BINDING THROUGH IDENTITY

Technology affects knowledge on a level so fundamental we may not easily notice it. The technological model proclaims that knowledge is about *ways to obtain results*. How those results are to be applied is a matter for personal belief or conviction. The value or benefit of the results—their meaning in a larger context—is *not presented as a question for knowledge*.

The technological model thus affirms the existence of two separate realms: the 'objective' world of results and the 'subjective' world of personal conviction and concern. Knowledge is understood to apply only in the objective realm; in the subjective realm of desires and feelings, knowledge has no role to play. Since issues of value and meaning fit into the subjective realm, they recede from view as possible subjects of knowledge or topics of public discourse. In such circumstances, what is meaningless comes to the fore by default.

In the technological model, all knowledge is 'for' a purpose. Ultimately it becomes the *property of the self*, which decides what use to make of it. Yet the self

as such is centered in the subjective realm, and thus in its fundamental identity it remains inaccessible to knowledge. The technological model accepts the claims of the self to stand at the center of the world that it knows, 'owning' all experience, but it has no way of investigating those claims directly. While the cultural conditioning of the self, the modification of the self's identity over time, and similar issues are all open to inquiry, the 'fact' of identity itself, *to which all knowledge is subordinated*, is inaccessible to knowledge.

With the self established at the center of experience, a dichotomy at once emerges. The self finds itself to be separated from the objects that it needs to satisfy its wants. From this basic situation arises desire—a momentum directed outward toward possession of what is desired—and from desire comes action.

Bound up in these subjective patterns, the self works to acquire specific goods available only in the objective realm, using up its mental and physical energy in doing so. As the method for doing this, technology receives special emphasis. And since the technological model for knowledge supports the claims of the self, a cyclical dynamic comes into being, stimulating the ever-increasing production and consumption of goods to satisfy the needs of the self. A constant 'busy-ness' makes it unlikely that other forms of knowing can arise.

The subjective structures of desire help shape cognition in accord with the technological model. Based on memories and imaginings, the self projects an image of what is desired, and at once the projected image puts knowledge into its service. Fully occupied with the

concerns brought forward by emotions, fantasies, and desires, the self subordinates awareness, concentration, and active intelligence to the push and pull of wants, fears, and needs. The division between the subjective and objective is constantly reinforced and applied in new domains. Because the mind is operating without a more comprehensive knowledge, there is little opportunity to disengage from the ways of being already set in motion.

Since the object of 'knowledge' understood 'technologically' is the 'objective' realm, the activity of the self—which consists of a process rather than the outcome of that process—is knowable only indirectly. Intelligence and will are put under the control of feelings and emotions; the self is guided not by awareness, but by the need to gain power over its circumstances so that it can obtain what it wants. In place of the light of knowledge, the thick darkness of wanting and the seductive images of desire determine how the self shall act. The patterns of action follow well-established ways of being, in which the self can only acquiesce.

As long as the 'subjective' self is cut off from the 'objective' world, such limitations on knowing seem almost inevitable. The split between the two realms places the self in a position where its time and space are confined and its knowledge fallible. The body, which seems somehow to straddle the subjective and objective realms, continues to assert its demands for pleasure, happiness, or comfort, leaving the self no choice but to respond. A pattern of want and need, punctuated by episodes of fulfillment, establishes the fundamental order within which knowledge can arise. Only a few altematives for knowledge seem allowable: Knowledge

that allows the self to identify and distinguish what is desired from what is not; knowledge of technological knowledge; and knowledge as a possible object of desire. The list does not seem to extend any farther.

Knowledge Without Power

With knowledge confined in this way, the self finds itself situated in a world given in advance. The role of cognition is to describe or 'make use of' this 'given' world. For the most part, this will take place through thinking, as knowledge offers 'models' of what is 'real' and 'true'. Certain information is provided or a certain logic is worked out, and then a rule is established. Following thinking's lead means *conforming to this rule or model*.

Once knowledge is identified with the structures established by thought, it becomes a second-class citizen in the self's subjective world, wholly subordinate to the structures of desire. Unlike desire, in which the momentum that leads toward action is intrinsic to the desire itself, thinking lacks the energy that flows directly into doing. Encoded in the rules and interpretations imposed by thought as a way of linking subjective and objective, 'knowing' loses its intimate connection to 'being'.

Divorced from penetrating intelligence and direct experience alike, and untested in action, knowledge based on thinking and models may gain substantial influence despite its flaws. The consequences can be deeply destructive across a broad reach of space and time. Since it is subject to manipulation by the dominant force of desire and emotions, such knowledge is also readily transformed

into belief, rationale, or ideology, lending a cloak of intellectual respectability to patterns of action based on desire and need.

When new knowledge does arise, it is understood as being bound to the 'objective' realm, which is *not the realm of the self*. Thus, such knowledge does not directly affect the self in its being. Though conceptual models, new scientific theories, or new ideologies may seem inspiring, the response they evoke fails to bridge the gap between the being of the self and the being of the world that the self somehow 'inhabits'.

The direct consequence of this pattern is that the impact of even the most powerful insights quickly fades. As we discover that the knowledge we attain seems incapable of transforming our being, we may lose confidence in the value of knowledge to affect our lives. We are left torn and frustrated, knowing that we 'know', but witnesses to the inability of our knowledge to affect us at the most fundamental level.

Territory and identity

The restrictions on technological knowledge not only undermine the search for 'knowledge alternatives', but also establish as beyond the range of knowledge the most basic structures within which human beings operate. When we use knowledge as a means for attaining preestablished ends, not only the ends themselves, but also the claims of identity and territory on the basis of which desired ends are *defined* are placed outside the domain of inquiry. The bonds of country and place, family and

class, the circles of friendship, profession, ideology, and lifestyle can be identified and studied from outside, 'technologically', but they apparently cannot be 'known' directly from within.

Thus, though it may seem clear enough that we 'know' what we desire or how we feel, this 'knowledge' makes sense only by being referred back to the pre-established domain of subjective identity and the values and attitudes that identity sustains. And this domain remains inaccessible to knowledge.

The technological way of knowing is aware of this limitation on the knowledge it presents, and tries to counteract it. However, it does so not by expanding the domain of knowledge to include the basic identity of the self, but by adopting measures to *cordon off* technological knowledge from the bias that unexamined claims of identity and territory would otherwise introduce. The scientific method, which insists on elaborate safeguards against 'subjectivity' in its attempts to arrive at the 'objective' truth, is perhaps the fullest expression of this concern with the inaccessibility of the subjective realm to knowledge and the resulting potential for error.

Valuable as the scientific methodology is within its own sphere, it accepts as a given the domain of not-knowing that technological knowledge posits at the outset. The structures of identity, value, and meaning remain beyond the scope of inquiry. So well-established is this way of thinking that the limits on the scope of knowledge introduced in this way go largely unnoticed.

Private and Public Knowledge

At the other pole of contemporary understanding are the fields of knowledge that seem to go beyond the technological model. Where technology leaves questions of value and meaning to one side, psychology, religion, philosophy, art, and similar forms of inquiry all could be said to take as central the need to investigate (in their own ways) the meaning and nature of human being and the quality and the capacities of the mind. Instead of looking only at externals, they explore questions of motivation and inspiration and may even ask directly how the objective and subjective realms interact.

Nonetheless, such forms of inquiry as they are practiced today continue to share the technological, 'self-centered' model of knowledge, in which the subjective and objective realms are opposed to each other and 'being' is split uneasily between them. They pursue a knowledge understood as being available through a turn 'inward', toward the subjective realm.

Since this approach leaves the technological model intact, the result is to undermine the validity of the 'deeper' knowing that 'private' knowledge professes. Without agreed upon 'objective standards', such knowledge (as opposed to the judgments it leads to or the explanations it spawns) cannot readily be a topic for public discourse. It tends to occupy a shadow world, easily overlooked or ignored on the one hand, or confused with fantasies and daydreams on the other. With 'objective' modes of knowing active in the foreground,

knowledge that is considered 'only' subjective is denied any ultimate significance.

So long as the technological model for knowledge governs our understanding, the conventional response to such alternative forms of knowing will be distrust or skepticism, or else misinterpretation of their message as consisting of another 'model'. Indeed, with knowledge fragmented into the 'subjective' knowing of individuals, there is little alternative. Even if a new, more 'comprehensive' way of knowing did somehow 'arrive', there would be no way to communicate it, no way to transmit such 'personal' knowledge into the shared domain of public discourse and 'objective' knowledge.

Chapter Five

Knowledge as a means and as property; knowledge subordinated to identity, the structure of separation and desire; knowledge through 'self-centered' models; knowledge as powerless; private and public knowledge; new knowledge unavailable.