-dimensionality. The German clockmaker who is himself a clock personifies a life-design of pure practicality.

All people are apparatuses which serve other apparatuses. They live in a social world of total instrumental self-reference, in which each individual action is well-founded, but no one knows what the whole picture is supposed to look like.

In a choice between a world of total calculating reason and a world of total emotion, one-dimensional thinking will yield a decision based on what the individual concerned has most recently gone through. Having just come from the tyranny of feeling, people experienced the dawn of modernity as a wondrous, sobering rescue; but then, constrained in the steel-hard shell of a German clockmaker, they often dreamt of losing themselves again in the dark forest of the emotions.

The idea that there is a path between those two roads has thus far hardly been expressed philosophically. But in everyday life that idea is currently beginning to dawn, with many people searching, groping, testing. Will the idea of a third way between calculation and emotion suffer the same fate as the imperial message in Kafka's tale?:

“From his deathbed the Emperor has sent to you of all people, you the Individual, his lamentable Subject, a message ... The messenger has just set out ... he puts out first one arm, then the other, making his way through the masses ... But the masses are so vast that their homes are unending ... In vain he strives, propelling himself through the innermost apartments of the palace; never will he escape them. And should he succeed in doing so, nothing would be gained, for he would have to fight his way down the staircase. And should he succeed, nothing would be gained, for he would have to cross through all the courtyards, and so on through the millennia ... No one gets through here, certainly not with a message from the dead. – You, however, sit by your window and dream all this as evening falls.”

The difficulty is that two-dimensional thinking is achievable only through epistemological learning. But that is not nearly as alluring as regaining the psycho-boom of the 1970s, and its benefits not nearly as tangible as the yield on investments in research and development. Epistemological learning would be about freeing oneself from typological thinking, for example. It would be about understanding what it is to comprehend something. It would be about fully realizing that, when there is talk about “self” or “culture,” what is meant is pattern and process. It would be about holding fast to the

search for truth and inter-subject commitment even when things get blurry, erratic, confused and fluid. On the other hand, it would not be about saying farewell to the joys of one-dimensionality, whether your pleasure is football, pop concerts or sex, whether it is genetic research, the stock market or environmental technology, or cursing aloud at idiots and bores. Two-dimensionality does not replace one-dimensionality, it complements it. But that is a subject for the Imperial message.