Chapter 2. Georges Friedmann: From the Great Disequilibrium to the Interior Effort.

“I know that I write these words because I am injured.”

—Georges Friedmann, Journal de guerre, 27 March 1939

I. Introduction

I.i. An Unquiet Wisdom

In the introduction to his 1970 quasi-memoire La puissance et la sagesse, the French sociologist of labor and technology Georges Friedmann situates the collected reflections, field notes, and journal entries that constitute what he calls the “autobiography that I will never write,” as follows:

But gradually, as this work advanced, these events, these collective and personal experiences, necessitated a series of disruptive reassessments on my part, which profoundly changed my plan. In 1945, straining toward a humanism capable of ‘genuinely transforming the human condition,’ I had not forgotten the moral conditions upon which its realization depended, although I had indeed placed them in the third row, after economic and social conditions. Today, without denying the role of these latter—far from it, one will note—the observation of our world led me to affirm the essential role of these moral conditions. After having, during my period of ‘naïve Marxism,’ [marxisme naïf] given a quasi-exclusive privilege to the ‘material’ dimensions of things, I began to perceive with greater and greater clarity the spiritual dimension, which is so despised today [actuellement si méprisé]; and yet, without it, there will never be a socialism with a human face.

This work of reimagining the place of what Friedmann calls here the “spiritual” in general, and its relationship to the political in particular, emerge from a life and career dedicated to the investigation of human labor, our relationship to machines, the experience of war, and the

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2 La puissance et la sagesse, 11; ibid.. Despite his importance in France as a sociologist of labor, his expertise on and work within the Soviet Union, the publication of his war journals and his long and deep engagement with the philosophical tradition (cf. his Leibniz et Spinoza, Gallimard, 1946), Friedmann remains little-known in the Anglophone world, with next to none of his work having been translated since his death in 1977. For that reason, all translations from Friedmann’s work are my own, unless otherwise specified.
3 Ibid., 10.
4 See his Friedmann, Journal de guerre, 1939-1940, a text to which we will return.
question of revolution. That its importance for him is tied directly, indeed necessarily, to that life and that work, cannot be overemphasized.

And yet, despite their deep significance, it will remain unclear, at least at this juncture, just what Friedmann means when he speaks of the “moral” and “spiritual” conditions that he is compelled to re-situate, both in general and within political life in particular. What can it mean to speak of an ethics that we place neither in front of nor behind, but rather directly alongside the political—let alone one that not only deserves, but on a certain understanding demands the appellation “spiritual?” That the language invoked here is not exactly clear for Friedmann either, and that at least one goal of the nearly 500-pages of reflections and meditations that make up La puissance et la sagesse is to achieve some clarity on the very terms that he invokes at the outset, is of course no coincidence.

The text traces and re-traces the political, intellectual, and ethical concerns that would mark his life and career, from their initial emergence in his childhood and adolescence, to nearly the end of his life:

And so here is a book that in no way hides its values, unbiased [wertfrei]. It navigates a counter-current, at a time when certain forces, whose historical determinations are evident, give rise on all sides to formal research whose point of departure is a de-valORIZATION of all “human” content. After many years and many voyages on several continents, I began to feel the need for an “interior voyage.” We will follow the steps of this development here, punctuated by the fragments of the autobiography I will never write. You will find here, communicated by a man who has sought to understand—and not to hide—his own weaknesses and failures, some responses called forth by the great questions that he has attempted to live. (Readers will judge for themselves the extent to which I have succeeded.)

Indeed, in following both the “exterior journeys” and the “interior effort”6 of his life and career, La puissance can be recognized, by his own description, its contents, and its structure, as a kind of spiritual exercise in its own right. But if it is the substance of La puissance to chart the

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5 La puissance et la sagesse, 11.
6 See ibid., 119.
“internal” parallel of this journey—with all its difficulties, errors, insights and flaws—our own understanding of its project relies on a sense of those “exterior” conditions and experiences which gave rise to Friedmann’s interest in what he calls the “spiritual dimension” in the first place. We will closely follow both of these journeys over the course of this chapter, though to ends slightly different from Friedmann’s own.

**Early Life and Work.** Despite, or perhaps thanks to, a comfortable urban upbringing and unparalleled education, 7 Friedmann tells us that in his youth he was somewhat enamored with rural life: “at sixteen,” he says, “I wanted to become a farmer;” 8 but this was not to be. Following a series of intellectual adventures 9—including at least one famous misadventure 10—over the

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8 *La puissance et la sagesse*, 32.

9 During the period from about 1924 to 1930, Friedmann co-founded the *Philosophies* group, named for a journal he co-edited with the poet Pierre Morhange (1902-1972), and the philosophers Georges Politzer (1903-1942), Norbert Guterman (1900-1984), and Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991). This core group of five friends came together at the *École normale*, and was, he says, “closely knit by their trenchant views, their enthusiasms, their arrogant refusals, their revolts: one of them rich, the rest not at all.” (Journal de guerre, 1939-1940, 25-26. See also Elisabeth Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co: A History of Psychoanalysis in France, 1925-1985* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 56-71; ibid.) Friedmann himself was “the rich one,” and would attempt to use his inherited wealth to support the group’s various endeavors. Over the course of the end of the decade, the friends published four short-lived journals. The first of these, *Philosophies*, for which the group is still known, was on Friedmann’s account, “a review whose tendencies were ‘epic, mystical, metaphysical.’” (Friedmann, *Journal de guerre*, 1939-1940, 26. The six issues of *Philosophies* appeared between March 1924 and March 1925.) *Philosophies* folded after only six issues, to be replaced by the shorter-lived *l’Ésprit*, which saw only two issues in May 1926 and January 1927 (Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co: A History of Psychoanalysis in France, 1925-1985*, 61.). Although “no member of the group adhered to Marxism” (ibid., 56.) by the time *l’Ésprit* closed down at the end 1926, “the adventurers joined the ranks of the Communist Party,” (ibid., 61.) and in turn founded a new publication project, “la société d’édition Les Revues,” in 1929. Continuing the quintet’s previous activities, the société published two short-lived journals: *la Revue de psychologie concrète* and *la Revue marxiste*. (Friedmann, *Journal de guerre*, 1939-1940, 26; see also footnotes 6 and 7.)

10 The group’s final attempt at publishing was again short-lived: both of the latter two journals were forced to cease publication for financial reasons, following the “tragico-bouffonne” events of the “roulette affair” (*Journal de guerre*, 1939-1940, 26, fn 9.) In 1929, Friedmann and Pierre Morhange lost a large portion of Friedmann’s inherited fortune, and thus the group’s funding, at the Monte-Carlo casino, to a con-artist claiming to be a fellow Marxist who would double their finances at the roulette table. Insisting that they wait outside because he could not properly concentrate with them present, the 27-year-old idealists never saw the man or Friedmann’s inheritance ever again. This absurd series of events remains the subject of speculation as to whether the man, “Spektor,” was a “run-of-the-mill swindler” or an agent of “the Parisian corridors of the Comintern.” For more details regarding “the affair,” its aftermath, and the subsequent history of its interpretation see Roudinesco, *Jacques Lacan & Co: A History of
course of the late 1920s, Friedmann’s lifework began in earnest at the opening of the new decade.

Around 1930, his focus became the first-hand study of labor and mechanization in both the socialist “east” and capitalist “west,” or what he refers to as “the technological adventure of human beings in the 20th Century:”

I did not become a farmer. I chose instead (or did I choose?) to try and understand the technological adventure of human beings in the 20th Century. Over the course of 30 years, the lover of nature and solitude instead took to halls populated by machines, construction sites, the docks, mineshafts, and thermal power stations for his field of study. I passed a large part of the years of my youth and maturity in fumes, dust, and dins; in the middle of the thronging crowds of the cities and suburbs of the East and West, in the industrial zones of the ‘Old,’ ‘New,’ and ‘Third’ worlds. What a path; how many thousands of kilometers I must have wandered for the sake of inquiries crude in comparison to the methods that researchers now have at their disposal!11

The physical or “exterior” ethnographic journeys described here constitute the substance and foundation of Friedmann’s life and research. But this brief passage also names the central object of that work, “the technological adventure of human beings in the 20th century.” And its “external” pursuit, through the ethnographic work that Friedmann began during this period, is the foundation of his desire to re-situate the “internal,” spiritual dimension within a constellation of moral, economic, and technological concerns.

The “Technological Adventure.” This foundational concept, the “technological adventure of human beings in the twentieth century,” he later specifies, “corresponds to the acceleration of technological progress in the past century,”12 although it does not simply denote

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11 Friedmann, La puissance et la sagesse, 32.
12 Ibid., 108. Indeed, in making this point he eloquently articulates one of the fundamental and recurring problems of any discussion of spiritual exercises. It is also interesting to note that Friedmann thought that the coming digital society, which he foresaw in the 1970s, would simply be an extension of industrialization—and, moreover, could not be separated from the industrial means and forms of labor which would produce, for example computers, mine the materials that constitute them, etc. This is why, at least on a certain reading, his insights remain relevant for us today: “We are still living in this age, and it is unclear when it will end;” (ibid.) or as he more succinctly puts it, “The game is not over.” (ibid., 109.)
the fact of the industrialized landscape and technological change. It also necessarily refers to the consequences of those transformations in the experiences of human beings living and working amidst social, economic, and technological change on a scale, at a pace, and in forms that had never before been seen. Thus, under this heading, Friedmann gathers all of the varied forms of labor, the mechanical innovations, forms of stress and satisfaction, the personal experiences of workers, the economic conditions which give rise to and shape all of these other factors, among the other practices, places, and experiences, too numerous to list, that populate his writings. And although Friedmann implicitly and explicitly develops the idea of the technological adventure over a lifetime, it is present as a motivating concern from the very beginning of this period:

“Interest in these problems, which have always seemed to me among the most important and disquieting of our epoch, concerning as they do humanity’s moral as well as its material future, had begun to engage my attention as early as 1930.”

**The Great Disequilibrium.** However, given the ways in which Friedmann talks about this “technological adventure,” it is possible to read the concept as something which names a problem. “Technological adventure,” however, is in fact a purely descriptive term, a technical phrase that carries no necessary political or ethical content. The danger, the problem, that Friedmann began to identify as early as the 1930s emerges from but is not synonymous with the Technological Adventure, and is referred to in *La puissance* (indeed, it is the title of the book’s first section) as “The Great Disequilibrium.” It is characterized “by the increasing disproportion between, on the one hand, the multitudinous forms of power that technological

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14 Indeed, to ascribe a negative valence to industrialization, mechanization, and technological change more broadly would be to profoundly misread Friedmann’s politics and political commitments, and thus set the stage for arguably more profound misinterpretations of his discussions of spiritual exercises, “the interior effort,” and their relationship to the “exterior,” material conditions in question.

progress confers on human beings, and on the other the moral forces that we have at our command to truly deploy them in the service of both the individual and society.”\textsuperscript{16} In other words, the Great Disequilibrium represents a kind of political, economic, and ethical “crisis of adaptation” to the radical changes that constitute the technological adventure. Among its effects are forms of what Friedmann calls a “dehumanization” and “de-spiritualization”\textsuperscript{17} that intersect the material and spiritual dimensions of life and work in the technological milieu.

The Great Disequilibrium is thus the name Friedmann gives to his diagnosis of the spiritual demands faced by subjects living, laboring, and dying within the economic and moral conditions constituting the technological adventure of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. And it is therefore determinative of both the telos of the “interior effort,” and the concrete forms any practices meant to respond to those needs must take. These concepts are thus foundational for understanding not only his interest in spiritual exercises, but his understanding of what they are and what they can do.

From the beginning of his sociological career, Friedmann was already beginning to draw a close connection between the Technological Adventure and the Great Disequilibrium, even at the stage preceding his ethnographic journeys. Through that connection, and in turn, he was also already articulating conclusions about the relationship between the “interior” and “exterior” effort—of ethical practices of the self to political life and work. Friedmann’s conception of that deep connection is reflected not only in the analyses he provides, but the thoroughgoing methods he undertook in their pursuit. The latter included undergoing preparatory forms of technical training in order to be able to talk in greater depth and detail with workers, managers, and engineers on his ethnographic journeys. For just one example, “In 1932-33, I passed through a

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 23.
\textsuperscript{17} See Friedmann, \textit{Industrial Society: The Emergence Of The Human Problems Of Automation}, 212.
rapid apprenticeship in machine-tools (lathe, shaping-machine, planing-machine, milling machine), an experience with machinery clearly indispensable in every respect.”¹⁸ Such training would lay the foundation for a methodological approach that would allow him to more accurately report, reflect, and analyze the experiences of laboring subjects. In this way, his description of Industrial Society: The Emergence of The Human Problems of Automation, one of his doctoral theses and most influential early work, can be taken as representative: “The facts employed here are almost exclusively direct testimony coming from workmen, foremen, engineers, and from the studies of industrial psychologists specializing in the human problems of industry, [of the latter,] frequently men who have themselves practiced the mechanized trades which they were studying.”¹⁹

The USSR. At the same time and to be sure, if Friedmann’s commitment to direct engagement with workers is reflective of methodological and ethical concerns, it is equally informed by the explicit political commitments with which he opens La puissance. All of these factors would mutually and reciprocally inform one another, and thus the larger trajectory it is my concern to chart here. A committed Marxist by 1930 and a fluent Russian speaker,²⁰ Friedmann made the first of several research trips to the Soviet Union from September-October of 1932.²¹ He returned to the USSR again in 1933 and 1936 to continue “his research into the organization of work in socialist countries and to facilitate further contacts…within Soviet}

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¹⁸ Ibid., 21.
¹⁹ Ibid. Or, as the editors of the English edition put it, “The fact that Professor Friedmann spent some years as a machine-tool apprentice serves to enhance the value of this broad intellectual perspective.” (ibid., 11.)
²⁰ Gourné, “‘Philosoviet’ Commitments and a Sociological Stance Between the Two World Wars: Georges Friedmann’s Political and Intellectual Role,” 359. Note that all translations from Gourné’s paper are my own. –DW
²¹ As Isabelle Gourné describes it, a result of his “repeated visits to the USSR and the ethnographic work that his mastery of Russian and political connections allowed him to conduct there, Friedmann became, within the universe of the French social sciences in the 1930s, one of the principle intermediaries with the USSR.” Gourné further argues that Friedmann’s position of intellectual “ferryman” between France and the USSR also allowed him to contribute directly to “the legitimation of Marxism in the French social sciences, even among Durkheimians who had proven resistant to the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels since the end of the 19th century.” (ibid., 360.)
intellectual circles.” This research would result in the publication of numerous studies over the course of the 1930s, including a comparative study of factory work in the USSR, France, England, Poland, and Czechoslovakia in 1934; as well as philosophically and methodologically seminal papers like “Machinisme et humanisme,” and “Travail et communion en U.R.R.S” in 1935. During this time, his research into labor and mechanization was supported in part by his involvement with numerous Marxist organizations, publications, and networks, both in France and abroad. Neither Friedmann’s relationship to Marxism nor to the Soviet project amounted, on any reading, to a simple armchair pastime.

Friedmann’s time in the USSR did not only color his relationship to the Soviet project, but his work and worldview on the whole. These visits would lay the groundwork for his later disenchantment with the Soviet State and with Stalin in particular—all while radically reinforcing his commitment to the ultimate of “socialism with a human face.” The editors of his Journal de Guerre note that “In August of 1936, Friedmann found himself in Moscow during the first of Stalin’s great show trials, the ‘Trial of the Sixteen,’ in which Kamenev and Zinoviev were implicated. All of the defendants were executed the day after judgement was passed. In La puissance et la sagesse, Friedmann describes this event as having been a ‘decisive shock.’”

The “Friedmann Affair.” Despite that shock, however, Friedmann, like many, remained hopeful for the future of the Soviet project, and to that end his research and engagement with the

22 Ibid., 359-60.
24 “Machinisme et humanisme,” Europe, no. 151 (June 1935).
26 This “Trial of the Sixteen” was held from 19-24 August 1936, and is also called ‘the Trial of the Trotskyite-Zinovievite Terrorist Center,’ not to be confused with the nearly-identically named “Trial of Sixteen” Polish military officers in 1945. (See La puissance et la sagesse, 249, footnote.)
27 Ibid., 249; 72, footnote; 362-63
28 Friedmann, Journal de guerre, 1939-1940, 60. See also La puissance et la sagesse, 249.
USSR culminated in the publication of *De la Sainte Russie à l’U.R.S.S.* (From Holy Russia to the USSR) in 1938. In his preface, Friedmann describes it as “a book intended to serve the Soviet Union and the construction of socialism, without ignoring the errors and lacunae that are inseparable from such an immense effort.”  In spite of these earnest intentions, the book caused a scandal within Communist circles in for its retrospectively mild discussions of the “errors and lacunae” of Soviet politics and culture in question. In the ensuing “affaire Friedmann,” and despite some support, Friedmann was abandoned and attacked by lifelong friends and former comrades, labeled a “Trotskyite apologist,” a “traitor,” and “class enemy,” among other repercussions. The affaire would lead to a decisive break with the PCF in 1938—“that was the end of my time as a ‘fellow traveler’”—though Friedmann would remain a committed Marxist and socialist for the rest of his life.

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29 *Journal de guerre, 1939-1940*, 56, fn, 1.
30 As he writes a year later in his *War Journals*, “There is an immense critical work to be done, a critique completely stripped of all passion, by people who know both Marxism and the USSR well. On what points and in which ways has the latter departed from the socialism of Marx and Engels. Only such a critique will allow us to draw real lessons from the Soviet experience.” (Ibid., 81.) Friedmann had taken himself to be doing just that work in *From Holy Russia*, and following not only the Affaire, but the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, he worried that such work would never be done, at least not in good faith, and not in his own lifetime.
32 “Recensions of the book appeared not only in Commune, the PCF’s cultural review, but in the political journals and organs as well (Cahiers du Bolchevisme, L’Humanité, Russie d’Aujourd’hui). This diversity of publications attests to the attention that Friedmann’s book drew from communist leadership, above all from Maurice Thorez, whose archives include an entire dossier on the episode.” (Gourné, “Philosoviet Commitments and a Sociological Stance Between the Two World Wars: Georges Friedmann's Political and Intellectual Role,” 368.)
33 Friedmann, *La puissance et la sagesse*, 272. See Friedmann’s full note here for a more detailed description of his relationship to the CPF from 1930-1936, and a first-person account of the “affair” following the publication of *De la Sainte Russie in* 1938.
34 On this point, Friedmann is adamant in several places, up until the end of his life: “Even today, at the height of a great ebb of dashed hopes, I in no way renounce the socialist project. To use the greatest possible reason and justice in the organization of society, the production and redistribution of goods, to reduce from the very beginning the inequality of the chances for goodwill and accomplishing oneself, to aid human beings (who must also aid themselves), to penetrate—according to one’s will and means—the universe of knowledge and beauty.” (Ibid., 280.)
The War Journals. In 1939, in the midst of the crisis around the publication of his book, France and Britain declared war on Germany, and another decisive experience began for Friedmann. In August of that year, Friedmann was “mobilized as a lieutenant, an administrative officer within the Health Service, assigned to the Hospital Complimentary Unit of Laon.”\(^\text{35}\) The HC was a kind of mobile hospital unit,\(^\text{36}\) and Friedmann would spend the next year surrounded by the sick and the dying as the HC made its way south and west through France, beginning at Laon on August 26, 1939, and ending at Gontaud on June 28, 1940. Friedmann’s journey through war and death is chronicled in his posthumously published *Journal de Guerre*.

The *Journal* is marked by concentric levels of reflection and observation: from observations of life during wartime, to a detailed description of the crisis of political and ethical faith provoked by the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact—signed just over a week before Friedmann’s first journal entry on September 6, 1939. Here again, the political comes to directly intersect with the “interior effort” for Friedmann. From the earliest entries, he describes the *Journal* as a form of “examination,” that is uncannily familiar in its form to those spiritual exercises described by Hadot. Where Friedmann’s “examination” is different, however, is its central focus on a spiritual self-evaluation prompted by the historical and political specificity of industrial automation and the future of state socialism. And if Molotov-Ribbentrop prompted a crisis of faith, Pétain’s capitulation roughly a year later left Friedmann apoplectic, despondent, and Stoic, in ways that would directly re-engage and re-double his “interior-exterior,” spiritual-political efforts.

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\(^{36}\) The editors of Friedmann’s journals describe the HC as follows: “Beginning in 1939, the mobile Hospital Complimentary Unit (HC) operated within the general organization of the health service, at an intermediate level between the ambulances (cf. notes on pp. 207 and 218) and the evacuation hospitals (cf. note 2, p. 218). They were either assigned to an army corps, or, as was the case for Friedmann, to a communications hub—in this case, a regulation station (temporary railroad stations used to dispatch men and goods to combat areas). The HC was comprised of six doctors (possibly including specialists), two pharmacists, two administrative officers, and 130 nurses. It had a mixed function, both surgical and medical, with a capacity of 500 to 700 beds.” (ibid., 37, fn 1.)
Following the French Armistice with Germany on June 22, 1940, Friedmann maintained his *Journal* for roughly another week, until the 28th, where the final entry cuts off abruptly. On June 24th 1940, he writes: “my emotions have been given over, since yesterday, to alterations of indignation, revolt, inspiration, sadness.” On that same day, he notes that “I…believed in this army, into which I was mobilized, and which I gave my full support (these notebooks carry the trace of that belief), right up until the disaster of the 15-17 of May. Following that, I have continued to do my duty, at my post, but without faith and without hope.” Friedmann would continue to do his duty for just a little while longer, until that duty shifted. Soon after these events, he “took refuge in Toulouse, in the unoccupied territory, the Pétainist portion of France; finally, he engaged himself in the Resistance, side by side with his friend Jean Cassou” beginning in 1940. During this time in Toulouse, through what he called “the somber winter of 1940-1941,” Friedmann would make a number of important acquaintances. Through Cassou, Friedmann first met Violette Chapellaubeau, her future husband, the influential philosopher and sociologist Edgar Morin, and her close friend Vladimir Jankélévitch. It was also during this time that Friedmann came to meet Swami Siddeswarananda (1879-1957) of the Ramakrishna Mission, through whom “India first crossed my path.”

Following the War, Friedmann was awarded the *Médaille de la Résistance*, with rosette. He received his *Doctorat d’état* in 1946, with a major thesis entitled *Les problèmes humains du...* 

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37 Ibid., 292.
38 Ibid., 290.
machinisme industriel, and a minor thesis on Leibniz et Spinoza. Although the minor thesis remains untranslated, the major thesis later appeared in English as Industrial Society: The Emergence of the Human Problems of Automation.44 It is considered a founding text in the French sociology of labor.

The entirety of Friedmann’s academic career, from the end of the war to his death in 1977, is far too extensive to summarize here. In all of that time however, as Edgar Morin says, “he never broke from his focus on human labor, and on the workers themselves.”45 The direct, engaged, and empirical approach that he adopted as early as 1930, and the ethical-political motivations which drove that method and his work overall, would remain very much consistent throughout his life. They are also the foundation and the heart of his interest in and concern with spiritual exercises, or what he calls the “interior effort.” And it is for that reason I have devoted such attention to these biographical details: Perhaps more so than any of the other thinkers I will engage here, we must understand Friedmann’s life in order to understand his thought. What remains now, in some sense the basic task of this chapter, is to understand just how the philosophy of the interior effort shapes and is shaped by the sociology and politics of the “exterior.”

I.ii. The Material Present

i. Over the course of La Puissance et la sagesse, Friedmann theorizes the potential efficacy of the previously ignored moral forces and “spiritual dimension” in this task of

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mitigating, and perhaps overturning, the dehumanization brought about by the Great Disequilibrium. And although the concepts that constitute his diagnosis of the spiritual demands that concern him are at least somewhat clear at this early juncture, the idea of what he calls this “spiritual dimension” meant to counter them remains vague at the outset of La puissance. This is in no small part of course because the specification of that category constitutes the task of the book as a whole, a text which both concerns itself with and stands as an example of the “interior effort.” And as a spiritual exercise itself, it is a book that is meant to be both open and honest, including those areas in which his thought is still unformed and vulnerable.

It is for this reason that Pierre Hadot was drawn to Friedmann’s work in La puissance, and why he would reference Friedmann’s invocation of spiritual exercises so frequently. But it is also here that Hadot and Friedmann begin to diverge, in at first subtle but ultimately important ways. Although Hadot’s broader project—and indeed his invocation of Friedmann—is motivated by the prescriptive goal of “offering contemporary mankind a model of life” fit to address “contemporary spiritual demands,” his exhaustive analyses stop just shy of the kind of “translation work” necessary to that goal. Hadot’s larger oeuvre does, however, demonstrate the necessity of that work, and in so doing provides a general sense of the necessary contours of such a project. In order to so much as describe properly contemporary spiritual exercises, fit to address properly contemporary spiritual demands, we must first define both the “contemporary” and the “ordinary” themselves. This is just one aspect of the foundational analyses required to move us from either the ancient to the contemporary, or from the specialist to the average practitioner. Hadot, on my reading, very clearly, demonstrates why such definitions are necessary, but ultimately leaves to others the work of providing a framework for understanding

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47 “Spiritual Exercises,” 81.
how spiritual exercises could be integrated into contemporary forms of life, or how to determine what properly contemporary spiritual exercises might look like.

Friedmann thus differs from Hadot, and in some sense can be said to pick up right where Hadot leaves off, in two ways that are central to this project as a whole, and the elaboration of which will constitute the substance of this chapter:

**The Present and the Ordinary.** First, Friedmann’s discussions of spiritual exercises and the “interior effort” are explicitly contemporary and primarily quotidian. Friedmann’s entire sociological and political oeuvre can be understood as a specification of the uniquely contemporary conditions in response to which his interest in spiritual exercises emerges. Texts like *La puissance et la sagesse* and *Industrial Society* are thus equally philosophically and methodologically representative of his work more generally. Despite the specific focus on spiritual exercises and the “interior effort,” *La puissance* remains a text which characteristically concerns itself with the conditions of labor, technological change, education, war, and so on, in the mid-20th century, as the necessary foundation upon which any discussion of the former is taken up. Similarly, *La puissance*, like *Industrial Society*, engages but does not center religious or philosophical specialists, but rather the “spiritual needs” of average workers living within the economic, technological, and political conditions that he describes. Within the context of his work, these two factors—the contemporary and the everyday—are in fact inextricably linked.

It is again for this reason that *La puissance*, and indeed Friedmann’s larger sociological output, can be read as detailed descriptions of the particular spiritual demands to which any such practices must effectively respond. They can therefore be read as a model for the kind of thoroughgoing analysis required for the specification of the particular forms that any practices of the self which seek to address those conditions must take. Friedmann thus allows us to address...
certain lacunae in the work of Hadot in ways that are both rich and precise. His work, therefore, also provides the next sure step in addressing the overall question of the politics of self-overcoming.

**A Political Telos.** Friedmann’s project is fundamentally and comprehensively political. Where we can very roughly situate Hadot’s concerns within the domain of ethics and philosophical accuracy, Friedmann’s interest in spiritual exercises is political from the outset. This is the second major way in which that concern is reflective of his overall sociological project, as it is motivated by his observations of the large-scale effects of systemic technological change on the lives of the masses of workers. As we have also seen, Hadot’s analyses focus on the spiritual exercises of specialist, and primarily ancient, philosophical practitioners. On this question of the role of spiritual exercises in the material and economic conditions of the 20th century, there is simply no parallel in Hadot’s work (nor even in Foucault’s for that matter) for this aspect of Friedmann’s. As he says at the outset of *La puissance*, Friedmann’s goal is to bring the “spiritual dimension” into alignment with the economic and political concerns characteristic of certain forms of contemporary Marxist discourse, a goal that is far afield of Hadot’s concerns.

This political concern also motivates his wariness regarding the charge of “spiritualism,” itself a political category for Friedmann, for at least three possible reasons: First, certain properly “spiritualist” views amount, as he says, to an abnegation of political responsibility. Even those forms of “contemplation” which would lay claim to an apolitical status, have political consequences despite their own self-understanding. Second, the effort to distance himself from spiritualism is also a way of specifying that he does not seek to reduce politics to “moralism,” understood as its political counterpart, or rather consequence. Friedmann seeks to establish, through the integration of the “interior effort” into an analysis of “exterior conditions,” a
structural politics that is not reducible to the mere aggregation of the ethical lives of individuals. Finally, a great deal of “spiritualist” doctrine is marked by a kind of nostalgia for romanticized and misrepresented forms of pre-modern or pre-industrial forms of life. This impulse runs directly counter to Friedmann’s ethical-political project, his Marxism, and his understanding of technological change more generally. We will return to the problem of nostalgia in great detail below.

Regarding the second problem however, that of moralism, as we will see in greater detail below, Friedmann also rejects the radical inverse of this moralism, the “naïve Marxism” he invokes above, in which the ethical lives of individuals are simply taken to be the byproducts either material conditions or political structures. While he does explicitly move away from what he calls the “quasi-exclusive privilege” he had given to “the ‘material’ dimension”—what he will call the “exterior”—he in no way rejects the importance of those conditions. The goal, rather, is to situate a political philosophy of spiritual exercises somewhere between the extremes of moralism and material-economic determinism.

However, Friedmann is in no way out to find a “perfect balance” at the center of the two: If Friedmann is no conservative, he is certainly no moderate or liberal either. Rather, his goal is to offer an ethical corrective, a re-balancing, from the inside of—and squarely on the side of—a resolutely leftist critique of the effects of rapid technological change under both Western capitalist modes of production and Soviet forms which have lost sight of certain Marxist first principles. His goal, after all, as he states at the outset of La puissance is “socialism with a human face” not liberalism. Friedmann may have abandoned his naivety, but never his Marxism; he thus seeks to offer an ethical corrective within that framework.
It is in part for this reason that Friedmann’s political critique is already implicated in the ethical critique. The distinction between the “spiritual” and “spiritualism” is for him a political distinction, in that, on his view, it has political consequences. It is among my goals in this chapter to both explicate and develop this distinction as expressed by Friedmann. Insofar as it is ultimately a question of differing models of the relationship of ethics to politics, it will fundamentally contribute to the theoretical model constitutive of the broader set of investigations that make up my overall project here. But it is also here that we must be both extremely careful and extremely clear: we cannot conflate the ethical and political critiques, we cannot assimilate these concepts to one another, and we cannot simply assume that a critique of the ethical status of egoist spiritualism is itself already or necessarily a political critique. We may, after all, quite easily criticize “retreat” on purely ethical grounds, without engaging its consequences on the level of the political lives of groups and systems. Moreover, it is after all possible to formulate a conception that posits a sharp distinction between these two domains, and in which, therefore, there are no political consequences for ethical choices and actions.

I insist on this distinction, or rather the possibility of such a distinction, in order to highlight the fact that Friedmann himself does not distinguish them, and indeed sees them as intimately linked. We cannot understand what is interesting or special about either the fact that he links the domains of ethics and politics, or the way in which he does so, without understanding that it is entirely possible not to. And so it is not simply a question of identifying the fact that, for him, individual ethical retreat has social-political consequences. Rather, it is an issue of specifying the precise ways in which he conceives of that relationship, the reasons why ethical action has political consequences, and vice versa. Perhaps above all, in order to argue that the way in which he links these two domains does not amount to what I have already referred to
as the mere reduction of political life to individual ethical action in aggregation, it is important to see that this linkage is on his part an intentional one, rather than an uncritical or naïve assumption.

I.iii. Chapter Overview.

This chapter, then, will centrally concern itself with specifying Friedmann’s place in the development of those fundamental questions. Of the figures that I will address in this project, I believe that Friedmann provides the most robust and detailed model for the specification and analysis of “contemporary spiritual demands.” In a sense, Friedmann picks up where Hadot leaves off, and begins to provide the resources needed for addressing the questions with which the previous chapter concludes. Friedmann does not just argue that contemporary spiritual exercises must explicitly respond to contemporary spiritual demands. Rather, he demonstrates both why they must, and models the kind of work that must be done to understand just what those demands might be in a given case.

Further, his empirical, sociological analyses of “the technological adventure of human beings in the 20th century” and the “great disequilibrium” which emerges from it, provide an effective model for determining the spiritual demands particular to a given time and place. As I have already argued, this kind of groundwork is necessary in order to determine both how spiritual exercises could be integrated into contemporary life, and in turn the forms they would need to take in order to respond to the spiritual demands that emerge from the distinctive—rather than universal—aspects of that life. Even if the details, the precise definition of the “contemporary” in his work remain particular to Friedmann and to the West in the mid-20th century, the methodological model his work provides and principles upon which he pursues his
investigations are the most robust of all of the thinkers discussed here. Indeed, his “history of the present” may perhaps be more explicitly “present” than even that of Foucault.

However, in order to understand the ways in which this project can be generalized and integrated into a broader model for understanding the category of practices of self-overcoming, we will need a more precise understanding of the ways in which these and other aspects of that project fit together. Specifically, on the model that began to emerge in the previous chapter, we will need a much more robust and detailed sense of the diagnosis that Friedmann provides of the contemporary spiritual demands that emerge from the great disequilibrium and rapid pace of technological change. This will in turn allow us to understand whether, and if so how, Friedmann formulates a specific telos, a set of ideal principles, in response to those conditions. Finally, this larger dynamic will provide the foundation necessary for understanding exactly how the “spiritual dimension,” spiritual exercises, or the “interior effort” fit into Friedmann’s larger project, and above all, the ways in which their concrete iterations are shaped by the conditions in question.

II. From the “Technological Adventure” to the “Great Disequilibrium.”

II.i. The Technological Adventure of Human Beings in the 20th Century.

“The technological adventure of human beings in the 20th century” is the general name Friedmann gives to the object of his research, from the beginning of the 1930s until the end of his life. Even in the many cases in which the term itself is not explicitly invoked, it remains consistently and visibly present throughout Friedmann’s sociological, philosophical, and personal writings. It is a phrase that specifies something that is at once incredibly precise and incredibly broad. It denotes the radical and ubiquitous technological changes specific to the
early- and mid-twentieth century in the industrialized and industrializing countries of the 
socialist “East” and capitalist “West.” It further refers to the ways in which the penetration of 
these new technologies into all aspects of life, work, and leisure affect what Friedmann calls 
“human relations”\[48\] in general.

Friedmann argues that the changes that define the Technological Adventure are 
historically unique in both form and degree: the specific technologies themselves, the rapidity of 
their creation and dissemination, and the extent of their effect had never been seen before: 
“Human beings are now subjected to thousands of stresses, excitations, and stimulations never 
before known or seen. Every day, the ensemble of these technologies create, arrange, and further 
deepen, what I generally refer to as the new milieu.”\[49\] For Friedmann, this is not simply a formal 
observation, one that could be grafted onto any time and place. It is an affirmation that the 
specific content of that change matters, as it is wholly unlike any previous upheaval. This 
does not mean that past technological and social revolutions were not comparably dramatic, but that 
this specific “adventure” entails its own wholly unique challenges. It is not just that the world 
Friedmann finds himself thrown into is new—the world, after all, is always being made “new”—
but that it is “new in new ways,” and that he is able to observe technical, social, and 
environmental changes that had never before been possible.

This thread is ubiquitous throughout his oeuvre. In the early and representative article 
“Man and the Natural Milieu” Friedmann devotes several successive paragraphs to short but 
effective overviews of the changes brought about by a range of new industrial technologies. This 
“ensemble,” which includes railroads, automobiles, airplanes, telephones and telegraphs, and

\[48\] Georges Friedmann, “L’homme et le milieu naturel: panorama du nouveau milieu,” in Annales d’histoire sociale 
(1945), Hommages à Marc Bloch II (1945) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), 104.
\[49\] Ibid., 105.
nascent household technologies,50 “has transformed and continues, every day, to transform the conditions of human existence.”51 Within and beyond the workplace, “At every moment, life is further penetrated: it is a vast phenomenon which will not cease to advance, to further integrate itself into new areas of the life of work, home, the street, and leisure.”52 And the worker, departing the factory at the end of his shift, “barely steps away from industrial mechanization when he is seized by the mechanization of transportation and leisure.”53

The same is true for the agricultural worker and for rural life more generally. Indeed, the explicit goal of this short piece is to provide concrete observational data on the ways in which life and work are changing across rural France. Here he seeks to both identify and begin to fill in important gaps in contemporary sociological understandings of the place of mechanization in agriculture.54 The Technological Adventure is thus not limited to certain geographic locations, cultures, or forms of work. Nor is it limited by time: “Along with the hours absorbed by productive work, machines have penetrated every second of the day, and even sometimes, in the great urban centers, the heart of the night as well.”55

Despite its early date, “Man and the Natural Milieu” is very much representative of Friedmann’s broad sociological oeuvre. It also demonstrates the empirical origins of Friedmann’s central concerns, including the idea of the Technological Adventure. But these concerns are not limited to his sociological researches, and appear as well as an equally powerful thread in the more philosophical and personal writings. Indeed, over the course of 1939, the same

50 Ibid., 103-04. (His remarks on the mechanization of leisure time on page 104 on are particularly interesting.)
51 Ibid., 105.
52 Ibid.
53 Ibid. In this particular example, the worker in question is “Paul,” one of the ethnographic subjects of this study.
54 See ibid., 103.
55 Ibid. Note that while full electrification had not yet reached rural France (the location of this particular study), Friedmann does not see that as being far off, and the paper is focused specifically on the ways in which new technological forms have penetrated rural life and work.
year that this article was published, Friedmann would experience a very different but in fact commensurate incarnation of the technological adventure, recorded in great detail in his *Journal de guerre*. And despite the thematic diversity of the *Journal’s* widely ranging entries, Friedmann’s sensitivity to that dynamic is perhaps best seen in the passages that describe life and work in the HC.

Take, for example, his third entry, dated 10 September 1939, which is already representative of life in the hospital unit over the course of the next year:

> Since my arrival here, in the course of helping to prepare this HC (six hundred beds), the talk has been almost exclusively devoted to the means of combatting the effects of these new technologies of death. They have progressed in leaps from the landmines that have already so effectively served to populate our cemeteries: new gases, incendiary “Elektron” bombs, air power, these concrete and metallic “lines” upon which thousands of young lives will be shattered. This fury has never yet ceased. Humanity is still so far from the moment on which we will become fully human.\(^{56}\)

Here, he identifies both the presence and effects of “new technologies of death,” as well as the endless work done to so much as learn how to mitigate their effects. It is against this backdrop that, roughly a week later, Friedmann soberly remarks, “I have known since this morning that we will be here for a long time—excepting those who will disappear before the end—for a very long time. This HC, which we have established, will see days filled with sadness, with wounded and poisoned flesh.”\(^{57}\)

But what Friedmann sees in the HC is *not only* death and injury, as they are brought about in ways that have never before been seen. Rather, the effects, the human wages, of these new forms inscribe themselves in places beyond the bodies of soldiers and the work of medical staff. They *also* give rise to an endless need to adapt or discard old medical practices, all while creating new ones, in order to develop and deploy new methods capable of addressing these new

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\(^{57}\) Ibid., 49; entry of 18 September 1939.
and unique forms of harm. Forms that are, in the very midst of the war, undergoing constant shifts and refinements: “The Germans have invented new engines, magnetic mines, etc. Le Matin wrote this morning that we must respond to them, we cannot indulge in a lazy optimism; to which they added, ‘The war is a continuous creation.’” 58

**Forms of Change.** The Journal, however, does not simply reinforce or reiterate the descriptions and analyses of the Technological Adventure that populate his sociological writings. It also provides deeper insight into the nature of radical change and transformation, as Friedmann understands them. Indeed, this material presents an opportunity for deeper theoretical reflection on the nature of social and technical change because the dire immediacy of the circumstances in some sense demanded it of Friedmann. It is in those passages devoted not to his work, but to the landscape at the front, in which Friedmann’s conception of radical change is perhaps best expressed, and which provide the best occasion for a deeper understanding of the ways in which past and present are linked within the radical newness of Technological Adventure.

In two early Journal entries, Friedmann documents the experience of traveling through the French countryside in order to retrieve supplies. In these missions, they would often pass several of the same cemeteries and monuments, all barely a generation old, dating from the First World War:

10 Sept. 1939
Coste59 and I went to Reims by way of the national route: materials to recover, a lot of items “missing” from the bundles that we received. Raids at the Reims depots, complicating our ability to get the requisitioned goods….
Traveling, back and forth, through all of these villages, shores, hills, and forts whose names I had read so often in my youth,60 in the reports of the previous war. Our driver, T., a farmer in the area, knows every last detail of the local terrain. Here, a group of fighter planes was destroyed by a nest of machine guns; there, an enormous, monstrous, and jagged-edged crater, recalls the two companies who fell upon a German mine in 1916; and along the route, here and there and there again, the great fields planted with neatly arranged

58 Ibid., 103; entry of 23 November 1939.
59 Dr. Fluerent Coste; see the biographical note in ibid., 39. Friedmann spent a great deal of time with Coste during this period of the war.
60 Friedmann was around 12 when Germany declared war on France in 1914.
crosses, draped with flags—the black and white crosses of enemies now so close; the monument to those killed in the tank bridages, those killed by trench mortars, the monument to riflemen. All of these names, which had until now only been names to me, now swell with images: Craonne, Berry-au-Bac, le Chemin des Dames. I want to hold myself back from considering this conflict from too great a universal perspective (sub specie aeternitatis), because although I (happily) find myself defending incontestable values and principles, in spite of all of their faults, I see the regimes and institutions of France and Britain with clear eyes. Nevertheless, how could I, returning from this ‘excursion,’ stop myself from thinking that 25 years later, humanity is yet again gripped by a new fury again itself? It is a truth that explains so many things: that fury never ceased. It was incubating.\textsuperscript{61}

Roughly a month later, Friedmann again passed by some of the same monuments:

4 October 1939
We are still making our way to Reims, through the long, narrow passes made up of cemeteries, mine craters, landscapes stripped and all the more sinister in the grey autumn morning. Here is a monument to the dead from the tank brigades, then the infantry, and the cemetery for marine riflemen; here again the famous mine that devoured an entire brigade; and there a battalion of territoriaux\textsuperscript{62} who were killed on sight.

And here, once again, armies crawl across this dreadful landscape; the enormous machine of war has been stirred awake and made ready. We are here, and there, and among the occupants of this vehicle, I am the only one who was not here the last time…The car continues to travers kilometers of these landscapes. I let myself go, the sadness is too powerful for me to respond to it: feeling of the uselessness of all of this, horror at both institutions and passions which, after a quarter-century, will reproduce and renew, worsen the destruction and increase the slaughter.\textsuperscript{63}

We see in passages like this a subtle, perhaps gentle, though striking awareness of a series of contrasts, the familiar, perhaps eternal, “machine of war,” and its new iterations. In this way, we also glimpse the concentric layers through which Friedmann’s insight passes. The remnants of the last war dot the countryside, and its technological legacy visible each day in the HC. And yet, in being so visible, Friedmann is able to clearly gauge the changes that have come about since then, in wholly new forms of warfare. Each day, he witnesses the effects of technologies which both emerged from and far outstrip their forebears. And they do so in concentric layers that were not lost on Friedmann. Indeed, these observations are important because they allow us to further specify his understanding of the nature of the technological

\textsuperscript{62} “Régiment d’infanterie territorial”
\textsuperscript{63} Friedmann, \textit{Journal de guerre, 1939-1940}, 65.
change that constitutes the technological adventure—with an emphasis, however subtle, on the dynamics of change specifically.

In Journal entries like these, Friedmann is wholly aware of his place in a tragically ahistorical human experience—a fury that “never ceased,” but was instead “incubating,” and which, it seems, will always return. And yet, it was known even at the time, and certainly by an expert in machine culture like Friedmann, that the First World War had been in many ways a wholly new experience. The “famous mine that devoured an entire brigade,” or the chemical agents which had populated so many of the graves in question, were as much proper citizens of the twentieth century as Friedmann himself—even as such technologies had origins in 19th century conflicts, from the American Civil War to the suppression of colonial subjects by the European powers.

Friedmann understood that these techniques could at once have roots in the past and perform wholly new feats of destruction in the present. Indeed, he saw the present conflict in precisely this way: as a force that had not only reproduced but renewed itself, as a “continuous creation.” It had done so to destructive ends that had never before been seen—even as they clearly and recognizably emerge from a familiar recent past and take part in an unfortunately universal human experience. This “renewal” is thus representative of the technological adventure of human beings in the 20th century for Friedmann, not simply because it is constituted by the introduction and use of new machines, but because their devastating novelty results in a crisis of adaptation. It is precisely this feature of the Technological Adventure that gives rise to the spiritual-political condition that Friedmann calls the Great Disequilibrium.

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64 Ibid., 103; entry of 23 November 1939.
II.ii. The Great Disequilibrium.

If “the technological adventure of human beings in the 20th century” is the name Friedmann gives to the central object of his sociological research, the “Great Disequilibrium” is the name for the constellation of contemporary spiritual demands that Friedmann sets out to diagnose and address, arguably across all of his writings. These are in fact the very demands of which Hadot poses the question of the potential role of the spiritual exercises of Greco-Roman antiquity. Much like the technological adventure, the constellation of symptoms that comprise “Great Disequilibrium” are already visible in Friedmann’s earliest work. Whether explicitly named or not, the Disequilibrium is especially present in his studies of mechanization, automation, and the effects of rapid technological change on “human relations” in the 20th century and their resulting dehumanization.

Again, the Great Disequilibrium is not defined by that technological change itself, but by the crisis of failing to adapt to those changes, and its effects on the inextricably linked spiritual and material well-being of the human subjects caught up in it. As he puts it in the Preface to the American edition of Industrial Society:

“It is evident that, among the ills from which humanity suffers in the 20th century, one of the most serious is the lack of understanding of the structure and effects of the new environment into which men have been plunged during the last century and a half by the rapid development of a technical civilization….The destiny of machine civilization, born of the application of science to society, everywhere provokes uneasy speculation, exacerbated by the material and moral chaos into which humanity has been plunged by two world wars.65

Here and elsewhere, Friedmann already speaks of the disequilibrium in terms of a material ill, one with “moral” consequences and “spiritual” wages. But Friedmann does not simply seek to diagnose the disease: his work, like all medical research, is carried out in the service of discovering and implementing a healing regimen. Thus, “The problems of mechanization must

be grasped where they arise, observed and even experienced in their true nature. The various
sciences from which they derive must be studied in order to judge the evils, and to define the
remedies (if such exist) and the conditions under which the latter may operate.” If ever there
was an apt description of what Friedmann sets out to do in general, this is it.

II.ii.a. Labor and Dehumanization

The imbalance, the crisis of adaptation, that defines the Disequilibrium is first and above
all by what Friedmann refers to as the dehumanization of workers and, as a consequence,
everyone. *Industrial Society* is perhaps Friedmann’s most thoroughgoing work on these
questions, and its conclusions are representative of his views even toward the end of his life. The
text is blunt and unambiguous in its views, and Friedmann’s concerns are readily apparent from
the very chapter and heading titles: “Fatigue,” “The Working Environment”—which includes
sub-sections on the problems of “Temperature, Humidity, and Ventilation,” “Light,” and
“Noise and Vibration”—“Accidents,” “Problems of Monotony,” and so on. These sections
describe, in almost excruciating detail, the precise ways in which all of these conditions bring
about the forms of dehumanization particular to the Great Disequilibrium. He describes the
phenomenon known as “industrial fatigue,” and the “stupefying” effects of noise on the
factory floor in comparable detail. On the descriptions of the workers themselves that Friedmann

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66 Ibid., 19.
67 Ibid., 77 (Part One, Chapter III).
68 Ibid., 93 (Part One, Chapter IV).
69 Ibid., 93.
70 Ibid., 94.
71 Ibid., 97.
72 Ibid., 108 (Part One, Chapter VI).
73 Ibid., 129 (Part Two, Chapter I).
74 See ibid., 84-85.
75 See ibid., 100.
speaks with, all of these factors and conditions serve to reduce human beings to mere machine, and they are but a handful of the factors in the constellation of potentially dehumanizing features of life and work on the factory floor.

These are just a few examples of an enormous and complex constellation of conditions and effects that Friedmann analyzes. Indeed, his writings are dotted with examples of “the worker in mass-production workshops” who appears as “a raw material in the midst of other raw materials,” and for whom “the agonizing problems of the dehumanization of labor” are a central feature of daily life.\textsuperscript{76} They should, for that reason, suffice for providing a general understanding the concrete forms of dehumanization that concerned Friedmann, as there is no space or need here for a detailed rehearsal of the full breadth of his sociological and historical observations of the spiritual-material building blocks of the Great Disequilibrium.

**Scientific Management.** However, part of the ongoing diagnosis of the Great Disequilibrium in Friedmann’s sociological oeuvre consists in the analysis not only of industrial conditions themselves, but in the already existing attempts to adapt to new industrial transformations. Indeed, over the course of *Industrial Society*, Friedmann exhaustively details the intersections of the work itself with the overarching theories and practices of “rationalization” which marked industry from the end of the nineteenth- to the first half of the twentieth-century.\textsuperscript{77} In fact, some of the clearest examples of the reproduction and amplification of the Disequilibrium are to be found in the system of “scientific management,” whose then-ubiquitous dominant form was developed by the mechanical engineer F.W. Taylor, which Friedmann identified as a root cause of so much of the misery he observed throughout his life.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{77} See ibid., 30.
\textsuperscript{78} See ibid., 37, 261, 74.
Despite Taylor’s ambitions of bringing “harmony, not discord”\textsuperscript{79} through the “the application of science to industry,” or “mathematics applied to the organization of industrial labor,”\textsuperscript{80} the most efficiently-produced byproduct of the system seemed to be the misery of workers laboring in industrial conditions that were already inherently dangerous. Part of the problem, as one critic put it, was the fact that “‘Taylor was first of all an engineer; he knew the mechanism of the lifeless machine but not that of the living motor.’”\textsuperscript{81} Thus, “The increased productivity sought by Taylorism is obtained less by rationalization than by intensification of work. The performances achieved by exceptional workers are, with very slight reductions, demanded of the mass of their comrades with no guarantee that the latter can maintain this effort for any length of time.”\textsuperscript{82} Simply put, “The very expression, ‘human motor’…suggested some confusion with certain tendencies of Scientific Management. In the industrial worker the latter had seen primarily the motor and very little of the human.”\textsuperscript{83} Taylor’s triumph is of course only rivaled by that of Henry Ford, who notably “congratulates himself on the fact that the new technical means have ‘eliminated human art from this operation.’”\textsuperscript{84}

Friedmann’s critiques of Taylorism’s claims to the status of a science are as thorough as they are withering, if at times subtle, throughout \textit{Industrial Society} and elsewhere. Suffice it to say that, as Friedmann so dryly puts it, “‘the science of machine labor’ perfected by Taylor was in any case, apart from any other assessment of it, not winning the approval and gratitude of those whom it directly concerned and to whom it claimed to bring easier work and financial satisfaction.’”\textsuperscript{85} Or in the more blunt words of the American Federation of Labor, “‘the inhuman

\textsuperscript{79} Taylor, \textit{Principles of Scientific Management (140)}, in ibid., 41.  
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 40.  
\textsuperscript{81} Atzler, in ibid., 54-55.  
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 55.  
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 67.  
\textsuperscript{84} Ibid., 201.  
\textsuperscript{85} Ibid., 43.
and hideous system’ called Taylorism after its inventor ‘reduces human beings to the condition of mere machines.’”86 Others simply referred to Taylorism as “organized overwork,”87 which produced nothing more than “the loss of all initiative in the worker who was turned into an automaton and a moron by the Taylor system.”88

But while Friedmann levels these criticisms at Taylorism specifically, he does so because the latter is representative of the field of “scientific management.” He thereby also takes these concerns to reflect the situation within the entire field of automated industrial labor: apply equally to the Fordist factory and comparable systems in the USSR. Thus any attempts, Taylorist or otherwise, to “rationalize” industrial labor will only exacerbate the Great Disequilibrium, by pushing workers further toward the status of machine, and further from their humanity.

II.ii.b. The Milieu and the Cycle of Adaptation.

The forms of dehumanization that emerge directly from machine-labor are symptoms of the Great Disequilibrium, and are indeed constitutive of it. But so are the attempts by forms of scientific management to adapt labor to the conditions in question, thus contributing to and reinforcing that condition. Scientific Management is, in itself, an attempt to adapt to the new industrial circumstances, and in failing, only exacerbates the Disequilibrium brought about by those circumstances. They are in the last analysis just different aspects of the same cycle of imbalance, the same crisis of adaptation. In this way, Friedmann’s criticism of Fordism and Taylorism are illustrative of the cascade effect produced by the Disequilibrium: a set of

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86 Ibid., 262.
87 In Germany, one Dr. Sachs published an article in 1913, criticizing Taylorism “in terms which strikingly recall those of the militant members of the French General Federation of Labor (CGT), which had just then accused Taylorism of being ‘organized overwork.’” (ibid., 42.) Another critic, Lahy, “observed as far back as 1916” that “scientific management is a constant appeal to overwork.” (ibid., 53.)
88 Ibid., 43.
conditions arise that are already disruptive in themselves, and the forms of organization emerge in response to those conditions only exacerbate that imbalance.

There is, on Friedmann’s understanding, a reason for this. In *Industrial Society*, Friedmann argues that “The determining laws of an epoch sweep along the most powerful individuals in spite of themselves.” Or as he says in “Man and the Natural Milieu:”

> “Human beings are not the same, we do not feel, behave, or think the same according to the epochs of our history, to the environment within which we live, and the technologies at our disposal….In an ancient adventure in which causes and effects jumble together and reciprocally condition one another, human beings condition our environment, and through our environment, we modify ourselves, set forth toward new transformations. There is no continuity in this march, nothing unilinear; civilizations are born and die. Some stagnate, far from the techniques discovered by other human groups. They pursue their destiny without knowing others, […] that which, today, has become nearly impossible: technological civilization, by the prodigious means of diffusion at its disposal, is in some sense totalizing. […] The mentality of individuals in a human group is inseparable from the total ensemble of the conditions of existence particular to the state of knowledge, technology, and language available to them, and through which they express themselves. Today, the most logical thought is maintained, in its vocabulary and syntax, even for those minds that are the least permeable to scientific things, by the machinery that rational thought has been able to develop for almost the past three centuries.”

Friedmann’s assessment is rooted in an understanding of the reciprocal relationship between the effect of human labor upon our (built or natural) environment, and the subsequent impact of those changes and that work back upon us. In other words, when we labor upon our world, we labor upon ourselves.

The problem then is that the radical content and pace of technological change have unbalanced the cycle of change and adaptation to those changes:

> With the emergence of technological civilization, our environment has begun to constantly and profoundly evolve: a torrent of technological changes, world wars and social wars, the fever of everyday life. No possibility has the chance to truly clear a new path, or to fix itself in a stable set of behaviors—in instinct. The stimulations which issue from the technical milieu multiply themselves in a way that is superabundant, disordered, and chaotic. We can say the same thing for the reactions which correspond to them within the individual, on the level of sensibility and action. What had constituted the principal fabric of our psychic lives, in the natural milieu, has been diminished or even disappeared without having (not yet anyway) been replaced.

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89 Ibid., 31.
91 *La puissance et la sagesse*, 41.
It is for this reason that Friedmann is not only concerned with the exponential pace of technological change, but the political, social, and psychological effects of our ceaseless and fruitless attempts to adapt to it. Indeed, it is the inexorable feedback-loop of the effect that our labor has on the very conditions under which we subsequently labor that is now marked by imbalance, and which has produced the condition diagnosed as the Great Disequilibrium. Thus our failure to adapt—and to so much as know how to adapt—to the Technological Adventure of the 20th-century results in a disequilibrium between “the power and non-control of technology, and the debility of moral forces,”92 specifically the forces necessary for us to control the products of our labor and prevent them from controlling us.

The overwhelming nature of the technological change which we ourselves have brought about has caused us to lose control over both our own works and the conditions under which they are produced. It is for this reason that he devotes dozens and dozens of pages of La puissance to innumerable examples of what he simply calls “The Power of Things over human beings,”93 which can be anything from the privileged example of nuclear weapons,94 to automobiles,95 to the effects of all of these technologies on human biology96 and psychology, to any of the other “technological horrors” personally witnessed or reported to him during the war, in the post-war West, in the Soviet Union, and so on.97 He also refers to this compromised situation under the

92 Ibid., 65.
93 Ibid., 44.
94 “The most convincing proof of the Power of Things over human beings today is to be found in our attitude with regard to the nuclear menace.” (ibid.)
95 See ibid., 59-60.
96 “The progress of scientific and technical knowledge (each so effected by the other) has brought about for us, as living organisms, a number of consequences, though there is no need to enumerate them all here. I will content myself to highlight the variety of biological transformations which can be observed in the new milieu of industrialized societies.” (ibid., 39, emphasis added.) He then goes on to speak about birth and death rates, infant mortality, life expectancy, changes in age of puberty and menopause—all phenomena which are, tellingly, either identical to or reminiscent of those which Foucault inscribes within the concept of biopolitics.
97 See ibid., 48-49.
general heading of “man inferior to his works,”98 which corresponds with the spiritual political telos he identifies in one of the final sections of La puissance: “man superior to his works.”99

However, it must be just as clear that Friedmann’s understanding of the relationship of human beings, our subjectivity, to the technological and natural milieu, and what I have called the “cycle of adaptation” that is necessarily tied to it, is still a neutral analytic category:

Human beings change. Our manner of thinking is no less variable, relative, tied to the ensemble of conditions of a civilization than our manner of sensing and perceiving. The logical processes of thinking among the contemporaries of Luther are not the same as those who visit the cinema or fly in airplanes. The natural environment which dominated Western Europe since the 16th century had a concurrent mentality, different from that of the inhabitants of the new milieu.100

For Friedmann, this claim has no necessarily political or ethical content either way. Indeed, the formal role of these insights is more akin to that of the Technological Adventure than the Great Disequilibrium, which again emerges from but is not synonymous with the former.

I emphasize this neutrality because it is at once the cause of the Great Disequilibrium and the condition of the possibility of its spiritual-political resolution: “I do not believe, and I emphasize this here in order to avoid any misunderstanding, in an immutable human nature. In dominating the environment that we are given, human beings are able, reciprocally, to aid in our own transformations, our ascent towards our own heights—our humanization.”101 This view at once gives Friedmann a causal explanation for the physical and spiritual misery he has observed from the trenches of the Second World War to the “machine halls and mineshafts of East and West,” and give him hope for the future. It is only insofar as a relationship such as this is a source of certain problems that it can also be a means of remedying them.

98 Ibid., 39.
99 Ibid., 406. Indeed, “Man superior to his works” is the title of section VII. of Part 5, “Élever la voix,” of La puissance et la sagesse.
101 La puissance et la sagesse, 42.
The question now becomes, in turn, just what the treatment might look like—and perhaps more importantly, why Friedmann comes to believe that “spiritual exercise,” and the “interior effort” are necessary and integral to the process of humanization that he hints can counter the Great Disequilibrium. As Friedmann himself concisely puts it in La puissance, “Can we suppress, or at least reduce, the Disequilibrium which thus results for human beings? And if so, by what means? These are some of the questions to which this book will attempt to respond.”\(^\text{102}\)

But very much like the question of spiritualism—indeed, tied directly to it—in order to understand what Friedmann’s view looks like, as well as the reasons for which he comes to hold it, we must also understand just what his vision necessarily excludes.

### II.iii. The Futility of Nostalgia

The dehumanizing effects of labor under the Great Disequilibrium are sometimes accompanied by, though analytically distinct from, what Friedmann refers to as the de-spiritualization of work. The great systems of “rationalization,” whether Fordist, Taylorist, or otherwise, were at the time predictably exacerbating that phenomenon: “Unfortunately, the trend of rationalized labor towards ‘despiritualization’ (Entseelung) takes a totally different course.”\(^\text{103}\)

Where “dehumanization” roughly refers to the assimilation of the human being to a kind of machine, de-spiritualization refers to something slightly more precise, though they are closely related. Friedmann’s usage, de-spiritualization refers to a kind of disconnection of the worker from his work, in which the machine becomes something other than an extension of the worker’s body and subjectivity. The machine, the tool, becomes something that stands between human

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\(^{102}\) Ibid., 23. We can in some sense read *La puissance* as Friedmann’s final attempt to answer the positive political and ethical questions his concrete sociological research had been posing to him his entire life.

\(^{103}\) Friedmann, *Industrial Society: The Emergence Of The Human Problems Of Automation*, 212.
beings and the objects of their labor: “In de-spiritualized work, the close bond between the worker and the task is loosened, sometimes even broken.”

In practice, de-spiritualization codes the historical shift from artisanal work to automated labor. On the model of artisanship,

Between human beings and the elements, nothing seems to interpose: it is close to them, things or beings, animals, tools, wind, land. The carpenter conceives and executes, plane in hand, sculpts, sands, varnishes, and finishes his work, all while, in so doing, debating with himself the merits of his own practice. Nothing separates him from his material, his work. Taking his tool in hand, his hand is extended, he knows it, adapts it, fashions it to his grasp. The tool is an extension of his body, his skill, and his art.

This kind of labor, in other words, “requires that man be present to his work. The work itself is still coextensive with human motion, technical efficacy with tools.” Now, although it is entirely possible to take these descriptions as merely romantic hindsight, the experience of de-spiritualization on the part of workers is born out in the first-hand testimonies Friedmann reports: “Another worker, Watson, an old mechanic, reproaches Taylorism especially with having taken from the worker the responsibility for his tools, and his machine.”

The problem, however, with the discourse of “de-spiritualization,” tied as it is to a certain, perhaps romantic, understanding of artisanal labor, is that for this very reason, it is easy and intuitive to link a notion of “spiritualized” work directly and necessarily to certain specific forms of labor. And to be clear, Friedmann does very clearly believe that artisanal labor is characterized by a “spiritualization” that was being lost: “Mechanization has once more deepened the opposition between work and culture, which, in certain of his activities, the medieval artisan had reconciled. The ascendency of the community over the individual has

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104 Ibid., 390. The question of the relationship of this concept to Marx’s notion of alienation is far too complex to address here, and must be set aside for future study.
106 Ibid., 114.
apparently strengthened these contradictions.”

Friedmann is, to his credit, aware of the distinction, and clearly works to avoid conflating the two. The problem is that such a reading can and has (more often than not) led directly to a nostalgia for “the world which immediately preceded the technological civilization,” medieval artisanship, and indeed “non-technological” forms of life more generally. In other words: a romantic nostalgia for forms of life and ways of working that either no longer exist or never actually existed as they are currently imagined in the first place.

Friedmann does genuinely see de-spiritualization as a problem, as one form of dehumanization characteristic of the Great Disequilibrium. Moreover, it is clear from his earliest works that it is a problem that he believes can and must be solved. But as for any solution that is predicated on a nostalgic “return” to something, whether real or imagined, he wants no part:

In his *Cours d’Economie politique*, François Simiand quotes the opinion of a business leader who is highly devoted to propaganda for rationalization: “This very day, in contacts with artisans, blacksmiths, and locksmiths, I recognize with deep admiration the share of technical knowledge and human experience possessed by these true artists, and reflected that it would be a national loss, a decrease in national capital, to force such men to work in a shop where they would perform an automated task.” And Simian, agreeing with this opinion, adds that in these old trades there is “to a certain degree and under certain circumstances not an inferiority but a superiority which should be preserved.”

Friedmann’s response to all of this is unequivocal: “‘Superiority?’ Certainly. But is there anything more than a *pious wish* in this value judgement concerning the observable facts of modern large-scale industry?” The problem, put slightly differently, is the association of a certain *relationship to work* to both certain *forms* of work and a vision of the past *characterized by* those forms of work.

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108 Ibid., 241.
110 As he says, “No one, then, can deny that human labor involved many repetitive and subdivided operations before the time of mechanization.” (*Industrial Society: The Emergence Of The Human Problems Of Automation*, 132.)
111 Ibid., 209.
112 Ibid.
In a short passage in “Signs,” the first chapter of the first part of La puissance, and under the telling sub-heading of “An Irreversible March,” Friedmann succinctly describes the critical valance of both the Technological Adventure and the Great Disequilibrium. Here he does not simply provide another definition, but more importantly identifies the causal relationship between the two, and specifies the political and ethical consequences of each. It is quite telling that it is in this context that Friedmann specifies the critical and prescriptive goals of the book:

Technological progress is irreversible. The stage of human history that we have entered, and whose pace increases in a rush before our eyes, is in no way comparable to any past age. It is an Adventure of wholly unique character. No technology is either good or evil in itself; all in fact contain possible benefits. How then, and under what conditions, can something which is not bad in itself, and which is even potentially good, become harmful to human beings? How is this baleful potential, what Elton Mayo called “the seamy side of progress,” realized? Doesn’t the experience of the 20th century confirm the responsibility for these evils which Marxism attributes to “capitalist” modes of production? Can we suppress, or at least reduce, the Disequilibrium which thus results for human beings? And if so, by what means? These are some of the questions to which this book will attempt to respond.¹¹³

Technological change, which includes changes in forms of work, is the basis for the Disequilibrium, but the latter is a contingent, historical—and in no way necessary—consequence of the former. This means that industrialization and automation can serve human beings, or they can be sources of dehumanization, depending centrally but not exclusively upon the conditions of production in all their complexity. Both Friedmann’s ethics of spiritual exercises and his politics of “external conditions” rest on this understanding, as does his way of conceiving the relationship between the two.

Thus despite the rather dire tone of his descriptions from Industrial Civilization in 1946 to La puissance in 1971, Friedmann is equally and consistently clear that this is in no way a

¹¹³ Friedmann, La puissance et la sagesse, 23. We can in some sense read La puissance as Friedmann’s final attempt to answer the positive political and ethical questions his concrete sociological research had been posing to him his entire life.
lament for something “lost,” but rather a *diagnosis* of his (our?) present situation, and thus the exigencies particular to it:

I do not believe, however, that we are now merely experiencing a new episode of the same grand misery that has trundled its way through history. This misery, this impoverishment, has always been profoundly embedded in *a society*, in *a culture*. Though a fact of civilization, it is not and cannot be the same, for example, in the United States in 1970 and in the medieval West…. Today, it is tied to the Great Disequilibrium, from which emerge the varying differences in its depth and extension, according to time and place. All told, the manifestation—which imposes itself with tragic evidence—of a moral underdevelopment in industrially evolved societies corresponds to the acceleration of technological progress in the past century.”

These *specific* problems, these particular questions, could never have emerged before, because the conditions which have produced them have never existed before. Friedmann is neither a luddite nor a romantic, and when he poses the question, “Doesn’t the experience of the 20th century confirm the responsibility for these evils which Marxism attributes to ‘capitalist’ modes of production?” we cannot confuse this *description* of the problem with an *endorsement* of a nostalgic call back to some past form of life, no doubt suffused with its own particular troubles and dangers:

…nostalgia for the past only merits a brief halt. Ineluctable technological progress, the universe that surrounds us, summon us to continue on our journey. The present is rich with possibilities, and in the tumult that comes with it, old virtues founder. An equilibrium—imperfect, and limited to certain privileged zones, but which had the virtue of existing—disappears, and another has not replaced it.

We *cannot* go back, nor *should* we.

We *cannot* because technological change is “An Irreversible March”—a telling subheading which appears in §I. *Signs*, of Part I., *The Great Disequilibrium*, of *La puissance*.

This is not a naïve teleological claim, nor is the important point here that change itself is

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114 Ibid., 108.
115 Ibid., 23.
116 Ibid., 28.
inevitable (though he certainly holds that view). Rather, one implication of the inevitability of change is the fact that all times and places carry with them their own particular problems, challenges and dangers. A utopian nostalgia is not merely impractical and unrealistic, it is undesirable because it amounts to trading one set of problems for another—and without the benefits that new forms of work, modes of production, and so on do indeed carry with them.

Thus we should not go back because. Friedmann is quite clear, “Technological progress is a good when it delivers human beings from pain and slavery.” Thus, “Despite all of the evils from which free time now suffers, there are today men, women, and even young people, who understand how to benefit from the new instruments that have been placed in their hands by technological progress: the latter being, I repeat, indifferent to the uses that one makes of it for better or for worse.” At the same time, he is under no illusion regarding the real problems, and thus real challenges, that these changes necessarily bring with them. The point is, simply and again, that technological change is neither good nor bad, but rather at once inherently promising and inherently dangerous:

Milling machine, transfer machine, cranes, digging machines, computers, Rolleiflex cameras, washing machines, transistors, submarines, automobiles, cars, space ships—not a single one of these ‘machines’ can be used in the service of human beings, of our bodies and minds, without compromising our health, our freedom, our understanding of the world. And yet, at the same time, they all possess the capacity for aiding us in passing, in the words of the sage, from a lesser state of perfection to a superior one. Even assembly-line work (a form so passionately discussed in terms of the division of labor) can be beneficial in certain economic and social conditions, if they are combined with precautions which neutralize their dangers.

117 As he puts it in one of the final sections of *La puissance*, “Discovering a New Sense,” “Today, in a world in which different civilizations are being rapidly standardized from one antipode to another, across continents, in an ineluctable movement that grinds down traditional differences, I cannot understand how it is possible to speak of “rediscovering the sense of life.” It is not a question of rediscovery or revival, but of new discovery.” (ibid., 403.)

118 Ibid., 17.

119 Ibid., 97. See also his cautious endorsements of many of the other technological facts of contemporary life, and the potential for human flourishing that they can carry with them, but which are so often dismissed outright: “It is necessary to study, with a sympathy denuded of any superiority complex, in accepting the potential values of a ‘mass culture,’ entirely different from that of classical humanism, the goods of cultural consumption diffused by the mass media.” (ibid., 115.)

120 Ibid., 19. Many thanks to Marie McDonough for her help in translating this very challenging passage.
Elsewhere, in the concluding remarks of *Industrial Society*, he describes the “magnificent possibilities” of the humanization of industrial labor:

The theory of automation gives hope to the total disappearance of unpleasant work, the relocating of workers driven from industry by technical progress in other skilled occupations, and the transformation of the man at work into a sort of demiurge or creator, making and minding machines. But these are technicians’ abstractions which the actual evolution of capitalist societies since the beginning of this century has cruelly contradicted. Complete automation is full of wonderful promises: freeing the worker from these subdivided tasks (in which he is half-absorbed by the machine), from assembly-line labor henceforth assigned to mechanical appliances, distributing consumption goods in great quantities, increasing comfort, shortening the working day for all, creating leisure for everybody, and consequently the means for attaining dignity and culture. But here again, technology and the suggestions of the human factor which tend to control its application in industry bring only a magnificent possibility; man, alone, through the social and economic organization in which techniques are integrated and oriented, can decide the degree to which this possibility may become actual.\(^\text{121}\)

It is from this perspective that Friedmann asks, at the end of Section I of *La puissance*, “Could we succeed, at a different stage of organization and wisdom, to overcome the physical, psychic, and social evils that [the Great Disequilibrium] has multiplied? For our species, the “enthusiasm” of our Technological Adventure is hardly a century old; so very little time. Was Marx in fact more correct than the theoreticians of post-industrial society in situating his own époque within the prehistory of humanity?”\(^\text{122}\)

The task is thus to identify the conditions under which that promise can be developed, and the means to suppress those dangers. But it is a task that is possible: In maintaining that we are shaped by forces “outside” of ourselves, Friedmann also maintains the possibility of actively and consciously engaging in that shaping. Indeed, such a conclusion follows directly from his understanding of human being, labor, and milieu. If in laboring upon the world, we labor upon ourselves, and if our goal is to alter the results of that labor in some way, we must first

\(^\text{121}\) Friedmann, *Industrial Society: The Emergence Of The Human Problems Of Automation*, 384. See also his concluding remarks on mechanization, (ibid., 389.)

understand the *particular* dynamics of these processes within the *specific* conditions in which we find ourselves.

In other words, in order to respond to the problem in any meaningful way, we have to describe it first: “Here in the final third of the 20th century, we engage in the technological Adventure particular to us at a moment so fraught with dangers. How can we overcome those dangers without understanding them—without studying them?”123 If indeed, “The Technological Adventure forces human beings to invent new forms of life, to discover a new sense of one’s life: invention and discovery;”124 what are the criteria, the standards, the values by which we can best pursue these forms of invention and discovery, in order to arrive at the *telos* of our “humanization,” rather than simply reinforcing the cycle of Disequilibrium? If appropriate “means” must be appropriate to *these specific questions, problems and conditions*, how must we tailor those means, our tactics and strategies, in response?

### III. From Exterior Solutions to the Interior Effort.

#### III.i. The Limits of Exteriority.

Friedmann’s first attempts at addressing the Great Disequilibrium were characterized by what he calls a certain “exteriority.” Given his diagnosis of the origins of the situation in the fundamentally material conditions of technological change, and the goal of achieving a “the humanization of technology,”125 in which “the machine is adapted to the person (and not the inverse, as has been and remains so often the case),”126 it was reasonable to assume that scientific, technological, and economic responses would more than suffice:

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123 Ibid., 42.
124 Ibid., 404.
125 Ibid., 118.
126 Ibid., 114.
In brief, I had accorded the social and biological sciences the power to work together toward the humanization of work, attacking—by way of external remedies [emphasis added]—the evils which come from uncontrolled (un-dominated by human beings) mechanization, which menace the physical and psychic equilibrium of human producers. I had faith in the ability of science to come to the aid of the body and spirit of working human beings, to defend them from the effects of anarchic and rapacious industrialization.\textsuperscript{127}

As we have seen however, Friedmann came to see the limits of such strictly “exterior” approaches: “The “exterior” remedies which have been recommended in order to humanize, insofar as is possible, both work and leisure time are, certainly, worthy of discussion…. I continue to think that they can, together, provide great benefits. But I see now the limits of their efficacy much more than I had at first.”\textsuperscript{128} Such means do have a role, but a very specific one: “Exterior remedies constitute our defense against these dangers. But in this New Frontier, we must engage in an offensive, though quotidian, form of combat, an endless struggle within the indefinite field which calls to us: the mastery of technology, its humanization.”\textsuperscript{129} It is thus his understanding of the means by which the Great Disequilibrium must be addressed that shifts.

\textbf{The USSR, Revisited.} Regarding that shift, Friedmann’s emerging skepticism for political, statist, and technological responses is rooted first in his deep relationship with the USSR. The political and personal horrors of the era of Stalin “Cast a crude light upon the disequilibrium between political power and the moral misery of those who have so atrociously abused it in the name of a doctrine of justice, proclaiming the reconciliation of human beings with ourselves.”\textsuperscript{130} But the point is not that the gulag is for Friedmann a damning indictment of socialism tout court, or of its ideals. He does not abandon Marx or Marxism, and he does not recoil into moralism. The issue is rather that beyond the more spectacular political troubles of Soviet life, in its mundane, quotidian, goings-on, it became clear to Friedmann that “The

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 116.
  \item \textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 124.
  \item \textsuperscript{130} Ibid., 117.
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dominant values of technological civilization exercise their corruptive force just as much in Moscow as in Washington, in Paris as in Beijing.”\textsuperscript{131} On his observation, the respective “technological adventures” of East and West in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century had far more in common than partisans of either form of economic life would care to admit.

The Great Disequilibrium was not simply a Western problem, but was also evinced in many of the same ways, and for many of the same reasons in the Second World: “The fundamental traits of a technological milieu comparable to that of the Western societies had already appeared within the “socialist patrimony.”\textsuperscript{132} In other words, both the political and technological aspects of the socialism he saw first-hand as a young man, and observed from abroad until his death in the 1970s, had failed to achieve the “human face,”\textsuperscript{133} the “nouvelle morale socialiste,”\textsuperscript{134} he worked so thoroughly to describe. And if that political domain which was founded upon the very principle of the rectification of the relationship of human beings to our labor, within a modern, technological and industrialized context, could fail so spectacularly to achieve that balance, then Friedmann would conclude not that socialism was hopeless, but that there was something overly simplistic about his own reasoning:

In light of these repeated shocks, I came to understand that my quasi-exclusive interest in “exterior” remedies had been the expression of a relatively simplistic scientific materialism. […] This form of scientism is no more justified than any of the others. These ‘exterior’ remedies are useful, certainly, and even necessary, but not sufficient. Bad institutions are not solely responsible for the ‘limits of the human factor.’ These limits are inscribed within human beings themselves. As with our physical, social and psychic environment, it is upon human beings and from human beings that we must reflect, and provoke action.”\textsuperscript{135}

\textsuperscript{131} Ibid., 102. He seems (and La puissance is less explicit on this point) to want to tie the top-down political problems of the USSR to the presence of the Great Disequilibrium of life and work in the Second World as well, although because the text is so vague on this point, I hesitate to attribute such a strong, and potentially reductive, causal claim to him here. There is certainly a relationship between mundane life in the USSR and the terror of Stalin for Friedmann, but he never explicitly spells it out for us. The important point is rather, again, that technological change in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century resulted in a form of imbalance within both daily and larger political life in the USSR comparable to that of the West.

\textsuperscript{132} Ibid., 116.

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 10.

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 117.

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., 117-18.
Now, if these limits are inscribed within us, that inscription is itself the result of the complex and reciprocating relationship between laboring subjects, the work we do, and the work that is done to us: “Labor, such as it is carried out every day by the masses of workers, of employees, constitutes a vast terrain in which the ‘conditioning’ of human beings by our new milieu takes place.”\textsuperscript{136} And if those conditions effect our responses to them, in the work that we do and the way we do it, any work on our part to shift the terms will require somehow “stepping outside” and re-approaching the cycles or patterns within which we find ourselves, in even the smallest way: “In order to control our new milieu (that is, to “humanize” it), we are compelled to make choices. But in order to make those choices, we must rely upon values and the people who live them. How can we break from this circle?”\textsuperscript{137} Thus on this account, if “exterior” conditions (and “conditioning”) produce “interior” effects, and vice-versa, then to meet our material conditions only on the level of their materiality is to fundamentally misconstrue the nature of the dynamic in question, and to thereby impair the development of a response that is either effective or just.

In other words, insofar as any wholly or primarily “exterior” attempts to redress the effects of the Great Disequilibrium remain caught up precisely within the Disequilibrium—shaped, and re-shaped by it—those systems will either simply fail, or further exacerbate the Disequilibrium itself. It is for this reason that attempts to adapt to the radically new landscape of the technological adventure of the 20\textsuperscript{th}-century, attempts as wide-ranging as Scientific Management and Soviet state socialism are subject to many of the exact same forces and problems. And it is why the goal of humanization requires an interior effort: “Our spiritual

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., 114.  
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., 124.
forces, save for some exceptional cases, are not yet in a state to address these conditions, and yet only they can save us, by aiding us in the mastery of our new milieu, and thus liberating us from it.”

What is required is a way of engaging and re-shaping the subjects laboring under the Great Disequilibrium, such that the cycle itself is shifted not simply toward “humanization,” but toward new forms of humanization appropriate to the technological milieu. Subjects who, in laboring on themselves, labor on the environment such that the conditions newly produced do not cycle-back in an uncontrolled way that continues to reinforce and exacerbate dehumanization and alienation. It is also for precisely these reasons that the “interior effort” required cannot—or at least, cannot only—be a general one. The spiritual exercises required to meet these needs must be tailored to these needs and conditions, and cannot simply be imported from other cultures, great religions, or even classical antiquity whole cloth.

III.ii. The Interior Effort

It is for these reasons then, which I have sketched far too briefly here, that Friedmann finally comes to the conclusion that the kinds of “exterior” solutions to the disequilibrium—which again is itself in large part a material imbalance—wrought by the kinds of technological, economic and thus social change in contemporary life, must be met with what he calls an “interior effort:”

In highlighting both the necessity and insufficiency of “exterior” remedies to the difficulties that have emerged in a technological society, both within work and outside of work, we have at the same time revealed the need for an interior effort in order to bring our own technical progress under control, and thus to ensure the moral and physical future of our species. It now becomes a question of studying the chances, the limits of such an effort, and, through these reflections, to discern the forces capable of reducing, and perhaps one day suppressing, the disequilibrium, of which we have already taken note of many signs.

138 Ibid., 98.
139 Ibid., 118.
However and again, it is in no way a question of spiritualism; the goal is to “re-situate” the relationship between interior and exterior, not to prioritize one over the other: “In order to attenuate or suppress the Disequilibrium, we must call upon both ‘interior’ and ‘exterior’ remedies.”¹⁴⁰ That is the challenge that emerges from Friedmann’s diagnostic work, and it is not an easy solution.

And yet, La puissance is not so much a prescriptive text as it is a preliminary analysis and diagnosis: “I have no pretension however of providing a ‘system’ here, or of drawing up a structured and exhaustive list of values. Any such values would need to emerge from the critical observation of this new milieu and thus, in a manner of speaking, have directed my attention ‘to the terrain.’”¹⁴¹ There is thus no universal or trans-historical form of “interior effort,” nor can the internal work of differing times and places be simply re-purposed for the exigencies of another—not without the kind of thoroughgoing assessment he describes here, and a rigorous translation of given forms of life, practice, and belief based firmly in such analysis.

Indeed, among the dangers of proceeding without such rigor, he identifies the specter of precisely that spiritualism its moralist political counterpart from which he and the other writers that I have invoked work to distance themselves:

Some of course have sensed the need to cultivate new spiritual forces in contemporary man, but very few among even those are oriented in the only constructive direction: to search for these new forces in and through the recognition of the technological progress in question, through what Karl Jaspers calls a “loyalty” to the realities of the 20th century. Lacking that loyalty, the denunciation of the dangers of technological progress so often devolves into a mythical nostalgia for the past, which in turn leads, as the case may be, to a global rejection of modernity, a negative and desperate attitude, an escape into spiritualism or mystical comforts, and religious or secular forms of retreat from the world.¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 408.
¹⁴¹ Ibid., 118.
¹⁴² Ibid., 119.
We cannot simply exchange the exterior for the interior. To do so would be to continue to trade in a political and moral framework of mere opposition, which fails to understand the complexity of the relationship between these only seemingly distinct domains.

And so it is here that Friedmann finally sets out the task of *La puissance*, to discover a form of “interior effort” proper to contemporary life, in its ability to address the imbalance wrought by the particulars of technological change, without lapping into a vapid spiritualism, useless nostalgia, or conservative moralism by failing to understand the complex reciprocal relationship between material conditions and “spiritual” life. As undeveloped as it ultimately is in the text, Friedmann’s conception abandons the former terms altogether: “Human beings are called today to undertake an interior conversion, one that is much more than a psychological adaptation to this new milieu. Only this conversion can allow us to take our own future in hand, to unlock it, at once on the level of the individual, of society, *and* of the species; a path of salvation, a new frontier, a long and decisive march.”\(^\text{143}\) Or as he says a page later, “It is not a question of human beings learning to become God, but rather learning to become human.”\(^\text{144}\)

The question is, of course, how? And, moreover, what exactly would this “humanization” look like? For Friedmann, any real answer can only arrive at the end of *La puissance*,

But are these reflections, these regrets, in vain? Are we, today, given our mental and physical constitution, the state of our nervous systems and the state of our relationship with our new environment, capable of controlling these same machines, of actually dominating and subjugating them? Only at the end of this book will I attempt to discern the price of such an effort, and to determine the conditions under which, and the culture within which, we human beings may finally reveal ourselves as superior to our own works.\(^\text{145}\)

\(^{143}\) Ibid., 122.
\(^{144}\) Ibid., 123.
\(^{145}\) Ibid., 68.
Under this description, the text itself can be seen as both the reflection and product of a lifetime laboring to not merely answer these questions, but to painstakingly detail the conditions under which such questions must be posed, and the criteria that any such answers would have to meet.

III.ii.a. To “Re-source” Ourselves.

One of the most important and extensive aspects of this project within La puissance is a kind of survey that Friedmann undertakes, and which constitutes the at-once thorough and admittedly insufficient substance of Part III of the book, entitled “Où nous ressourcer?”

Here, Friedmann poses the following question, one of the central questions and tasks not only of the book, but of the larger project of “re-sourcing” ourselves within the Great Disequilibrium:

In what way, from which religion, which doctrine, which social movement, can human beings today, draw upon for the moral forces that will aid us in balancing the material power with which we have been so endowed, in order to truly control the latter? Over the course of this chapter, I will attempt, in keeping with my reflections, a brief review, which claims to be neither thorough nor exhaustive.

It is a “review,” more precisely, of four traditions: “Christianity,” which primarily means Catholicism in this case; Judaism; “Hindu Spirituality;” and “Marx, Marxism, Communisms.” This selection certainly has some glaring omissions, at the very least in the absence of Islam and Buddhism, but there is very much a method here. Friedmann had substantive knowledge of and a personal relationship with all of these traditions and their practitioners. Catholicism was the “principle religion of France, the country which so liberally

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146 Ibid., 179-281.
147 Ibid., 181.
148 Ibid., 183-213.
149 Ibid., 214-27.
150 Ibid., 228-47.
151 Ibid., 248-81. The questions raised by the fact that Friedmann places “Marx, Marxisms, Communisms,” and “militant revolutionaries” in general, in this explicitly religious company are many, and their answers are not
welcomed my parents;” Friedmann’s own background was Jewish; he did not simply encounter Indian religions second hand, but engaged well-known Hindu practitioners directly during his time in Toulouse; and Marxism remained his adopted quasi-faith—one which had occasioned its fair share of both crises and revelations in his own life. In this way, Friedmann remained ever the empiricist, in both his choice of traditions to engage and not to engage, and in the admirable precision and care he devotes to each in these impossibly brief reviews.

To each of the traditions discussed here, Friedmann poses the question with which we began: that of their respective ability to address to what I have followed Pierre Hadot in referring to as “contemporary spiritual demands.” In fact, and indeed, it is precisely this section of La puissance that Hadot refers to in his invocation of Friedmann at the opening of “Spiritual Exercises.” Recall that, after citing an important passage from Part V of La puissance, Hadot offers the following reflections:

With the exception of the last few lines, doesn’t this text look like a pastiche of Marcus Aurelius? It is by Georges Friedmann, and it is quite possible that, when he wrote it, the author was not aware of the resemblance. Moreover, in the rest of the book, in which he seeks a place ‘to re-source himself,’ he comes to the conclusion that there is no tradition—be it Christian, Jewish, or Oriental—compatible with contemporary spiritual demands. Curiously, however, he does not ask himself about the value of the philosophical tradition of Greco-Roman antiquity, although the lines we have just quoted show to just what extent ancient tradition continues—albeit unconsciously—to live within him, as it does within each of us.

It is true, Hadot is correct, that there is something curious about Friedmann’s omission, but not for the reasons Hadot gives. As evinced in both La puissance and in key passages in the

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152 Ibid., 183.
153 I bracket any commentary on Friedmann’s discussion of Marxism here due to lack of space, and because his discussions of the religious traditions in question are far more productive for my purposes.
154 Friedmann, La puissance et la sagesse, 359-60.
155 Hadot’s use of the term “Oriental” here must, I take it, refer to Friedmann’s discussion of Hindu spirituality in La puissance. It is worth noting that Friedmann’s “review”—for whatever flaws it may possess—does not refer to “Oriental” traditions (and does not use the term “Oriental” at all) but to Hinduism specifically and by name.
157 It is fascinating to note that one of the places in La puissance where Friedmann invokes ancient figures like Marcus Aurelius, Plato, and Epicurus, is in the midst of a discussion of Marxism. (See Friedmann, La puissance et la sagesse, 359.) It is unfortunate that the limitations of the present work will not allow for a substantive philosophical engagement with that point of contact in Friedmann’s thought.
Journal de guerre, Friedmann was in fact very much aware of the philosophical tradition of Western antiquity, and of Marcus Aurelius and Stoicism perhaps above all. The curiosity here thus lies not in his ignorance, but in such an omission given the depth of that relationship—if I am correct that Friedmann chooses the subjects of his “review” based on an intellectual confidence in his own ability to do so garnered from past study and experience.

At the same time, the omission in question is not actually as much of a problem as Hadot suggests, because Hadot’s language does not accurately represent Friedmann’s views in this section. Although Hadot tells us that Friedmann “comes to the conclusion that there is no tradition…compatible with contemporary spiritual demands,” Friedmann does not actually say anything of the sort in La puissance et la sagesse, certainly not in Part III. And the reason has everything to do with the specificity, the definition, of precisely those “contemporary spiritual demands” which Friedmann’s lifework is devoted to describing and understanding. Instead, Friedmann’s “reviews” in Part III of La puissance are not concerned with determining the ability of a given tradition to respond to the spiritual demands in question, at least not on the level of the fundamental doctrines or practices of a faith. In fact, there is nothing inherently the case about any of these traditions that would necessarily preclude them from addressing said demands. Neither Friedmann’s investigations nor his conclusions concern themselves with adjudicating the sufficiency of a given doctrine in itself; he does not take sides, nor does he “reject” any tradition or group. Rather, his goal in Part III is not so much to come to any particular conclusions about Christianity, Judaism, or Hinduism, but to instead pose certain difficult questions to them: the question of their current ability, willingness, and any concrete efforts being made to help human beings adapt to and master the technological milieu.

158 See Journal de guerre, 1939-1940, 280-81.
Catholicism. Of Catholicism, he wonders: “Is there, in the contemporary Catholic Church (encyclicals, pastorals, the orientation of the episcopacy, theologians, preachers, etc.) a reflection concerning certain effects of technological civilization, presumed dangerous for spiritual life?” Friedmann’s approach here is empirical as ever, and the very text of the question comes directly from a “little questionnaire that I sent to several priests and laypeople, who I know to be both open-hearted and courageous,” in order to take the general pulse, as it were, of the contemporary church: “The responses given to these questions orient the reflections which follow” his reflections on the answers received.

Despite some discoveries that are promising to him in a very limited and preliminary way, it is here that the tradition ultimately does indeed fall flat for him: “There are, unfortunately, very few theologians, and even rarer the Pope, who have considered the importance of these questions for the religion of the Church.” But this is not, for Friedmann, ultimately a condemnation; it is instead a sober philosophical and sociological assessment, one that may also present itself as an opportunity, if only we properly understand the problem, and choose to address it:

Because the new milieu, the anarchy of which has already evinced its tragic aspects, cannot be mastered without the proper moral forces, because this combat will dominate our century, and without a doubt the centuries to come, it is in facing this challenge that Christianity can rejoin the great current of life which

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161 Ibid.
162 Ibid., 185.
163 Friedmann does discuss the views of certain Catholic thinkers and leaders who are amenable to using new technological means to reach the faithful: Of Cardinal Emmanuel Célestin Suhard (1874-1949), Archbishop of Paris from 1940-1949, Friedmann tells us that “One of the consistent themes of his instructions is that the church must use forms of mass communication (television in particular) in the service of the Word of God, of spiritual life, and the universality of the faith.” (ibid., 202.) And of Pope Pius XII, who remarked, regarding television, that “‘Television allows us to discover ‘the stranger,’ wherever in the world, ‘another in himself, a brother, a man.’ It is ‘in the service of the truth, a continuous Pentecost.’” (ibid.) Remember, however, for Friedmann the simple use and adoption of technology is not necessarily an escape from the Great Disequilibrium; more likely that engagement is itself caught up within the imbalance, potentially exacerbating it as another turn of the wheel.
164 Ibid., 185.
“seems, for some time now, to have fallen by the way.” The crisis of human beings in the societies of both West and East offers the Catholic Church (and the other Christian confessions as well) the occasion to discover a new motivation [élan].

The question then is one of the potential for the church and its members to recognize the problems that Friedmann diagnoses, and to both adapt traditional practices and perhaps create new ones marshalling the “moral forces” necessary for human beings to address the Great Disequilibrium.

**Judaism.** This is the consistent methodological and intellectual thread of all of the “reviews” that make up Section III of *La puissance*. Of Judaism, Friedmann poses a set of questions nearly identical to those he addressed to his Christian interlocutors:

> The question which I must now ask myself is the following: can Judaism, here in the final quarter of the twentieth century, contribute to the wisdom of humanity, precipitated by the Technological Adventure, faced as we are by all of the evils and dangers of our times? If the answer is yes, which sources must it draw on, and to what extent?

Somewhat more precisely: Can “The ‘revalorization of Jewish mysticism,’” for example, “such as it is undertaken by the faithful today, aid human beings in controlling and humanizing the technological milieu?” Much like Christianity, as he discusses it above, “Judaism now has several chances to rediscover an inspiration, to attract and hold the young, to shine toward the future.” It is up to engaged practitioners to determine just how they will do so within the technological milieu.

**Hinduism.** Again and in turn, this is the conceptual thread that centers and shapes Friedmann’s discussions of Hindu Spirituality, such as he understands it. As noted above, Friedmann’s first real encounter with Hindu philosophical thought came in the fateful winter of

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165 See Friedmann on Lubac, ibid., 468n.
166 Ibid., 212-13.
167 Ibid., 215.
168 Ibid., 222.
169 Ibid.
1940-1941, spent in hiding with the Resistance in Toulouse. Here he met Swami Siddheswarananda, of the Ramakrishna Mission, from whom he learned a great deal, and who he would visit again following the war. \(^{170}\) Siddheswarananda introduced Friedmann “to the writings of the great contemporary gurus, above all the works of Vivekananda, his own teacher,” and those of the famed Indian revolutionary, poet, philosopher, yogi, and guru, Sri Aurobindo Gosh, \(^{171}\) which influenced Friedmann a great deal.

Friedmann’s “review,” of Hindu spirituality is again marked by an empiricism itself characterized by a commitment to the historical and material contextualization of the forms of thought and practice that he engages. Friedmann is clear, almost to a fault, of the limits of his knowledge of both Hinduism and contemporary India. Nonetheless, or perhaps precisely for that reason, he is adamant that the former can only be understood within the context of the latter: “In order to judge the possible role of Hindu spirituality in today’s world, we must also confront the real India today, as its best observers have described it, drawing upon the investigations of demographers, economists, doctors, and sociologists.” \(^{172}\) However, Friedmann’s empiricism here, the approach briefly sketched above takes on a somewhat double-significance in the case of India, insofar as its unique recent political history and status as a non-aligned country, intersect with its rich intellectual and religious history. Only on the other side of a rigorous investigation of the material and political (“exterior”) conditions under which contemporary Hindu thought and practice (“interior”) are taken up and shaped can one understand the potential for this tradition to address and disrupt the Great Disequilibrium.

\(^{170}\) See ibid., 229, footnote.
\(^{171}\) Ibid., 229.
\(^{172}\) Ibid., 241.
Nonetheless, in a preliminary way, Friedmann sees promise in the Indian thought he has encountered and the political and economic action he has observed. In fact, “Sri Aurobindo conceived of a complementarity between the ‘mechanical’ and the mystical,” a model strikingly similar to Friedmann’s own ideal:

The encounter of these two currents, which interest me in particular here (not their juxtaposition, but rather their combination), could allow for the development of a ‘science with conscience’ on all of its levels, in all of its domains: this science, oriented toward the summit of humanity, controlled by our highest ambitions, whose absence so cruelly constitutes the greatest failure of technological civilization, and possibly its ultimate downfall.

Sri Aurobindo had hope that India could realize this synthesis.\footnote{Ibid., 246.}

In the same way that he addresses the other traditions reviewed in Part III, Friedmann poses the same question of the current ability of “Hinduism” as he understands it to mobilize the moral forces needed to address the imbalance that so concerns him. But Friedmann’s answer in this case is both commensurate with the others that he gives, and unique. Hindu spirituality may have the capacity to develop those moral forces, to “realize the synthesis” that Sri Aurobindo aspired toward, but it has not yet done so. Nor, more precisely, has the state of India done so. But here, Friedmann adds a level of specificity to his conclusions, in terms of a more precise delimitation of at least one criterion required to achieve that synthesis on a national level:

India has not accomplished the synthesis in question. But it has not do so because this is because it is not the work of a single nation, nor even the work of ‘spiritual’ masters or communities, regardless of their grandeur or saintliness. We thus arrive again at the question at the heart of this book, and the response that the facts, as they present themselves, give to us: In order to vanquish the multiform Disequilibrium, as it manifests in both the opulent societies of the West or those of the Third World, in order to give rise to the necessary compliment of moral forces, the precious example of spiritual masters, from whatever quarter, is insufficient. It must be undertaken by an effort that is prosaic, quotidian, effective—by each of us. The ‘enlargement’ of the human domain will not be accomplished alone: it can only be obtained within the New Frontier, through the combat the Technological Adventure imposes upon us.\footnote{Ibid., 247.}\footnote{Ibid.}
To be clear, “India” is in no way synonymous with “Hinduism;” not historically, and not for Friedmann. His language here can therefore be confusing: he wants to understand Hindu spirituality within the concrete economic, political, post-colonial, (etc.) contexts within which it is primarily practiced and developed—that is, within the state of India. That overlap is crucial and constitutive, and thus has everything to do with Friedmann’s conclusions. But the point is not that India has failed to achieve the synthesis in question because of some inherent doctrinal or practical inability to meet the spiritual demands in question. Rather, the promise is there, but the challenge has simply not yet been taken up.

However, here Friedmann also specifies the necessity of a form not only of collective action, but of quotidian practice. This particular distinction does not explicitly appear anywhere else in Part III, even if it is certainly implicit throughout La puissance and necessarily entailed by his political commitments. It is thus here that Friedmann unambiguously addresses what I have called the problem of specialists in my discussions of Hadot. Masters and models may be important, but their mere existence, even with mass influence, is insufficient. First and primarily because the spiritual exercises and interior efforts taken up by religious and philosophical specialists simply cannot be approached in the same way, for the same reasons, or in the same amounts of time by working laypeople. Moreover, they certainly cannot be taken up in the same way by those individuals and communities laboring within the new technological landscape, and whose lives, and that landscape itself, are caught up in the dehumanized and de-spiritualized turn of the Great Disequilibrium. Above all, because these are the lives that primarily labor upon the environment, and in turn upon the conditions which constitute not only laboring subjects, but all human beings in a given political, religious, or technological community, it is the practice of non-specialists, the rank and file, which must take precedent on this account. While specialists
certainly play a role—that much is also clear from Friedmann’s engagement with them, in all kinds of traditions—they are not, ultimately the answer. What is required instead is the proletarianization of spiritual exercises.

This claim is implicit throughout *La Puissance*, and is indeed logically entailed by both his political commitments and the focus of his sociological lifework (themselves intimately linked, as we have seen). Unfortunately however, it is only explicitly discussed in this brief set of passages, within a very brief discussion of the intersection of politics and spirituality in contemporary India. Indeed, it remains completely unclear why the way in which Friedmann’s vision requires something much more foundational than the exemplary lives of religious experts, should only appear at this juncture, as the same claim could just as easily be made with regard to any religious tradition or spiritual regimen, including and perhaps especially Judaism and Catholicism. Friedmann also fails, again by his own at least implicit standards, in his interrogations of these traditions, to look at the ways in which they are currently or are potentially capable not simply of addressing the spiritual demands of the technological milieu, but of doing so through the everyday, quotidian spiritual exercises of average people. (He certainly had the skill, training, and expertise to do so).

All of that being said, at issue here is ultimately “The difficulty…to accept science and technology and to mobilize the moral forces necessary to master them (thanks to a new wisdom), without breaking with the mysticism [that we draw upon to do so]—be it Jewish, Christian, Muslim, or Vedantic.”176 Is any tradition, group, or party willing and capable of effectively disrupting of the cycle that feeds and exacerbates the Great Disequilibrium, through the integration of an interior effort that exists with and alongside efforts toward necessary “exterior”

176 Ibid., 222.
or material transformations? Is it possible, and if so by whom, to produce spiritual exercises tailored precisely to the spiritual demands of the technological milieu that are, thanks to the \textit{forms that they take}, capable of transforming, of \textit{humanizing}, practicing subjects?

In other words: what must be done, and what can be done to replace the cycle of the Great Disequilibrium with a cycle of humanization? Can such “interior efforts”—mass, collective efforts—operate such that they constitute the first steps in the creation of \textit{new human beings}, whose material labors \textit{in turn} contribute to the production of a \textit{new milieu}, capable of \textit{again producing new human beings}. Human beings that are no longer “inferior” to our own works, who control the technologies that we create and are no longer controlled by them, and who are increasingly capable of further contributing to the endless work of our own ethical and political freedom. Despite the very clear limits of his analyses, \textit{this} is Friedmann’s question, not simply to the traditions he discusses in Part III, but to anyone who claims to care about the material and spiritual wellbeing of the human species.

\textit{III.ii.b. From Spiritual Demands to Spiritual Exercises.}

Friedmann does not actually discount anything—including the ancient philosophical practices and traditions that Hadot himself suggests—from potentially serving the forces of humanization in combatting the Great Disequilibrium. What Friedmann does discount, and quite clearly, is any “interior effort” that simply deploys traditional beliefs and practices without the work of properly tailoring them to the exigencies of the new milieu. He also discounts any form of spiritualism, as egoistic practices and efforts cannot by definition intersect with the fundamentally political, social, and collective nature of the spiritual demands in question—at
least, not for the better. Finally, he discounts any interior effort that is not substantively comprised of the spiritual-political efforts of average people, workers, the rank-and-file.

Regarding the first point however, with regard to Hadot’s initial query, the answer is thus not to be found in any pre-existing regimen, individual practice, or tradition as it stands, because the contemporary spiritual demands of the Technological Adventure are just so radically new and unique. For Friedmann then, the answer may either be found in wholly new forms of spiritual exercise, in intentional “translation” of ancient spiritual exercises or familiar religious traditions, or in some complex of both. What matters is that any properly contemporary spiritual exercises are tailored to the diagnosis of the conditions at issue, and work toward a telos also determined by that diagnosis. For Friedmann, that means beginning with the Great Disequilibrium as it emerges from the Technological adventure, and ultimately arriving at a state of “humanization” capable of disrupting the cycle which perpetuates that imbalance.

Unfortunately, it is precisely here that we meet the limits of Friedmann’s project. Where Hadot’s oeuvre consists almost entirely in the analysis of specific spiritual exercises, we see almost nothing of the sort in Friedmann. And so, while he thoroughly models the kind of analysis necessary to determine what the spiritual exercises that he suggests we should take up “each day—either alone or in the company of another who also wishes to become better”177 must look like, he also gives almost no examples of his own—with two, though only two, semi-exceptions. These are La puissance et la sagesse, taken as a whole, and a specific thread within the Journal de guerre, comprised of certain forms of reflection provoked for Friedmann by Molotov-Ribbentrop.

177 Ibid., 259.
The first of these is the “interior voyage” at once constituted by and recorded in *La puissance et la sagesse*, a text the political, philosophical, sociological, ethical, and spiritual complexity of which I have most likely failed to do justice to here. This is in no small part because of its enormous length (442 pages, not including endnotes) and the wide range of themes and questions addressed there: from Friedmann’s childhood, to Stalinism, to the Kibbutz movement, and so on. Perhaps more importantly, *La puissance* is marked by a complex recursion: it is at once an analysis of contemporary spiritual demands, of the sort that is preliminarily required for the practice of spiritual exercises, and a spiritual exercise in its own right. It is as if, for Friedmann, the very analysis of the Great Disequilibrium can itself contribute to the humanization required to inaugurate new cycles outside of it.

In this way, the book is structurally parallel to the larger goals that he articulates. We must first become “new”—in part, and as best we can—through an interior effort, complimented by and intersecting with “exterior” political struggles, within the Great Disequilibrium. Only then can such “new human beings” act upon the built and natural environment in order to begin to disrupt the cycle of the Disequilibrium, a disruption which in turn provides the conditions of possibility for newer “new human beings,” who will in turn labor further on themselves directly, in order to further humanize the “new milieu.” It is a complex, ongoing, multi-step process, a cycle of humanization, rather than a singular “state” of humanization. Writing *La puissance* is thus for Friedmann, on my reading, a structurally or formally similar process. The analysis of the Great Disequilibrium is itself a form of interior effort, of the sort required to further transform oneself in the ways necessary to further address, mitigate, and contribute to the disruption of the cycle of Disequilibrium. Even as it is just one step in a process that does not, and indeed cannot, stop there.
The second, and much more easily recognizable, quasi-example of a concrete spiritual exercise in Friedmann’s oeuvre is what calls the “examination” that he takes up within the War Journals to understand the devastating news of Molotov-Ribbentrop. Due to constraints of time however, it is impossible for me to do that examination justice, as the work of historically situating it is already a project in itself. Much more importantly however, I use the phrase “quasi-example” above because, in the end, even this examination ultimately seems to amount to another diagnostic exercise. Thus, despite some promise, any rehearsal or analysis of this thread would resemble the discussions that already constitute this chapter so closely as to serve no productive purpose in this overall project. It ultimately falls somewhat short of the full range of possibilities entailed by Friedmann’s understanding of the interior effort as I have attempted to reconstruct it here.

IV. Conclusions.

We need not necessarily agree with Friedmann’s entire assessment in La puissance et la sagesse, the Journal de guerre, Industrial Society, and elsewhere in order to see the enormous value of his work for the task of elaborating and understanding the larger category of ethical practices of self-transformation. Indeed, we are in no way necessarily obligated to adopt his view that the rapid acceleration of technological change is the foundation for the most pressing spiritual demands of his time, or our own for that matter. For my part, I am certainly sympathetic to the content of his claims regarding technological change and the specifics of both its possibilities and dangers, and I do believe that it holds great promise (as he himself did) for the current digital iteration of the technical milieu, and perhaps even its yet-unimaginable future forms. And although it remains somewhat incomplete, his ability to effectively describe the insufficiency of purely “exterior”
political models to at least certain conditions of distress and imbalance provides precisely the basis of the kind of formal framework that never quite appears in Hadot. The latter, as we have seen, never quite describes the relationship between material conditions and spiritual exercises, nor does he speculate in much about the ways that they might reciprocally impact one another.

At the same time, as far as Friedmann’s contributions go, it is certainly possible to imagine new analyses arriving at new and differing conclusions regarding the fundamental conditions that give rise to the precise spiritual demands of the contemporary world—or any time and place, for that matter. But any debate regarding the continued accuracy of Friedmann’s specific claims is in fact tangential to my own purposes here. More importantly, his contributions are necessary to the broader understanding and elaboration of the idea of practices of the self that my own project seeks to accomplish in two fundamental ways: First, Friedmann provides a formal model by which we can understand the emergence of new forms of practice that are capable of meeting the spiritual demands of a given time, place, and people. Second, Friedmann’s work demonstrates the possibility of the theorization of a politics of self-overcoming, in the exhaustive detail by which he attempts to “resituate” the relationship between material and ethical forces.

IV.i. Contributions: Friedmann’s Analytic Model.

Contemporary Spiritual Exercises. First and foremost, Friedmann demonstrates both the possibility and necessity of historically and culturally appropriate (and thus, perhaps, efficacious) practices of the self; indeed, this is one of the ever-present positive subtexts to all of his work. But he does not simply demonstrate the criteria by which forms of spiritual exercise must be shaped and determined in his own time and place. Certainly, he specifically delimits the
precise contours of the Technological Adventure of Human Beings in the 20th Century and the Great Disequilibrium. But in so doing, he also provides a necessary *formal model* for the kinds of research, observation, and insight that would be required to properly address the spiritual demands of *any* time and place. In other words, Friedmann gives us the most robust example, of any of the thinkers addressed in this project, of the kind of analysis of intersecting spiritual and material conditions required in order to specify the precise forms that any “interior effort” or regimen of spiritual exercises must take in order to address those demands.

This is, on my reading, Friedmann’s most important contribution: He models an effective and exhaustive method for going about answering the fundamental question of how to conceive of—and indeed to practice—spiritual exercises not only in the present, but at all. As we have seen, this necessity is entailed by Hadot’s analyses, even as Hadot does not in turn model the kinds of investigations required to specify the precise nature of given spiritual demands, and therefore forms that the interior effort would need to take. Recall, that it is just here that we run up against the limits of Hadot’s equally exhaustive project. Indeed, the ways in which the two ultimately abut and complement each other are thus clearest at precisely this juncture.

**A Political Interiority.** Second, Friedmann accomplishes this in a way that demonstrates the beginnings of a much-needed bulwark against charges of ethical spiritualism and political moralism, and thus begins to answer a series of important questions implicitly raised in my discussion of Hadot in Chapter 1. Specifically, his descriptions of the cyclical nature of the Great Disequilibrium—and the cyclical nature of any potentially successful effort to address it—demonstrate an intimate understanding of the ethical and material statuses of human beings in which neither is, properly speaking, given priority over the other. Moreover, Friedmann never once abandons the view that the transformation of material conditions is fundamental to human
flourishing, nor does he in any way reject the idea that technological change, properly controlled, is integral to our humanization. At the same time, our humanization, through spiritual exercises and an interior effort that marshals moral forces capable of transforming laboring subjects, is itself the very foundation of our ability to become “superior to our works.” In other words: our humanization is the condition of our further humanization, and the transformation of the technological milieu is the condition of its further transformation, precisely because the “interior” and “exterior” efforts are the reciprocating conditions of one another.

Implicit in this formulation, and made explicit in one unfortunately insufficient and brief passage on Hindu spirituality in contemporary India, is a critique of any over-reliance or over-emphasis on religious or philosophical specialists. As he says in the section titled “Human Beings Superior to Our Works” in Part IV, near the closing pages of *La puissance*:

> Hence the necessity of a quotidian combat, of an “everyday courage”—according to the fine title of the Czech film178—for those great and most often small actions which require mastery of oneself, lucidity, and disinterestedness. This is the New Frontier, which it multiple, quotidian, prosaic, and glorious, in which men and women must struggle, from their adolescence: struggling both with ourselves and with our technological objects. This is the boundless field open to human effort. It is the challenge launched toward human beings, to show ourselves, by ourselves, superior to our works.”179

This interior effort must, on Friedmann’s account, be both everyday and not the exclusive purview of the contemporary sage. While it is never explicitly spelled out, this view also implicitly entails that the practices and efforts taken up by average people would have to be different in some fundamental ways than those of specialists. This is in part due to the differences in time and resources for such practice available to different people. Much more importantly however, because of the unique physical, economic, and material conditions within

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which average people engage in spiritual exercises, as Friedmann does indeed specify in great
detail throughout *La puissance* and elsewhere.

Friedmann thus demonstrates both the kind of work required to understand given spiritual
demands and thereby specify appropriate spiritual exercises, and provides a picture of a politics
of self-overcoming that does not amount to egoism or spiritualism. He also hints at the
importance of a genuine democratization of spiritual exercises, as a necessary consequence of
any attempt to “re-situate” the ethical and political and to collectively “re-source” ourselves. And
yet, while these contributions are indeed indispensable for any truly robust understanding of the
category of ethical practices of self-overcoming, we do ultimately encounter the limits of
Friedmann’s thought (as we have with Hadot, and as we ultimately must with Foucault and
King). Where Hadot showed us both what spiritual exercises look like and the necessity of kind
of diagnostic research Friedmann provides, his projects ends in some sense just where
Friedmann’s begins. Similarly, we have already encountered several important limitations and
omissions in Friedmann—important precise because they are, on my reading, in fact necessarily
entailed by the historical and philosophical substance of his work.

**IV.ii. Limitations and Implications.**

**The Meaning of “New.”** Among Friedmann’s further contributions is his demonstration
that when speaking of new practices, “new” can mean many things, including new versions of
old technologies and forms of life, updated and translated for new purposes. And yet, Friedmann
still fails to provide further examples that would meet the criteria he specifies. He does not show
us what concrete examples of properly contemporary, collective, and fundamentally political
practices of the self or regimes of interior effort would look like. At very least, however, he is in
good company here: Hadot, as we have seen, does not provide such examples either, and Foucault seems to struggle with the same problem as well. We will only see such genuine and detailed historical examples when we finally engage the concept of “self-purification” in the life and work of Martin Luther King Jr. in Chapter 4.

**The Limits of the Environmental Picture.** There is a more subtle series of questions and ambiguities that arise from Friedmann’s work, specifically regarding his admirable and fascinating formulation of the ways in which ethics and politics intersect through labor and the built environment. We may thus ask of Friedmann if is it only through this reciprocating engagement with the milieu (as he defines it) that we may see a genuine (non-spiritualist, non-reductionist) politics of self-overcoming at work? While the admittedly impressionistic picture that Friedmann paints here is fascinating and holds exciting implications for this project, is there not something limited and limiting about it? Can the relationship of the ethical status of subjects and the political, material conditions of power be further analyzed—and further generalized? Is it primarily through such forms of labor that our “moral forces” gain political efficacy?

Though his insights on these questions are far more detailed than, for example, the limited analyses on the question of mass- and everyday- forms of the “interior effort,” his work in this area also leaves many gaps, and remains undertheorized. Indeed, it is a thread that does not take a central analytic position within his researches, but rather appears as needed, in the form of a kind of explanatory support structure. In other words, it is never taken up for itself, neither philosophically, sociologically, nor historically.

The theme of the reciprocating relationship between work on the world and work on oneself, while powerful, thus raises two problems. The first of these is internal to the concept: it is never explicitly, and thus never fully, fleshed out for itself; it remains a philosophically
unsatisfying picture. The second is more relevant for my own purposes, while being a consequence of the former: Is the formulation of a non-reductive understanding of the relationship between material and structural political conditions and the ethical status and “moral forces” of individuals limited to the specific picture that Friedmann paints regarding our relationship to labor and the built environment? My answer is, perhaps obviously, no. And just as the answer to the question of further understanding and specifying contemporary practices will be taken up in Chapter 4 on Martin Luther King, the answer to this question will be found in Chapter 3, with the help of Michel Foucault.