SCREED

An effort to avoid the temptation of apocalypse and to reconsider the integral relation between politics and aesthetics

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Abstract

How can we address our contemporary social and environmental crises? How particularly can we foster our capacity to collectively agree and act? These are the questions that motivate this writing, prompting, I'm afraid, a semi-comic response. Amateur and inexpert, I struggle to recognise convincing practical solutions and quickly become absorbed in issues of political and aesthetic philosophy. Specifically, I engage in a reading of Plato's *Republic*, exploring a relation between his notion of justice and Kant's conception of aesthetic beauty. Thought together, the notions of justice and beauty, as scenes of holistically focused reflection, suggest an altered basis for value with the potential to inform beneficial alternatives.

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Preface

In the latter half of 2022, I helped organise an exhibition entitled 'Antarctic Futures'. Drawing together artistic and scientific perspectives, the exhibition focused on the implications of climate change for the Antarctic environment and suggested the need to re-imagine the continent beyond traditional conceptions of remote and untrammelled wilderness. It emphasised particularly that any effort to 'protect' Antarctica depends not just on adhering to and bolstering existing Antarctic Treaty provisions, but also upon addressing global climate change. No amount of strict enforcement of local environmental protocols is going to protect Antarctica from the consequence of global warming. Instead something more integral is needed - a much wider transformation of existing society.

This recognition can easily prompt pessimism. How likely is that the human industrial juggernaut can be halted? What chance is there that we can alter our fundamental conditions of social and economic life? Instead, much easier to adopt an apocalyptic mindset - to anticipate, for Antarctica, the grim prospect of collapsing glaciers and ruined ecosystems. This is hardly fantasy. It corresponds to credible scientific models of what is likely to happen. Nonetheless, for all its realism and cautionary value, we need to avoid being stuck in the thinking of apocalypse. We need to seriously address the other option - that society can be constructively changed. We need to give up the temptation of picturesque and neatly obliterative disaster and consider how human conditions can be altered, not only to protect Antarctica but also to improve our own prospects for continuing survival.

Straight away this effort encounters a set of intractable problems. These hinge on dilemmas of social agency and agreement, upon how we can discover just and effective means of acting as a global whole. While there are any number of potential

social, economic and technological solutions, our difficulty is in collectively agreeing on what needs to be done and how to do it.

I describe this piece of writing as a screed, recognising that 'screed' is a term of abuse. It refers to a long and typically tedious piece of discourse. Rather than a well organised and convincing argument, a screed takes shape as a dull and undifferentiated harangue. This derogatory meaning is relatively recent, emerging in the early nineteenth century. Prior to that 'screed' referred to fragments of cloth stripped from larger garments. Just as a cloth screed disturbs the identity of any overall piece of clothing, the written screed adopts the material scale of properly communicative discourse but directs it to alien and intransitive ends. I would very much prefer that this were not the case - that this piece of writing could communicate more integrally and effectively. But in reflecting on the poorly configured relation between the immediacy of climate crisis and the difficulty and slowness of human decision-making and action, I am very aware of my limitations, which are hardly entirely my own, which clearly have a more general and endemic character

My theme is the re-imagination of the world. I am tempted to say 'social world', but the dilemmas that confront us clearly extend well beyond the traditional sense of the social. The issues are in a very significant sense ecological, demanding precisely a capacity to recognise and acknowledge larger wholes that extend beyond conventionally human frames. If there is any hope of avoiding the very worst consequences of climate change, it depends not just on our capacity to develop effective programs of remedial action, but also, at the very outset, on our capacity to recognise different possibilities of system identity and integrity. In my view, this recognition has both a political and an aesthetic aspect.

The relevance of politics is evident. We require formal contexts for deliberation and action to shape new social and economic conditions, as well as an everyday politics to inform our perceptions, discourses and choices. But why aesthetics? Very briefly, aesthetics is relevant for me in that it represents another thinking of dimensions of justice - not the justice of the courts, nor

even the justice of general social equity and fairness, but a justice focused specifically on negotiating a relation between dimensions of multiplicity and holistic identity; of reconciling this relation and lending it a common (social) currency. The field of aesthetics evolved as an effort to acknowledge both the intractable texture of phenomena and to recover and restore a sense of holistic integrity within a modernity shaped by fundamental divisions and contradictions. We have evolved an analytic conception of the whole, in which the whole is manifest only in properly functioning parts; in which the whole itself threatens to withdraw from view altogether. The discourse of aesthetics, for all its shortcomings, for all its tendency to reinforce the analytic conception, also suggests an alternative mode of seeing and an alternative basis for value. In this sense, I argue that aesthetics is political at the outset and that both politics and aesthetics share a central concern with features of justice. To be honest, however, this aim was not apparent at the outset. It emerged through the process of writing. I began this screed with no real sense of direction and only gradually evolved particular aims in the midst of writing.

I dedicate this to two people. Firstly my father. He had dementia for the last decade of life and died just over a month ago. I used to travel up to see him every Friday in his care home until COVID made things more difficult. He had been a marine micro-biologist most of his life, but took up collage at roughly the same time that his dementia became noticeable (while he was still living at home). I have many boxes of his abstract collages. Until the last few years he also maintained an interest in theoretical physics. About six or seven years ago he wrote a one page summary of his theory of everything. He argued that the universe is ultimately crystalline. All change and movement is only apparent. Everything has already existed and continues to exist. I'm not sure what I think of this theory, but I was impressed that he wrote it down. His life and recent death have inspired me to get this thing finished.

Secondly, I dedicate this to Karen, who has quite reasonably wondered what I've been doing in my room every day over the last few months (and more). As much as she may be suspicious of the

value of this solitary effort, I very much appreciate her putting up with me during this time.

1. Imagining Things

Still dark outside. I have only just woken up. I have a sense that the world is completely changed, but have no idea precisely how. If I could recognise anything at all, I would tell you what little I see and what little I know.

A different me looks ahead and recalls what Plato wrote over two thousand years ago - projecting these words as the speech of Socrates:

> *But for someone to talk when he doesn't believe he knows, but looks for the truth as he talks, which is what I'm doing now, is both frightening and dangerous (450e - 451a[1]).*

And this is the approach that I will adopt, although with little sense of approaching the truth, and with little expectation of attempting anything especially frightening and dangerous - except, of course, running the risk of writing something as literally tedious as my title suggests. I am, however, proceeding uncertainly, with nothing clear in mind (I guess I tend to think we all are). I'm afraid that I only really have a beginning - largely indistinguishable from any number of false starts.

I begin with the well known statement: 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism'. This is attributed to either Frederick Jameson or Slavoj Zizek and was popularised by Mark Fisher in *Capitalist Realism* (2009). The statement seems true enough, but is hardly surprising. Much easier to imagine apocalypse than genuine change. The prospect of an utterly annihilating end is fuelled by a rich cultural imaginary, from

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[1] See explanation of my referencing of Plato's *Republic* (2012) in references section

visions of Christian hell, to the dystopian fantasies of popular film and the iconography of nuclear armageddon. Allied to this is the prosaic awareness of our own mortality, which discovers some perverse solace when amplified into something more dramatic and general. Of course questioning our capacity to rationally find our way out of our current mess is not simply apocalyptic. It also acknowledges limits to human centrality and agency that are important if we are to discover new models of sustainability. It provides an initial imaginative step towards recognising our emplacement within nature, subject to forces that we can never entirely know, let alone master. As much as we strive to retain some reserves of optimism, this must be balanced and informed by a genuine regard for the likeliness of catastrophe.

Although never directly saying this, Jameson's (or Zizek's) statement suggests that if we could only evolve a post-capitalist economy and social system - if we could only find adequate means to imagine, conceive and broker such a thing - that the immediate prospect of apocalypse may recede slightly. It is precisely in our failure to think beyond capitalism and to realise a viable alternative model of social being and interaction that our orientation to disaster obtains its intractable definition. It is not that capitalism is our only problem. It is that capitalism is symptomatic of all of our problems - material, existential and collective.

A biologist friend explains to me that her environmental awakening occurred in her mid-high school years after seeing Al Gore's *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006). She told her parents about the film at dinner. They were uninterested, arguing that whatever happened in fifty or one hundred years was of little concern to them - they would be dead. Appalled by their attitude, she vowed to become a climate scientist. I can understand her decision, but still her parents do have a point. Within the context of a society that can envisage nothing much beyond the present of accumulation and consumption, the future can hardly have any vivid or pressing relevance.

Avoiding the temptation of apocalypse is not easy. It demands rethinking the nature, structure and horizons of the contemporary

world. The systems we inhabit have an all encompassing pull. They include not simply manifest features of socio-economic structure, but also constitutive features of our identity and self-understanding. As much as we hope (apocalyptically) for something entirely new, anything we project will have to be evolved from existing stuff. Just as science fiction conceives the alien in terms of things we know - negatively, for instance, as insects, inchoate blobs or techno-fascist fiends, and positively as beams of light, Edenic gardens and innocent, oracular children - so too we can only imagine alternative systems in terms of the known. And if we deliberately resist this, then we find ourselves conceiving anti-images - upside down and reversed images of the existing world. We draw upon the existing lexicon of the known and the unknown because there is really no other way to proceed.

Digressing slightly, science fiction offers a conventional avenue for reflecting on potential futures, but such reflection is also evident in genres that ostensibly portray the past. Set in the Viking era, Robert Egger's *The Northman* (2022) tells the old Danish story of *Amleth*, which involves a prince taking bloody revenge for his father's murder. This story provided the inspiration for Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. The contemporary film, despite its legibly modern portrayal of exaggerated masculinity, is impressive in its visceral evocation of the close imbrication of the real and the supernatural in Viking culture. Indeed, it has been praised for its historical accuracy in summoning this very different way of life. However, its interests would seem to extend beyond the historical. While plainly oriented towards the past, it also sets forth a conception of human identity that has relevance for how we conceive the future. The return to a more elemental, earth and nature focused life is a common fantasy of post-apocalyptic imagination. The Viking world provides a vehicle for engaging with this possibility imaginatively (and spectacularly). At one level, this vision is cast as a field of unrelenting conflict, violence and inequity (reminding us of Hobbes notion of the 'nasty, brutish and short' state of nature (1985, p.186)). At another level, however, and precisely through its evocation of atavistic features of human

being, it suggests a vital alternative to contemporary life, offering a renewed relation to nature and a rich palette of human, animal and supernatural interaction. This ambivalent conception - both repellant and appealing - aligns with a contemporary imagination that discovers models for the future in nostalgic (and less nostalgic) visions of earlier societal forms. The portrayal of the Viking past works both to confirm the natural basis for dilemmas of contemporary society, by highlighting age-old currents of murderous and grimly exploitative conflict, while also implicitly questioning the contemporary narrowing and dulling of the human field of experience.

The film's interest in the future is evident not only in terms of the modelling of an imaginary past, but as a vital strand of the story itself. The main character, Amleth, is preoccupied with visions of the future - revenge, Valhalla and the continuity of his blood. As a young boy, Amleth participates in a male initiation ceremony with his father. His father, just returned from battle, carries a fresh abdominal injury and presses his son's fingers into the wound. Under the influence of a ritual potion, Amleth discovers in his father's entrails the roots of a tree that grow up and include all his ancestors, his father and himself. They appear suspended from the branches in the manner of Christmas ornaments. Much later in the film, he sees the tree again, but this time with his children hanging from the higher branches above himself. This vivid premonition of the future links to a conception of time as a field of fatal determination in which past, present and future are inextricably linked. It confirms the limits of Amleth's own life and establishes its wider implications. Earlier in the story, a Viking witch had prophesied that Amleth would have to choose between between being 'kind' to his kindred' or enacting vengeance. In this vision of his children, Amleth suddenly recognises that there is a way of doing 'both' - of guaranteeing his bloodline precisely by fulfilling his own vengeful destiny. In this sense, his revenge is justified less in terms of addressing an immediate familial injustice than in terms of ensuring an aspect of natural continuity. At the very end of the film, as Amleth lies fatally wounded, he experiences a consoling

vision of his wife with the two young infants that he will never know. His life is redeemed by looking beyond his own narrow self interest toward the good of his heirs.

Why have I described this long story? Because it offers a fairly obvious response to my biologist friend's parents. Through the lens of Viking fantasy, it suggests the need to shift beyond a myopic focus on the present of individual interest to recognise our incorporation within a larger living tree. Furthermore, it suggests that this recognition may lend our necessarily individual lives greater meaning and value.

Enough with this digression. Time for riddles. What proceeds excitedly on feet in youth, in an ordered train as an adult and then spreads indiscriminately across the floor as an elder? A writer, of course. They begin musically with poetry (measured feet), then move on to well organised prose or narrative, and finally end up writing something like this - a long and undifferentiated screed. Or, as Plato puts it in relation to philosophy,

> *Finally, when their physical strength goes, and they are no longer candidates for political or military service, they should roam free, like sacred animals and do nothing except philosophy (498c).*

In any case, returning to my beginning, what do I wish to accomplish with this piece of writing? My aim, however ill-advised, is to conceive a non-apocalyptic beyond to capitalism, with the capitalist system conceived as informing untenable social relations and an unsustainable relationship to the wider environment. As much as I'd like to arrive at a developed conception, these pages represent a theatrical effort to see what's possible from a very limited basis - my own hazy conception of things. I am sure that anything I write will fall short in countless ways. I doubt, for a start, that elaborating an alternative socio-economic system is work for a single person. Programs for change must emerge collectively to have any genuine currency and potential. Still, you would hope that I could roughly sketch out a plan. There must be scope to envisage alternatives without

automatic recourse to contexts of democratic deliberation and dedicated expertise. I am hardly the best person to be attempting any of this, but if constructive options are available then surely I should be able to recognise vague outlines of them. If I am altogether unable to do this, it affirms not only my failure but also, perhaps, a paucity of evident alternatives.

I suppose I could write a piece of fiction, but that would mean imagining characters and a plot when I only mean to imagine the contours of a different world. I'm hoping that I can imagine the latter generally and diagrammatically, without the need to conjure convincing details. In any case, my underlying interest is more philosophical than practical. Although I would love to develop a fully elaborated blueprint for transformative social change, I realise that my focus will be more upon the intangible implications of our current predicament. There is a need to refashion not only systems, relations and processes, but also aspects of sensibility, understanding and communication. I am particularly interested in how a notion of aesthetics, broadly understood, links to a conception of politics in a way that suggests new scope for social and environmental justice.

Predictably, this will be a socialist vision. Otherwise, I can only imagine an account of ruin - the exacerbation of our current circumstances. To be entirely and necessarily reductive, capitalism (and its state-socialist variants) thrives on growth, which inevitably produces heat. This heat may discover new alibis and alternate sources, but is still bound to further warm the world, place further unsustainable demands on planetary resources and reinforce continuing systems of global inequity.

I should observe that I am not especially optimistic about the future. I doubt that we can easily adjust our societies and lives to reduce our malevolent influence on environmental systems. Very simply, our current situation is the product of complex forces that have a compelling energy. While I appreciate that we are significant authors of our predicament, I hardly think that we can straightforwardly and deliberately change things for the better. Human society develops and follows paths that exceed neatly

rational deliberation. Furthermore, while we are still enmeshed in the fragile safety of extant systems, I doubt we will discover the collective motivation to affect major change. I suspect only an increasing set of cataclysmic events will drive demand for transformative action. Linked to this, the key question of this 'study' emerges. Beyond recognising that something needs to be urgently done, and even developing a viable plan of action, how can we establish the conditions of agreement that would enable any course of action to be coherently and consistently pursued?

Despite my lack of optimism, I am determined to make an effort to envisage different outcomes, if only as a means of better understanding aspects of our current situation. There is really no other option, except to simply give up, perhaps consoling ourselves with the recognition that whatever happens follows an ultimately natural logic. I can mumble to myself, 'humans may be agents of devastation, but whatever the terms of this devastation, systems will adapt - most probably without us and the ecosystems we know, but still in some kind of living or non-living form'. This kind of rumination clearly offers no great consolation.

So instead I am imagining waking up in this different world. I am supposing that I would still have a bed of some kind, maybe not my own bed, maybe simply one that I happen to be lying in. For the time being, I am waking up in my roughly usual way just after dawn. I am certainly not looking that far ahead that the ordinary cycle of night and day is no longer pertinent. Indeed I suspect that the rising and the setting of the sun will become increasingly present and meaningful. While there can be no reassuring return to the conditions of traditional hunter gatherer and agrarian society, it may be that long-standing natural features of the world will obtain a renewed prominence. This is especially so because there is nothing that urgently demands that I get up. I have no busy job that I need to rush off to. I have things to do, but they can be approached in an unhurried way. I have time to notice the changing light, the presence of clouds, the possibility of rain.

Very evidently, I am already starting to write fiction. I am imagining a person - somebody roughly resembling myself - on a

specific day in an unspecific future. While my aim is to be as specific as I can, I must also allow this world its distance. Once again, my aim is to conceive an alternative system, not a narrative universe involving the details of particular places, things, experiences and lives.

So let's leave this person in bed for the moment.

There is somebody else who is already up and walking past outside (I contradict myself immediately with another narrative scenario). They are heading off to a medical appointment with a specialist doctor at the regional medical hub: a bit like a mall but without the shops - more a convenient concentration of human services. This is hardly difficult to imagine. This kind of thing already exists. She is travelling to the hub because the local medical system lacks the relevant specialist expertise. But she does not drive there. Instead, she walks a short distance and is picked up by a local bus, transfers to an exchange and then catches a train. No car and yet it is straightforward to get from here to there. All of this depends upon an articulated public transport system that facilitates individual travel pathways.

I have seen something like this in Turkey (although this was not an exclusively public system). You walk to a known local street, a mini-bus (*dolmus*) cruises by, picks you up, transports you to a local bus exchange and very quickly you are on your way to Ankara, Istanbul or some other major city. Many people don't own private vehicles in Turkey, so the public transport system is nuanced and finely articulated. It seamlessly integrates local, regional and national transport networks. This is a mundane example, simply suggesting that there are alternatives to private vehicle transport. These options already exist for many of us - less so, however, for those living in poorly serviced and far flung suburbs, but common for many inner-city dwellers. Imagine the consequences, however, if the public transport system were to become more extensive and private ownership of vehicles were greatly reduced or even prohibited. We could adapt to this new system. It is not unimaginable. We can anticipate inconveniences

and a sense of reduced autonomy and freedom, but we could readily adapt.

It is through such small and not especially imaginative steps that we can move to a more dedicated vision of an alternative system. While we may not have the luxury of changing the world in modest incremental steps - while the demand for change may come suddenly and affect us more urgently - nonetheless, at the level of our thinking, it helps to gradually realise that other modes of being are viable and available.

The larger issue this example raises, of course, is about mobility generally. The last century has enabled vastly accelerated human mobility. We can be in Sydney for lunch and Bali for dinner. We can live on the Gold Coast and commute weekly to Melbourne. This mobility depends upon largely unsustainable forms of transport, particularly air travel. How are we to imagine an end to this ready mobility? One option is to return to slower forms of travel - perhaps the traditional pilgrimage or some modern, carbon-friendly variety of nomadic movement. This engages with the proposal for a return to 'slow living', which promises, on the positive side, a deeper appreciation of the texture of lived experience. But how does it correspond to the contemporary sense of globalised identity and interaction? The global sensibility is clearly closely linked to aspects of corporate capitalism (the infinite mobility of flows of capital), so demands qualification and critique, but setting this complicity aside for the moment, how are we to elaborate global responses to global problems without rapid and dedicated human mobility? It may be that we need to distinguish between the motion of real bodies and the motion of imaginary and discursive interaction? Perhaps we require greater attention to fostering virtual rather than real globalisation? And yet how would this be distinguishable from the abstracted non-citizenry that capitalism already offers?

It is worth noting that many of us have scarcely travelled since the COVID pandemic. On the positive side, this has meant that people have spent time in their local places more, but it has also produced a sense of loss - a diminution of dimensions of identity

and experience. Of course, I am speaking of people like myself who have grown up with the privilege of travel, who are constituted in terms of the possibility of being here and then very easily and swiftly elsewhere. While this level of mobility is no longer tenable, the alternative seems bleak. We envisage being stuck in one place, forced to endure more restricted lives. This prospect of reduced mobility highlights the affective implications of any major level of systemic change. Alongside describing the objective character of any 'new system' there is a need to consider how it affects our subjective relation to aspects of embodied and reflective-imaginative being. There is a need to contemplate changed relations to dimensions of desire, agency and individual and social identity.

This effort to qualify contemporary mobility, to stress that a privileged sense of mobility must change, raises the difficulty of elaborating anything like a universal plan. There are all manner of different relations to the current system. The issues of mobility emphasises this. Most importantly, there are profound levels of inequality that affect any relation to the conditions of a proposed new system. Even the positing of an alternative vision itself is compromised by these inequalities. Who has the right to propose alternatives? Why should anybody attend to them, let alone adhere to them? On what basis do they assume any level of universal currency? Very simply, we can scarcely develop any adequate and consistent means of addressing issues such as climate change without addressing the conditions of global inequity. Local efforts are worth pursuing, but they are likely to have limited efficacy until we discover new social and economic forms that create a genuine basis for wider, more universally agreed action.

But then again, the very notion of universality is problematic. Even if envisaged in redistributive and democratic terms - it is still linked to the thinking of domination - the insistence that a common vision and plan of action must prevail. We are all willing, I suppose, to accept some level of practical, negotiated agreement, but when we start thinking of a revised global system it is easy to start prescribing how things will be for everybody. Just as in

Plato's *Republic*, there is a thin line between social utopia and fascism. How are we to imagine the architecture of a new system without developing a castle with tall walls and a moat? How can we envisage multiple perspectives and approaches? How can we allow systems to emerge collaboratively? How can we ensure that collaboration is not simply a mechanism for vested and inequitable interests? These questions demonstrate that everything hinges on how we conceive the potential for social collectivity and action.

But I have left my inadequately imagined person lying in bed too long. They need to get up, if only to piss and eat. But who knows how each of these things will be accomplished. Perhaps they will just piss where they are and then abandon their bed. Perhaps they will go looking for food. Perhaps they will steal it. Perhaps they will open up their French door refrigerator and drink a bottle of organic kale juice. Any number of options. But since this is my imaginary system, I will suggest that our unhurried protagonist gets up and urinates in a composting toilet and then wanders down the path some way to a communal food hub, picking at the various offerings. He then ambles a bit further down to a large hall with a communal piano and plays it for a while, before a friend arrives and encourages him up to the garden before the sun gets too hot. They spend a few hours weeding some vegetable plots, drinking tea and playing cards before heading down to the ocean to swim. I appreciate this may sound dull and far too relaxed, suggesting some suburban scale hippy commune. But I don't think it is altogether misguided.

The system involves all citizens, where practical, contributing to food production and spending most of the rest of their time involved in social interaction and leisure pursuits. They can afford to do this because they don't own much. They don't own houses. They have very few individual possessions and don't really do many things that cost a lot of money. Some people pursue more specialised vocations - as doctors, teachers, scientists, makers, etc. - but many more develop holistic skills and focus on addressing local needs. Their roles are precisely that, socially negotiated programs of action rather than jobs. They provide integral rewards rather

than differentiated (stratified) incomes. They are pursued because, on the whole, people want to make things of their lives and contribute. And if they don't wish to do so - if they'd prefer to spend all day in bed or taking drugs - they are welcome to do so. Working is not the focus. The focus is on the pursuit of meaningful, socially engaged and fulfilling activity.

This is all very well, but surely fails to consider vital aspects of human being - our restless dynamism, our competitiveness, our erotic and criminal urges, etc. Quite true. I have not considered any of these things adequately, but it seems to me that these are less simply essential human qualities than traits that take shape in complex dialogue with historical social conditions. They could be regarded, for instance, less as anything innate than as features that obtain their dark, particular definition within the context of industrial modernity and capitalism. Are there criminals as such, or are they defined in terms of decisions made in specific, very often inequitable circumstances? This is not to suggest that the self-interested, erotic and transgressive are alien features, simply that they always obtain a socially determinable form, with the potential to be inflected differently - to be expressed in other terms.

We may also object that I have stripped away the capitalist system but left the current world basically intact. There are cities and suburbs and these simply shift into communal mode. Public amenities replace private ones. Homes, kitchens, bathrooms and possessions are conceived in terms of a common stock that is equitably serviced and accessed. This aligns with an effort to shift beyond the twin paradigms of Western economy, in which there are either slaves serving owners or slaves appearing to be owners but actually enslaved to debt. The first relates to literal slavery and the status of serfs in the mediaeval economy, while the latter indicates the wage-slavery of modernity.

But in attempting another approach, how are these new public, communal spaces delineated? How does one become a member of them? What is this community's relation to other communities and to 'foreigners' - to people who are not part of that community? Most basically, why should this delineation of spaces and roles be

respected? Why shouldn't other people - perhaps those who have lost their own homelands to political oppression or rising sea waters - not come and live here also? On what basis do these others not share equal access to whatever is publicly constituted? This is to consider the nature of 'the public' itself? Does it have boundaries? Is it something exclusive? Is it somehow excepted from the general rule that possessions are to be shared? Does the community - local, regional, national - own its own particular space of communal integrity, or it should it be made more generally available?

One approach may be to think in terms of protocols of reciprocal obligation. 'Other' people may come here if 'we' are allowed to go there, but then what if the direction is all one way? What if resources are limited? What if one hundred additional people show up there is not enough housing or food? Does all of this indicate the necessity of practical boundaries or is it better to radically insist upon openness and sharing?

This returns us to the problem of envisaging principles of universal agreement. What if some people and some groups disagree? We could possibly then consider a subdivision of the available global space, with some adhering to protocols of reciprocal sharing and others going elsewhere to follow other protocols or to ignore protocols altogether. The problem, however, is that there can be no system that legislates such a division. The latter group - the group that refuse to adhere to our communal ethic - are not bound by any of our efforts at exclusion and ensure through their refusal of our system that our space is never hermetically secure. We must be constantly vigilant that they don't invade. We must develop the capacity to defend ourselves and fight to ensure the principle of open sharing remains perversely exclusive. So contemplating other places that escape our limited universality enables less a rich plurality of modes of social being than the certainty that these modes will come into conflict and that our own principles of integral community will be exposed as a sham (limited and restricted).

We encounter a very evident conundrum. Either we adhere to a universal principle that lacks any means of being adequately negotiated (due to cultural differences and systems of inequity) or we abandon universality to be subjected to another universal order - what Hobbes refers to the '*warre* of every man against every man' (1985, p.188). The latter is not precisely a principle, but has a similar absolute and determining character. Sidestepping this impasse would seem to demand thinking in less binary terms. Instead of a community and its other there is a need to conceive porous and intimately connected communities, as well as something like a meta-community (a community of communities). The latter is possibly less an initial principle than an emergent phenomenon based upon the network of relationships between existing communities.

The Western notions of the savage, alien and exile can potentially be replaced by a thinking of lines of association. Australian anthropologist John Von Sturmer explains that when two Indigenous strangers meet they instantly discuss aspects of connection (1981, p.3). However remote their relationship, they can always recognise a kinship link that provides protocols of interaction. There is in this sense no notion of the absolute stranger. The latter notion only emerged with the arrival of Western explorers and colonists. Given the history of territorial rivalry and displacement in Europe and the Middle East, it is hardly surprising that stronger notions of inclusion and exclusion developed. If we could somehow think beyond them - if we could gain the habit of 'placing' people rather than excluding them - more viable reciprocal relationships could possibly take shape, but then again, only on the basis that we make deliberate efforts to reduce conditions of global social inequity.

No doubt vital differences will remain. We can hardly ignore the Taliban exclusion of girls from schools or North African traditions of female genital mutilation? Do we insist these practices be stopped? From a western perspective, I think we are obliged to resist them. I am very unsure, however, how this resistance should be conducted - through efforts to literally politically intervene or

distant diplomacy? At one level, I believe that we are obliged to do everything possible to stop these practices. At another level, I recognise that directly intervening demonstrates yet another aspect of aggressive and inequitable power.

Everything hinges here on a complex set of tensions. Cultural relativism suggests that there is no such thing as universal ethical reason. We learn instead to acknowledge and respect profound aspects of cultural difference. While this is generally hugely beneficial - particularly within the context of critiquing a vacuous rhetoric of human universality that disguises, for instance, real processes of Western colonial expansion and the genocide of traditional peoples, it also has the consequence of making any general discussion of questions of human value awkward. It can suggest that no such discussion is even feasible. In a world facing immense global social and environmental challenges, this can quickly become disabling. Alongside the respect for difference, we also need to discover new grounds for commonality and agreement.

I am clearly becoming focused on the intractable dilemmas of negotiating social collectivity.

The last few days I have reached an impasse. I have written much less - just some random, ill-considered observations:

– There is no perfect society and there never will be one.

– Society begins with the family - and the tensions in the family, the sexual and gender tensions between husband and wife, the affinities and rivalries between father and child, mother and child, and between children. The family has functional value, but is not a product of reasonable deliberation. It is something we encounter. Even the orphan discovers the family - as a lack and as varieties of better or worse institutional prosthesis.

– Some argue the social begins beyond the family - that it relates to wider realm beyond any notion of biological

foundation, but surely the biological and the historical exist in mutual, complex relation?

– I agree with Aristotle that identity emerges from the social and does not exist without it. Even the hermit only coheres in terms of the social (in terms of an effort at withdrawal and ascetic autonomy).

– People are sets of affordances.

– The issue of crime? I would like to simply permit anything and allow culture itself, without any recourse to police or judiciary, to limit crime. But clearly we cannot permit, for instance, a father to murder his wife and children and continue his life with no consequences. (But who is this 'we' and what makes the necessity of punishment so 'clear'?). We could certainly foster conditions that would make these kinds of actions rare, but they would still most likely happen. These edge cases are defining. The conventional answer is to refer to fundamental principles of justice and their embodiment in community standards and the formal legal system. This is the system in place, but does it work mainly to reduce crime or to structure and exacerbate it? How can recourse to the police and the legal system be reduced significantly so that criminality loses vital identity? It is not that people are intrinsically good or bad. Nor are they are natively drawn towards supporting or subverting social bonds and codes of action and behaviour. People become criminals for complex reasons. A 'serial killer' becomes a 'serial killer' partly because we have lent the category tangible imaginative force. Surely, as much as possible, the point is to limit this kind of categorisation and deal with the difficulties of human interaction in a more holistic way that avoids demonisation and encourages empathy and social inclusion.

I also wrote this unfinished note:

– In Cartesian mode, imagine an evil genie that maintains various collections of biological creatures - little zoos of living things. The genie does not come from Earth, but arrives from elsewhere to build a zoo of earthly stuff. Luckily we are included in the collection. The genie is busy with regular travel to other planetary systems and would like to ensure the earthly zoo is roughly intact each time they return. Cognisant of the ecological history of Earth, the genie recognises a recent plague of people and a dwindling number of other living things, so employs a very large net to scoop up significant portions of the human population and empty them into the abyss of space. The genie wipes away the shiny slime of human infrastructure and flushes the atmosphere of its noxious carbon to encourage the growth of plants, fishes, birds and insects. Perceiving that getting the activities of human beings right is key to enabling some level of decent ecological equilibrium, the genie descends into the collection as a deliberate force. They arrive as a beguiling and authoritative ruler, shaping human behaviour and social life in ways that are conducive to the overall health of the zoo. What else would we expect the genie to do? They establish systems that reduce conflict and ensure rough ecological balance. They foster variety, but limit either overpopulation or rapacious interaction…

I lost my way with this story. My aim was to posit an imaginary mechanism to shift beyond intractable political-philosophical dilemmas concerning how global agreement and agency is achieved. I envisaged the genie as a zookeeper, or possibly Platonic 'philosopher king', doing what is best for human beings by considering the needs of the overall ecological system, but we can hardly look to such external agency. The political problem must be addressed without any recourse to a benign *deus ex machina*. I suppose I could delve into political philosophy more thoroughly (and, no doubt, I should) but still the naivety of my project is important. Any conception of an alternative system needs to be articulated with an aspect of idiocy. If I know too much, and if a

major goal is to manifest my particular expertise, then I will temper my proposals, endlessly qualifying them with the expectation of potential and very reasonable objections. Better in this instance that I write something dumb than nothing at all. Our current circumstances demand urgent and deliberate efforts. We are hardly likely to settle fundamental political-philosophical questions over the next few decades, but we must certainly dramatically alter our economic and social conditions within this time or there will be little scope for thought at all.

So, let me risk a few more rash proposals. Although many argue that the capitalist system is not incompatible with reducing our malevolent influence on the planet, I am suspicious of this view. If I were suddenly thrown into the role of the genie, I would attempt the following:

1. Eliminate capital as a basis for global value, interaction and exchange, fostering instead a set of equitably resourced social systems linked to particular peoples and environmental systems;

2. Ensure local cultural systems are largely self-sufficient, eliminating the need for the large scale movement of goods and peoples;

3. Make labour an intrinsically rewarding aspect of life that all people have scope to participate in, but without serving as a means of materially differentiating them. Furthermore, labour should link holistically to other aspects of life, so that it is not a discretely separate category;

4. Foster a custodial relationship to non-human systems as an essential feature of human society. This includes reducing existing human infrastructure and restoring a rich variety of local ecosystems;

5. Develop a much greater focus on intangible features of social identity, rather than real, material indices (and certainly not capital accumulation);

6. Develop lightweight and sophisticated technologies (focused particularly on communication).

Let me try again. One of the advantages of being a genie is that I can make as many attempts as I like. So, once again, here is what is needed:

1. Global governance system established with explicit aim to end inequitable and environmentally destructive capitalist system and to foster new modes of society and social being

2. Collaborative global system enabling protocols of association and exchange, but restricting trade and human mobility

3. The model of competing nations is replaced by cooperative system that envisages ecologically sustainable groupings of peoples who relate to tenable local food and production systems

4. Universal welfare and health system

5. Free knowledge networks

6. Elimination of private property and replacement with notion of custodianship and protocols of reciprocal exchange

7. Global directive to end private ownership and use of fossil-fuelled private vehicles and devices. Switch to public infrastructure, bicycles, etc.

And with that my job is done. I can disappear, ceding my powers to my zoo animals, who will now manage perfectly well on their own. A fond fantasy, I'm afraid. No possibility of a genie and very little scope for universal agreement. The issue we face is that there is no time for discussion, we must act, yet we don't even know how to begin discussion, let alone what to do. While some level of globally convincing social equity would make consistent action much more likely, we have no luxury to slowly evolve such a state.

We must act now within the midst of inequity. We must address all problems at once without any sense of a globally agreed plan.

On the issue of urgency. There is a need for action, but panic and haste hardly produce worthwhile decisions. Even if we are swept away by a large wave, better to remain roughly calm than to thrash around in the sea. This provides a better chance of making it through the tumble, or at least bravely facing up to the prospect of drowning. It may also provide better scope to make a sound strategic decision - to dive down, for instance, to avoid the wave's full force. In any case, if we do not immediately have answers to our present problems then perhaps we need to spend the time evolving them rather than simply rashly acting. The demand for instant action is partly complicit with the overall sense that everything we are experiencing represents only another momentary dilemma, as though we can somehow move swiftly elsewhere to some other place or state of being that will make all the bad stuff go away. More important that we deliberately confront matters and recognise their intransigence and duration. We may not act in time, but we must dwell for a while within the conundrum of action rather than simply imagining that we can shift beyond it. Everything depends upon thinking through this moment of thinking and agency.

Kingsnorth and Hine (2009) suggest that part of the problem lies in our very conceit that it is somehow our role to save the world. They argue that the world will continue in some form or other whatever we do. It is we that are set to disappear. Still, that is reason enough to think through the problem of action and attempt to affect change - less to bolster our *hubris* than our potential for survival.

French philosopher Jacques Ranciere distinguishes between two orders of politics: the false politics of ordinary political discourse and governance, which he labels the 'police'; and the politics of 'dissensus' in which the *demos* (people) are (occasionally) manifest as a rift within the existing order (1999; 2001, p.10; 2004: 12). Ranciere argues that dissensus has an aesthetic character Inasmuch as it represents a tear in the order of existing sensibly

inscribed social relations. While this model provides an important critique of both contemporary politics and political philosophy, it would seem problematic in terms of offering any scope for constructive forms of transformative political action.

A similar problem affects Mouffe's (1999) conception of 'agonistic pluralism'. The emphasis upon the revitalisation of liberal democratic institutions through a carnivalesque theatre of difference ignores that there is still the need, beyond acknowledging fundamental layers of social antagonism and structural disenfranchisement, to discover practical means to agree and to act. The modes of democracy that Rawls (1971) and Habermas (1998) advocate, which aim to provide a lived, moral-ethical basis for liberal democratic institutions, are criticised for their assumption that power can be stripped away from contexts of debate, their rational conception of discourse and, most crucially, their assumption that any kind of genuine consensus can be reached. Yet leaving aside the chimera of a neatly normative sphere of democratic decision-making, the value of deliberative democracy lies in highlighting participatory processes for legitimating forms of necessary social and political action. The existential threat that climate emergency represents demands not simply the constant assertion of human plurality, but more particularly some basis for coherent and consistent global action. Currently, we simply lack the deliberative mechanisms to make this possible. The UN lacks sufficient power and agency and world politics is characterised by fundamental, constitutive rivalries and disputes. Within this inauspicious context, there is a need to somehow find means for global agency to address our contemporary (and profoundly ongoing) crises. Alternatively we must look to the undirected play of local actions that may or may not gain global shape, and are more likely to demonstrate inconsistencies, contradictions and compromised scope than any sense of emergent potential.

(Would it be better in these circumstances to aim to describe goals rather mechanisms - to describe a vision for an alternative

system rather than a clear pathway for achieving it? I seem to have a better sense of what a system might look than how to get there.)

A few more thoughts on Mouffe's conception of agonistic pluralism. Mouffe is critical of Habermas for imagining the institutional possibility of an ideal speech situation in which all can freely speak without the imposition of wider relations of power, yet at the same time she argues for a clear distinction between antagonism (as the forceful expression of difference) and agonism (as the theatrical mediation of difference). This also seems to bracket dimensions of power, asserting a meta-linguistic and meta-ethical power that provides the basis for a respectful pluralism. Agonism depends upon each party in the overall plural set of relations abiding by at least one fundamental rule - that they respect social difference and associated agonistic forms of engagement. However, discussion, decisions and actions very typically involve singular and exclusive choices that set aside or literally negate the interests of specific parties. Politics is not simply a theatre of mutual recognition but also a context for pursuing contentious lines of action. Within current world politics there are countless instances where antagonism refuses to give way to agonism, where different parties (social groups, political parties, cultures and nation states) directly contend without any prospect of compromise. Agonism can only ever really succeed where difference itself is reduced to a theatre, where it has lost any motive force. While the notion of agonistic pluralism has value in terms of acknowledging the limits of rationally negotiated consensus, it fails to adequately conceive the consequences of difference. It renders difference itself an ideal, neglecting its forceful very often uncompromising basis.

I have been trying to write about aesthetics for some time, focusing specifically upon Kant's notion of beauty and its uncertain political implications. Writing shortly after Kant, the Romantic writer Friedrich Schiller highlights these implications, arguing that aesthetic education provides the necessary basis for the enlightened political transformation of society. Aesthetics is in this way distinguished from politics. It represents a sphere apart that

can never properly become, or be integrated within, the worldly context of ethical action per se. From a contemporary perspective, Rancière, describes the close affinity between the aesthetic and the political, with both sharing an emphasis on the 'distribution of the sensible'. Yet, like Schiller, he also brackets any direct correspondence between the two. This disjunction appears as a regular paradox within the philosophy of aesthetics. Aesthetics is regarded as fundamental to the possibility of political transformation and yet also essentially distanced from it - characteristically withdrawing from anything resembling action as such. German critical theorist Theodor Adorno (1997) argues that aesthetics retains its political promise precisely in these terms, by rendering compelling alternatives without actually manifesting them in practice.

I engage with these issues in greater detail in chapters 4 and 5, but it is worth observing at the outset, aesthetics is not only concerned with imagining futures - with modelling possibilities and embodying hopes - it has intrinsically political implications. The withdrawal from ordinary contexts of action is itself political. It engages with a different mode of being - attentive, contemplative, reflective - that unsettles more active and directed conceptions. At the same time, I have no wish to insist upon the distinct characteristics of the aesthetic as a separate mode of cognition and engagement. Rather the aesthetic is better conceived as a neglected layer of ordinary experience, thought and action that imperfectly denotes other features of being. In his *Poetics* (1986), Aristotle defines the dramatic plot in terms of representing 'men in action'. This summarises a whole notion of what it is to be human, of what it means to have agency - to live and make a significant mark on the world. Aesthetics offers an alternative to this conception. It emphasises an outwardly passive mode of being that involves, for instance, stumbling across and being struck by something beautiful. Mobility shifts inward to denote a flexible terrain of contemplative, unfixed play that has no other aim than to remain in this contemplative state (Kant). So aesthetics frames alternative contexts of paradoxical action - action as inaction, action without

externally conceived end. This has value as a vital antidote to modes of action and being that are destroying the world.

Just to emphasise, however, it is not as though we must privilege an altogether alien mode of being that has distinct and rigorously determined features. Rather the notion of aesthetics indicates and demonstrates a strand of ordinary human being. Rational thought, for instance, can also be reflective and resist narrowly instrumental goals. Similarly we can recognise all manner of 'aesthetic' interstices within everyday life that have profound political potential if we can only discover the means to regard them in these terms. The aesthetic then, broadly conceived, extends out from aesthetics as such to infiltrate and make strange many dimensions of ordinary active being. The vital need is to discover inaction within action and thus transform aspects of the latter's essential rationale and conditions.

Marx deliberately did not provide a detailed plan for communist society. He avoided describing 'recipes' for the 'restaurants' of the future, with the sense that communism would evolve historically (1873) . It was not an imaginary ideal or something that could be precisely envisioned. Driven by historical necessity the future society would be determined democratically by the people directly involved. This reticence makes sense within Marx's overall conceptual universe, but is perhaps less relevant in our current predicament. We no longer have any belief that inexorable historical forces will produce an improved society. Dialectical struggle as such, for instance, won't necessarily produce a more sustainable relation to ecological systems. Instead, if anything, we are bound to the conditions of blinkered neglect and apocalyptic inertia. We are drawn within a black hole of our own creation, but without even a fully adequate sense of terror, let alone any clear idea how we might extract ourselves from our circumstances. If we even recognise our current peril - rather than denying or blithely ignoring it - the only way we can imagine any reduction in our destructive environmental influence is in terms of cataclysmic scenarios, involving the undoing of modernity and the annihilation of the human species itself. Within this context, there is an urgent

need to conceive alternatives, less to soothsay the future than to creatively and resistively open it up to other possibilities. Marx anticipated the inevitability of 'restaurants', while we are anticipating their disappearance altogether unless we can come up with some kind of recipes, however flawed, however subject to change.

Initially, I thought I could write this fairly innocently, or better stupidly. My challenge was just to make something up, recognising that my conception would inevitably bear the illiterate trace of long traditions of radical speculation. I'm increasingly rethinking the value of this approach. While I don't want to write anything like a standard academic account, there is a need for some rough literacy or I'm likely to simply poorly echo existing arguments. My brief discussion of Marx, Laclau, Mouffe and Rancière above indicate a casual effort to engage more closely with the literature, but I sense the need for something more thorough - a Cook's tour of political philosophy, touching on Plato, Aristotle, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, etc. This will hardly protect me from stupidity - and I do want to preserve an aspect of naïveté - but it may lend greater focus to my discussion and proposals. Although there is some charm in innocently envisaging an alternative system, the questions that I'm addressing also genuinely interest me. They encourage me to delve into the political philosophical tradition as a means of developing and refining my conception of social and political alternatives.

And then another fantasy takes shape. I imagine walking up into the escarpment forest each day for a few hours to read portions of canonic political philosophy. I carry a backpack and chair. I walk up a fire trail and then a muddy mountain back track to a small grassy clearing. I sit and read there for a few hours each day. This iterative procedure and physical discipline keeps me on track, although a recent preponderance of rainy weather makes it less immediately tenable. So instead I sit on the couch or on the back porch to do my reading each day. I'm starting with Plato's *Republic*, which I've read bits and pieces from, but never properly read from start to finish.

The *Republic* is fundamentally concerned with the nature of justice and injustice. This is considered less in strictly legal terms (as something legislated and judicially regulated), or as a specifically ethical issue (examining, for instance, the conditions that encourage or discourage equality, fairness, etc.), but more as an ontological dilemma. The issue is very much about justice as a condition of complex being that involves the balanced and symmetrical relationship between constituent parts. The entire proposal for an ideal republic (city) hinges on an effort to clarify how a coherent whole can be crafted from a set of specialised social parts (farmers, soldiers, retailers, rulers, labourers, etc.). Having considered the nature of social constitution, Plato then applies this model to an understanding of the human individual as a 'just' regulation of rational, emotional ('spirited') and appetitive elements. So, in both the political and individual context, justice is conceived in terms of the problem of constitution - of rendering something at once differentiated and integrally (healthily) whole. Justice (as well as 'goodness", beauty' and well being) is associated with a proportional and properly governed set of relations, injustice with the opposite.

In passing, it is worth observing that Plato's conception of how the mediation between parts to form a whole is core to questions of justice suggests another way of conceiving the political significance of Kant's aesthetics. Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790) positions aesthetic judgement as a special mode of cognition that involves a necessary relation to the objective world. Very swiftly, however, aesthetic judgement takes shape less as a specialised cognitive condition than as a meta-level field of mediation, shaping the relation, for instance, between the *a priori* and the real and between reason and dimensions of lived experience and action. In this sense, Kant's aesthetic theory - particularly his theory of beauty - gains a direct political relevance (and not simply at the level of its more obviously political implications). It can be regarded as a treatise on justice - on the just relation between different zones of human affordance. Reason may appear the ruler in Kan't system, but it is actually aesthetic sense that enables the possibility of

constitution. For both Plato and Kant, justice (or judgement) has a double aspect. It involves both discrimination (differentiation) and integration (reconciliation). Just as Plato conceives the political whole in terms of a relation between absolutely distinct parts (idealised, pure roles), so too Kant, in the very same motion of proposing the aesthetic mediation of specialised spheres of cognition also delineates their differences more precisely. Overall, this would seem to indicate a deeper political significance for *The Critique of Judgement*, which is political not only in envisaging a 'common sense' and dedicated sphere of human identity and freedom, but also in addressing the complex and ambivalent nature of constitution (system-integrity) as such.

This thinking of politics and aesthetics reminds me of the Anaximander fragment, which also employs a curious notion of 'justice':

> *Whence things have their origin, there they must also pass away according to necessity; for they must pay penalty and be judged for their injustice, according to the ordinance of time.*
> *(Nietzsche, 1873)*

Anaximander famously shifts beyond the PreSocratic tradition by rejecting the notion of a material *arche*, conceiving instead a wider framework of being - the boundless and formless *apeiron*. This remaining fragment of his teaching suggests an entropic vision, with worlds emerging and then collapsing back into undifferentiated being due to their 'injustice'. The term 'justice', as for Plato and Kant (in his related notion of 'judgement'), would seem to have a strongly ontological focus, signalling both the fecundity and pull of the *apeiron*. Justice involves the process of things evolving and then returning, due to their very excess of distinct identity, to the undifferentiated.

Anaximander's conception of entropic justice has pointed relevance in our current circumstances. Capitalist modernity shapes conspicuous injustices of this kind at all levels - not only informing antagonistic differences within society but in the relation between human society and the wider environment. The human

has obtained an excessively distinct shape and is exerting excessive geological, atmospheric and biological force, and so must 'pay penalty' and collapse under the weight of its own over-reaching. The notion of 'justice' ordinarily suggests a moral imperative, but here is much more focused on describing a dimension of material and ontological necessity. It is tempting to insist upon this and once again establish that 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism', but my task here is to envisage an alternative system, not dissolution itself, so I will do my best to stay on track and avoid giving in to what I must acknowledge is a strong temptation.

I am leaping around all over the place. Normally this would stop me. I would recognise that my thoughts are disjointed and would make an effort to write more coherently. Nothing wrong with coherence, yet in this case my concern is not only with the result - the description of some kind of alternative social, economic and political system - but also with the process of finding my way to such a conception, and even the uncertain possibility of doing so. As is most certainly already evident, I am not altogether sure where this argument is going. I hope to eventually produce some reasonable account of a viable alternative system, but it may be at least as valuable to directly confront my areas of blindness and uncertainty - and even my areas of lazy thought, where I can scarcely bother finding my way through the thick scrub of assumptions and half-developed ideas. So, at another level, my concern is not only to envisage an alternative system, but also to concretely explore another mode of thinking that is less strictly focused on coherence, that allows thinking to honestly manifest its wayward, un-concentrated and regularly diverted character. Arguably, this involves wasting the reader's time. Who, after all, wants to follow a poorly developed argument? But I'm hoping that it won't read quite that way - that consistent strands of argument will be evident, even if not rigorously kept under control.

I do have a clear idea of some things I'd like to write about. I know, for instance, that I want to explore the relationship between aesthetics and politics more thoroughly - and that I propose to do

this less by tracing the aesthetic tradition itself than by considering political philosophy within the context of aesthetics. This is just to provide some sense of where things are heading.

2. Lingering in Piraeus

The *Republic* is an account of what happened the previous day. Socrates and Glaucon had visited Piraeus for a festival. Just as they were preparing to leave they were drawn to the house of the elderly patriarch Cephalus with the promise of evening festivities and conversation. Cephalus himself only appears in the very first conversation. Socrates engages him in a discussion about the implications of old age, which swiftly turns to the question of what justice means generally (330e-331c). Shortly afterwards, Cephalus withdraws from the discussion to return to his religious rites, leaving his son Polemarchus to continue the discussion in his stead (331d).

The character of Cephalus has a plainly symbolic role. "Cephalus' literally means 'head'. The actual Cephalus is a wealthy head of family who although moderate in his ways and accepting of his declining physical state nonetheless represents a conventional figure who has not quite accepted the challenge of philosophy. Rather than thinking carefully about the nature of justice and the human soul, he fears the consequences of being regarded as unjust (in the afterlife) and argues for the advantage of his wealth in enabling him to ward off that risk (by paying his debts and having scope to tell the truth). He regards justice as a ledger of social (and financial) exchanges, as well as a context for superstitious supplications to the gods, rather than as an urgent question demanding proper investigation. He is not a bad person and is right to focus on moderation and acceptance, but flawed in his failure to properly and fearlessly pursue the considered life.

I am interested in Cephalus's retirement from the field of debate. While it may suggest the lack of a sufficiently inquiring mind, it also suggests a dimension of wisdom. Just as Cephalus is largely uninterested in money except as means of remaining 'just', and just as he endures old age with generally good spirits, so too he

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recognises his intellectual and rhetorical limits. He passes the question of justice on to others who come after him. He is the head of family who is also no longer really the head - the head who has already been replaced and who recognises this. His gesture of good humoured silence and retirement is not without philosophical implications. It suggests another mode of being that shifts beyond contention. Cephalus may not be especially or urgently reflective, but he nonetheless adopts a reflective (tragic) attitude, evident in terms of a willing disengagement - a refusal to act and a recognition of the impossibility of consequential action. These are traits that may very well have a place in the constitution of our alternative system.

It is worth emphasising that the notion of justice is first broached within the context of a fear of potential judgement in the afterlife. Employing language that aligns closely with Anaximander's fragment, Cephalus explains that 'the man who has acted unjustly in this world will find himself paying the penalty for it in the other one' (330e). The notion of justice is here linked to judgement, and especially a judgement of what is due and what is owed. As I suggest above, Cephalus regards justice less as a qualitative intrinsic condition (related to the health of society or the soul) than as something that is amenable to an external measure (the quantitative notion of 'the scales of justice'). His conception relates closely to our ordinary conception of justice as a moral-ethical complex involving socially legislated and judicially enforced rules. Justice, as an institution, functions economically as a set of reciprocal expectations and obligations. Socrates questions this conventional conception, retaining a sense of the relational nature of justice but rendering it in intransitive terms - no longer as a matter of exchange (measured returns, measured fairness, etc.) but as something essential and constitutive. Justice is cast in terms of the integrity of the whole, the capacity to properly manage a given set of internal parts. Justice becomes more an issue of functional harmony and adequate realisation rather than the dispensation of rewards and punishment. It takes shape at the level of the overall system rather than as a calculus of local exchanges.

Why am I so concerned with this issue of justice? It is not only to make sense of Plato's argument and to comprehend his ideal republic, but also because the notion of justice seems so vital to thinking beyond capitalism. We can think of this simply in terms of struggling towards greater equity - both within society and in relation to the wider environment, but then how are these equal relations to be determined and judged? At a very practical level, redressing global social inequity may provide the basis for evolving and legitimating necessary lines of political and environmental action, yet if conceived simply in terms of ledgers of discrete value and reciprocal exchange then the notion becomes tied to the logic of capitalism. Social and material inequity must be urgently addressed, but can only properly be approached in relation to an overall notion of instransitive value that is less focused on equality than systems ecology and the impossibility that any one thing can be exchanged for another. The latter may provide a better foundation for thinking of justice both within society and beyond. Clearly enough, for instance, natural relations are not shaped by any flat standard of equity. Lions eat zebras, but that is less a sign of inequity than of ecological interrelation. I'm not suggesting that human society should be constituted in terms of predator-prey relationships, but rather that society and social relations cannot constructively be reduced to any abstract standard of reciprocal equality. Instead social equity must have its basis in the unmeasured - in a respect for any thing as such. Social and environmental justice must be conceived constitutionally rather than in terms of any notion of equivalence.

I realise that I have not argued this convincingly yet. How can we give up on equity without dissolving into inequity? I will have to return to this issue, but the main point is that Plato's notion of justice signals another way of conceiving the issue such that extraneous and and disabling measures are replaced by a thinking of the integral ecology of being. Capitalism annihilates justice by rendering equality at once entirely abstract and spuriously material. We are all at once notionally equal and plainly unequal. Money provides a common measure for everything and so

obliterates the identity of anything as such. Just possibly, the need now is to abandon such measures in order to discover justice differently - both within society and in relation to wider environmental systems.

Once Cephalus retires from the discussion, the conversation about justice takes a surprising turn. In criticising Simonides notion that justice can be defined as returning to a person what they are owed (dispensing rewards to some and punishments to others), Socrates suddenly switches tack to consider how this definition relates to a range of different areas of expertise (332c). At one level this is motivated by the need to explain how justice can be enacted in different areas of practice (considering, for instance, how a doctor or a cook or a sailor return what is owed), but then the shift becomes more complex as justice is positioned less as a general aspect of any activity than as its own distinct area of specialised expertise. Conceived in the latter terms, it becomes evident that justice is not directly useful. It emerges as a non-instrumental form of expertise that is associated with the moral quality of 'goodness' (334d). Without following all the twists and turns of the argument, Socrates questions the view that justice, inasmuch as it is geared by definition towards the good, can possibly produce harm. This aims to demonstrate that all the awkward issues involved in the proper dispensation of justice can be set aside. Justice is not to be comprehended in terms of an awkward algebra of outcomes so much as in terms of its correspondence with the good (335c). The good (just) person does not harm other people on any basis. Justice represents the self-identity of the good.

At this point the rhetorician Thrasymachus volubly intervenes to criticise how things have been proceeding and to argue that justice is 'nothing more than what is in the interests of the stronger' (338c). Without pursuing the argument in detail, he insists that any given system for determining justice is geared towards the interests of the dominant. Socrates questions this argument, initially by examining its general validity. What if a strong ruler, he asks, does something mistaken that is not in their

interests? In such a context, is it just for a subject to follow a command that harms the ruler and makes them less strong? This returns the debate once again to the issue of expertise. Thrasymachus argues that no ruler, while properly ruling, makes a mistake. Instances of mistaken ruling, in his view, lie outside the specific expertise of ruling. Rather than questioning this exclusive conception of expertise - rather than arguing, for instance, that a ruler can readily be both a ruler and make mistakes - Socrates accepts and takes up this insistence on expertise. He argues that any expert is fundamentally focused on the welfare of its subjects of expertise rather than their own, suggesting, on this basis, that everything does not turn on the interests of the stronger; that precisely in their expert focus, rulers rule for their subjects rather than themselves (342e). Thrasymachus regards this as plain naïveté, pointing to examples of how stronger custodians regularly exploit those in their care (shepherds sell their flock at the market for profit and rulers grow wealthy at the expense of their subjects).

Thrasymachus employs the terms justice and injustice in complex and undecidable ways. He mobilises three different notions of justice that are never adequately distinguished: one relevant to the conventional ethical sense of just and unjust relations (shepherds are unjust to their sheep in selling them at market); another focusing on the conventional (arbitrary) character of systems of justice and their close alignment with ruling interests (the justice or injustice of any given action is judged by the powerful); and another again, although never adequately articulated, hinting that relations of dominance are just as such (anticipating the Sadeian or Nietzschean position). The latter conception never obtains focus in the dialogue, but would seem to lie at the heart of the problem of conceiving a constitutional notion of justice. Socrates pushes towards a notion of justice that is aligned with the good and the proper relation between parts. Thrasymachus's notion that justice is power suggests an amoral notion of just constitution that recognises at the outset dimensions of hierarchy and antagonistic difference.

Socrates ignores this broader possibility of an alignment between justice and injustice, focusing instead on the contradictions of Thrasymachus's position. He recognises that Thrasymachus is making two separate arguments: firstly, that justice 'is in the interests of the stronger' (344c); and secondly 'that injustice is more profitable than justice' (345a). Addressing the first claim, Socrates pursues the issue of expertise, arguing that exploitation is its own expertise and not a dedicated part of things such as shepherding, doctoring or ruling (346d). Taking profit from any aspect of expertise is regarded as an extraneous feature that falls outside the activity at hand. Socrates specifically argues that obtaining reward is not the primary motivation for ruling. Instead the role of the ruler tends to be grudgingly accepted and for the specific purpose of avoiding being ruled by those perceived as inferior (347c). So, it would seem that the thinking of power is not altogether alien to Socrates' conception of justice. Each specialised part performs its function according to its capacity and according to some understanding of superiority and inferiority. Justice is not equity per se but an appropriate distribution of roles determined by an hierarchical conception of capacities. But in any case, Socrates argues against the notion that justice is geared towards the interests of the stronger in terms of the counter argument that social functions are performed with an attention to the subjects concerned (the sheep being minded, the patients being healed, the people being ruled), not to self interest. The just functioning of parts and the just ecology of the whole depends upon modes of attention and action that specifically bracket self-interest.

Socrates then moves on to address Thrasymachus's claim concerning the profitability of injustice. He asks whether Thrasymachus aligns injustice with the good or the bad. Thrasymachus responds that injustice demonstrates 'goodness of judgement'. The triumphantly unjust are 'good and intelligent' on the basis, he asserts, that they 'have a perfect capacity for injustice, and are able to subject cities, even whole races of human beings to their rule' (348d). Socrates focuses on the provocative claim that injustice is not simply profitable but 'fine and strong' (349a). He

teases out the contradictions entailed in ascribing qualities to injustice that would normally apply to justice. He begins by demonstrating that this reversal is incompatible with our ordinary understanding of the good and the wise. This involves another consideration of the nature of expertise. Socrates coaxes Thrasymachus to the recognition that in the same way that a person with expertise only aims to outdo people who lack their expertise (a musician tunes the lyre better than a non-musician) - and this specifically exemplifies their wisdom (and hence goodness) - so too the unjust person, in attempting to defeat everyone, both their unjust peers (who share their expertise), as well as the just (who lack their expertise for injustice), reveals an ignorant and bad disposition. In contrast the just person, who has no wish to prevail over the just, only the unjust, follows the pattern of proper expertise and demonstrates goodness and wisdom.

Socrates second argument against Thrasymachus's position has a more fundamental character, addressing the nature of the good as such. Once again it hinges on the features of an integral, properly configured and functioning whole. Although Socrates is primarily concerned with goodness at the level of individual human beings (the soul), Socrates refers in the first instance to dimensions of social integrity - to what is most conducive to enabling a city to obtain cohesive identity and thrive. This reference to the broader social field as an analogue for understanding individual human identity is, of course, emblematic of the entire structure of the *Republic*, which describes the ideal constitution of the state as a means of subsequently reflecting upon the internal constitution of the individual (as a rational, spirited and appetitive complex). Socrates demonstrates that just as city of thieves or pirates is internally at war with itself inasmuch as it is is constituted in terms of features of injustice characteristic of such areas of expertise, so too injustice has a corrosive effect upon the individual, rendering them less good than bad, less wise than ignorant and less strong than incapable of coordinated action.

Finally Socrates deals quickly with the notion that the unjust person profits better than the just. Here he charts a relation

between the sound functioning of any part and its goodness. This draws together two notions of the good: the good as the appropriate and well-configured; and the good conceived ethically. The ethical is related to the health and orientation of a system. The goodness of a person (soul) is likened to the effectiveness of a tool or the adequacy of eyes to see something. However, this argument has a clearly circular aspect. Socrates claims that 'anyone with a bad soul must rule and care for things badly, and anyone with a good soul will do all these things well' (353e). This indicates that badness is defined in terms of not doing something well and goodness as the reverse. In that case, there would seem to be nothing in the nature of good or bad that is antecedent to, and distinct from, the sphere of expertise itself. The good and the bad, the just and the unjust, appear as functional aspects of any system, rather than features that have a separate identity. It is not that 'anyone with a bad soul must rule and care for things badly', but rather that ruling or caring for things badly is constitutive of a 'bad soul'.

Yet this is to attend to a very preliminary conclusion. The consideration about justice does not proceed in straightforward linear fashion, but iteratively through discussions with Cephalus, Polymarchus, Thrasymachus, and others; with each instance anticipating aspects of subsequent expanded discussion. The notion of expertise, for instance, appears initially as an example, only gradually taking shape as something integrally relevant to justice as such. So, if the argument reveals a circular character - if just functioning provides the basis for the good and the good provides the basis for just functioning - it is because the notions of justice and the good have, at this stage, not yet been sufficiently interrogated and resolved. Socrates acknowledges this, suggesting that he has simply snatched at various aspects of the question of justice like a glutton at a feast, leaving him with the sense of 'a complete lack of knowledge on the subject we've been talking about, since if I don't know what justice is, I'll hardly know if it really is a kind of goodness or not' (354c).

Glaucon objects that the current conception of justice as good and therefore more profitable than injustice renders justice, once more, in the acquisitive terms of a ledger of profit or loss. He challenges Socrates to 'leave aside all talk of 'pay-offs' or anything else we supposedly get from either of them' (justice or injustice) (388b) and focus on what justice 'is, in and by itself' (358d). Setting aside the idealism of seeking an essential and autonomous notion of justice, Glaucon's critique aligns with my own concern to think beyond capitalist social relations. There is a need to consider justice differently, not only in utilitarian terms of what it provides (a reckoning of profits and losses, good and bad, happiness and unhappiness, etc.), but as constitutive social condition. Glaucon's objection aligns with my suspicion of the distributive conception of justice, which has its basis in the principle (or presumption) of equality. Instead, just possibly, the notion of justice engages with an immeasurable field of value - at once holistically oriented and engaging the intractable character of the particular. The challenge is to find a way of thinking justice that is not reducible to any measure of equivalence - that considers justice ecologically rather than as a universal (and annihilating) currency of exchange.

I mentioned 'setting aside' the idealism of this conception of justice. I'm not sure that anything can really be adequately set aside. It is just that I currently lack the means to address this issue. It is not that I believe that justice exists as some eternal and essential thing, but that it can have critical value as a guiding principle that is gradually evolved in thought and obtains historically legible, coherent shape. It can provide a means of conceiving other ways in which the world can be arranged. In any case, Plato's idealism bears a complex relation to his equally strong commitment to the social and dialogical emergence of philosophical truth. While there is always the sense of where Plato is heading, there is the also the sense that any truth cannot simply be stated. It has to be worked towards and negotiated. Rather than direct and straightforward access to the formal and ideal contours of being, there is the need to proceed, often in circles, within the texture of social discourse.

The concept of a holistic justice emerges against the grain of conceptions that can only recognise scales of equivalence. I am speaking now less in relation to Ancient Greece than our own situation. There is the urgent need to resist a narrowly quantitative notion of justice that renders everything in terms of an abstract potential for exchange. It is not that equality and fairness are bad things. It is not as though we should be inattentive to global dimensions of social inequity, as well as the inequity of our demanding and destructive relation to ecological systems, but rather that the sense of justice that motivates us should not have a basis in the logic of accounting as such, but instead stem from a commitment to the immeasurable complexity of being, and the sense of our imbrication in that complexity.

As a means of encouraging Socrates to offer a proper defence of justice, Glaucon adopts the devil's advocate role, making a still more thorough case for injustice. He argues firstly that justice has its basis not in any genuine love for justice as such but in fear of being ourselves subject to injustice. We would all naturally follow our unjust inclinations, but recognise that this has risks, especially as only a few of us are sufficiently strong to prevail, and so elect, on balance, to be subject to laws that prohibit injustice. In this manner, the general mass of weak people protect themselves from the predations of the strong few (359a, 359b). Justice, from this perspective, represents a compromise - a 'contract' (359a) that involves giving up the possibility of obtaining everything we want in order to preserve what little we have. We subject ourselves to justice (as a 'compulsion' (360c)), rather than genuinely preferring it.

Glaucon proceeds to re-examine the issue of the profitability of justice vs injustice. Employing the notion of expertise, he conceives ideally just and unjust individuals, arguing that the most expertly unjust person not only has their way in everything but also manages, through dissembling and making observances to the gods, to be regarded as just, while the most expertly just person persists in their justice even when obtaining no benefit and when regarded unfairly as unjust (360e - 361d). In these terms, it is less

that justice is preferable to injustice than that the appearance of justice is preferable to the appearance of injustice (within the context of an underlying practical and self-interested commitment to injustice).

At this point Glaucon's brother, Adimantus, joins the discussion. He observes that on the one hand justice is celebrated and injustice is condemned, while on the other hand injustice is recognised as hard to achieve, with ready means available to mitigate any reputation for injustice. Popular belief and the words of poets suggest that sins can be expiated by making 'sacrifices and incantations' to the gods (364b). These conflicting messages lure 'the souls of the young' (365a) towards injustice, while also emphasising the need for discretion. If the young genuinely felt they would be caught and made to suffer for their justice they would relent from this course. However, since there are effective means of maintaining the appearance of justice, they can both profit from injustice and preserve their reputations. They can employ human means (secrecy and cunning) or buy off the gods with 'blandishments' (364d) and prayers. Overall, justice is positioned as a malleable realm of appearance that is better (more profitably) dissembled than lived. Adimantus's emphasis on popular opinion, conventional religious practices and the sayings of poets prepares the path for Socrates' subsequent critique of the discourses of appearance (poetry particularly) as forces of moral corruption. Adimantus concludes by calling on Socrates to defend justice for what it properly is, rather than as something simulated (a lightly worn reputational cloak that disguises a genuine allegiance to injustice).

Socrates acknowledges the force of these arguments and the difficulty of defending justice: it is 'no mean inquiry we are undertaking' and 'requires sharp eyesight' (368c). Catching hold of the metaphor of vision, he suggests the value of seeing things at a larger scale. Prior to considering justice at the level of the human soul he recommends the illustrative value of considering it at the level of the city (human society) (369a). While the city may seem a more complex field than the individual human soul, Socrates

argues that it provides a clearer starting point. The integration of parts is conspicuously evident at the level of the human social community, which will help clarify the constitution of the human soul.

Socrates begins by arguing that cities have their basis in the deficiency of individuals (369b). We must partner with other people in order to get things done. This straightaway suggests an ecological conception of the social whole. The city is not an extraneous thing that people can either join or not join. It is vital and constitutive site of unity and realisation. He then proposes the defining thought experiment of the dialogue - that they (the participants in the dialogue) work together to 'create a city from scratch' (369c). It is telling that Socrates envisages the city as the primary social unit, with no mention of the family. This neglects fundamental features of human interdependence, and certainly very specifically neglects the contribution of women in terms of child-rearing and domestic labour. Socrates mentions a range of specific human needs that the city will need to service - food, shelter, clothing, etc., but regards all of these in terms of a public culture of male expertise: 'and by this reckoning, at any rate, the minimum number of men necessary for a city will be four or five' (169c). This renders a constitutive dimension of injustice within the city.

Socrates moves on consider how best the work of the city should be managed. Should each 'man' do a bit of farming, building and clothes-making or should they each focus on an area of dedicated expertise? With the agreement that the latter provides a more practical approach, Socrates offers the further justification that specialisation aligns with the varied natural capacities of individuals. Expertise facilitates each person doing what they do best and therefore making their best contribution to the city - and informing the best structure of the city overall.

Socrates gradually builds a more complex city with farmers, craftspeople, merchants, labourers, etc. until it would seem to be complete. Adimantus admits that 'maybe' it is complete (371e). In the midst of all this imaginary construction, we are likely to have

lost sight of the original point of the metaphor - to develop an integral conception of justice - when Socrates suddenly returns to this theme. Referring to their initial sketch of the city he asks, 'so where on earth will be find its justice or injustice?' (371e). Adimantus responds with an expanded sense of the possibility of justice: 'perhaps it's to be found somehow in the mutual need all of these categories of people have for each other?' (372a). This represents a shift, however tentative, from a distributive to an ecological conception of justice - one that is focused on aspects of constitution and integral composition rather than a narrow reckoning of profit or loss. Socrates' reaction, however, is strange. He acknowledges Adimantus's observation with a 'perhaps' but then insists on the urgent need to 'look and see at once - no holding back' (172a).

This precipitates yet another shift away from the issue of justice as such to a consideration of the benefits of the imagined city - its encouragement of a happy and peaceful mode of life. Socrates describes an agrarian state of plenty. The citizens are envisaged eating bread, drinking wine and 'enjoying the pleasure of each other's company, and taking care not to produce offspring out of proportion to their wealth, in order to protect themselves against poverty or war' (372c). At this point Glaucon, as a sophisticated Athenian, objects that the description lacks 'sauce' (372c) and that the food sounds more fit for a 'city of pigs' (372d). Socrates accedes to his point, acknowledging the need to consider not only the constitution of the well configured city but also the constitution of the 'luxurious city' (372e). While maintaining that he has described the 'true' ('healthy') city (372e), Socrates recognises the need to consider how justice and injustice take root in cities that are not content with basic necessities - that seek out also 'perfumes, incense, prostitutes and pastries' (373a). He explains that this informs the need for all sorts of additional roles, including artists ('producers of imitations' (373b)), actors, contractors, wet-nurses, hairdressers, etc. (373c). Furthermore, in order to cater for these luxuries there will arise a demand for new land, and hence the need for war to obtain a defend this constantly increasing size.

More particularly, this signals the demand for a new area of expertise - soldiering.

At least partly ironic that the elaboration of the luxurious, ambitious, over-reaching city, the city that includes injustice at its essence (not only internally in terms of the inequitable distribution of luxuries, but also externally in terms of the theft of other people's territory), provides the basis for a detailed consideration of the constitution of the soldier guardian. The soldier is portrayed as not at all given to luxury or any kind of indolent excess, but as a rudely strong, stolid and loyal figure focused solely on the protection of the city. Although positioned at the margins of the city - defending and advancing its boundaries - the moral education of the soldier guardian will turn out to be central to the constitution of the city and its capacity for justice.

However, before getting to this, I would like to reflect briefly on Socrates' vision of the 'true' city. It is clearly not altogether removed from contemporary conceptions of post-capitalism. There is a similar emphasis on an equilibrium-focused society with restricted horizons of consumption and growth. The sense of a close-knit small economy of differentiated labour can be likened to aspects of Marx's conception of communism, particularly his insistence that 'from each according to their abilities, to each according to their needs' (1875). A standard criticism of these conceptions is that they involve visions of ascetic withdrawal to modest, agrarian forms of life. Modernity, in all its aspects (industrialisation, urbanisation, consumption), with its endless tiers of mediation, abstraction and excess, is jettisoned to make way for a fondly illusionary and impoverished alternative. From this perspective, the failure to envisage more realistic and immediately appealing options reflects a lack of constructive optimism and imagination. The various 'simple-living' alternatives appear as a sad collage of nostalgia and post-apocalyptic fantasy. While I am not convinced by these arguments, there is clearly a need to envisage systems that resonate with contemporary life and offer a coherent sense of hope. Still, it seems very evident to me that any viable social future will necessarily involve negotiating a

new set of ecological relations in which human impact is restricted and the human and the non-human are drawn into better, more sustainable relation. This is very likely to involve some version of a more grounded and agrarian society, unless we envisage the possibility of a major technological breakthrough that can put an end to all our problems - a sophisticated geo-chemical solution to climate change, for instance, or the capacity to distance ourselves ever further from natural environmental exigencies (climate-controlled habitat domes, colonies on other planets, etc.). Even if hi-tech fixes become available, it is hard to see how accelerating trajectories of growth, consumption, destruction and waste can be reconciled with the interests of continuity and sustainability in the long term. Within this context, Socrates' 2500 year old conception of the 'true' city retains its critical value - even as a preliminary sketch, even as it envisages a system that renders justice in terms of a spurious, naturally configured and patriarchal economy of expertise.

A poor effort to contextualise where I am heading with all of this:

– I am led to the *Republic* both because it represents a canonic work within political (and wider Western) philosophy and because it specifically sets out to envisage an ideal state (alongside, of course, also considering the nature of truth, the constitution of the human soul, etc.). In reading the *Republic*, I discover the crucial emphasis on the nature of justice - and I realise that Plato's conception of justice is not a conventional one. Instead of regarding justice as a ledger (with everything rendered in terms of dimensions of fungible equivalence), justice emerges as an aspect of tuning and of ecological relation. This has potential in terms of enabling a conceptual shift beyond the reductive, abstracted and antagonistic logic of capitalism. This alternative conception of justice opens up links to aesthetics, which is configured, certainly within Kant, in terms of non-instrumental contemplative engagement and an intransitive experience of value. How can an ecological justice and

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aesthetic judgement be thought together? How can they correspond? Does the notion of justice provide a means of conceiving alternatives to the capitalist system through the lens of features of aesthetics (which are already integral to any concern with political justice)? I know I have already said something along these lines, so forgive me for repeating myself, but I need to keep reminding myself of key points of orientation. As much as I pursue diversions, as much as I permit this writing to proceed waywardly and uncertainly, I am equally intent to draw things together whenever I can. This will entail many efforts at summary along the way.

I am tempted to simply delete this paragraph, but prefer to leave it in place, precisely in its inadequacy. I have made an undertaking with myself not to edit this writing as I develop it (or only minimally). Were I to start extensive editing then I would stop forging ahead. I would focus on chipping away at what I already have, most likely chipping away to the point that there is nothing worthwhile left, leaving me once again empty handed. So I will leave everything now in the interests of continuing. Clearly enough, however, if I am pausing and looking around for points of orientation it is because I fear I am becoming lost in the intricacies of Plato's dialogue. I hadn't expected to pursue the arguments in the *Republic* in such detail, but now that I have started on this course I feel that I should persist even if it means losing sight of an initial conception of how this writing was likely to take shape. The above paragraph represents an effort to justify this shift in direction, but let me attempt to explain differently.

Aesthetics is political as a form of constitutional reflection and mediation that renders identity and action in other terms. This conception of aesthetics can assist, for example, in delineating, the alienated and often contradictory politics of autonomously conceived modern art. While apparently removed from politics, while apparently focused on an entirely formal meta-sphere, modern art is political within the very tissue of its (formalist) practice. We tend to focus on the rhetoric of sublime revelation, but are less attentive to how aspects of space, time, labour and

value are articulated within modernist practice. It is within the context of the latter - within the various practical dispositions of modern art - that its politics are best recognised (Adorno, 1997; Ranciere, 2009).

However, the relevance of aesthetics is not restricted to art. Consider the casual and unhurried attitude of Socrates and Glaucon at the beginning of the Republic. They travel down to Piraeus from Athens to attend the festivities, but with no real sense of necessity. They run into some friends and are encouraged to stay longer. While this informal context provides evidence of a privileged and leisured life, it also provides the experiential basis for an extended meditation on the nature of justice and the human soul. The possibility of philosophy depends upon a level of freedom and detachment from the ordinary instrumental conditions of life. Although encoding an aspect of injustice - in that other people must work to make this philosophical leisure possible - it also demonstrates, integrally and within the texture of ordinary lived time, an alternative set of values and an alternative mode of being. My suggestion is that in a similar manner, modern aesthetic practices, however equivocal in their social implications, obtain political significance, less through any deliberate effort to be 'political' or to invoke radical insight than through their demonstration of alternative, but always accessible, systems of value and temporality. Aesthetics is political in imagining the suspension of ordinary directed action, in envisaging a realm of non-exploitative play and contemplation, and in engaging at a profound and deeply philosophical level with the problem of constitution (and therefore the nature of justice).

Overall, it seems more interesting to consider politics and aesthetics less as parallel fields that run alongside one another but never directly intersect, than as co-imbricated from the outset. Rather than considering the political implications of aesthetics, it is more useful to consider how the aesthetic is political in its very conventional attitudes of being.

However, this is scarcely the perspective that Plato adopts. Obviously very far removed from modern debates in aesthetics and

fine art, Plato (or Socrates) is notorious for expelling the poets from his ideal republic. They are not part of its proper constitution. He regards them as intrinsically alien to the nurturing of justice because they trade on appearances and promote untruths. Very conveniently, this links back to where we left off in our account of the *Republic* - the conception of the guardians and the issue of how they should be trained for the role.

Inasmuch as they protect the city from external threats, Socrates regards guardianship as the most important field of expertise ('function') in the society (374e). The guardians secure the city's existential basis and future. In order to realise their expertise they require a combination of relevant natural attributes (strength, courage, agility, spiritedness and a curious capacity for showing kindness to citizens and fierce resistance to strangers) as well as a cultivated regard for justice and the good. The question of the proper education of the guardians provides the rationale for the condemnation of poetry. Without pursuing the argument in detail, Socrates shows how the 'story-tellers' (poets) (377c) misrepresent the gods as performing unjust actions (378c) and adopting different guises (380d). In relation to the former, he argues that gods are by definition good and therefore cannot do bad things (379b), and, in relation to the latter, that gods are necessarily constituted in the best possible manner and therefore can have no reason to transform themselves into other things that must *ipso facto* be in worse condition (381b-381c). Further, if the suggestion is that the god's shape shifting is motivated by the need to deceive, Socrates asks why would a god want promulgate such a lie? As perfectly configured and entirely good things they would reject any false appearance as unnecessary, corrupting and intrinsically unworthy (381e-383a). These points are interspersed with examples from the popular oral tradition (Homer, etc.) that exemplify the portrayal of the gods in a bad light.

Popular story-telling is also criticised for arousing the bad passions of fear, sadness, excessive mirth, etc. Socrates contends that these inferior emotions will encourage fear in future guardians and render them over-sensitive, as well as prone to unbecoming

laughter. The guardians are to be 'spirited', but in a moderate manner, with a limited emotional range and a robust capacity to keep less edifying passions in check.

I have contrasted a distributive to an ecological conception of justice, indicating that the former emphasises dimensions of quantitative equity, whereas the latter has a constitutional focus. The distributive conception is more easily understood. It aligns with the contradictions of liberal democratic capitalism (the rhetoric of an equitable playing field, the truth of entrenched layers of inequity). The ecological conception is less clearly delineated. As a metaphor, I am thinking of something like a coral reef, which is configured as an holistic multiplicity. The justice of a coral reef relates not to any ledger of measurable value, but to the reconciliation of aspects of difference and cohesion, complexity and system integrity. Nonetheless, despite the lack of any common measure, surely this metaphor still involves a subsumption of individual parts to the status of functional components, so that the former are conceived in terms of their instrumental contribution to some vital aspect of the overall reef? The reef appears as a fragile but still roughly self-regulating energy system, with each aspect of the reef - each individual coral, each small fish, each large shark - contributing to a complex field of energy maintenance and exchange. Yet I am trying to describe something else.

Imagine that an elephant falls from a passing ship, makes its way to the reef and manages to stand in a shallow portion of coral. Is this elephant part of the reef's justice or does it fall utterly outside it? Is justice restricted to the functional economy of existing things in any given context, or should it also include the possibility that anything whatsoever may suddenly enter the system and therefore obtain an associated capacity for justice? More simply, is justice only relevant to the determinate functional elements within a given system or can constitution also involve a relation to otherness - and not as something entirely foreign, but as somehow belonging?

These are crazy thoughts I know. How is the notion of justice even pertinent when applied across these different contexts? How is social justice as an ethical demand to be mapped to ecological

systems of energy management, maintenance and transfer? What am I getting at in conceiving a general notion of justice that is neither distributive nor strictly homeostatic and functional, in which we must somehow conceive the irreducible character of aspects of multiplicity, cohesive integrity and otherness? And how can any of this be useful in terms of thinking integrally beyond capitalism? How can it shape the conditions for new forms of social and economic organisation? These are the questions that concern me, even if I cannot adequately answer them. For me, they relate to two very specific dilemmas: firstly, the question of how human society can discover a just relation to the environment; and secondly the urgent question of how we as human beings can discover adequate means to live and act in ways that offer some scope for a sustainable future. It may that multiple levels of thought are needed. Perhaps a distributive notion of justice can be subsumed within an ecological one, only itself to be subsumed within a qualitative notion of an immeasurable, non-instrumental and open justice?

Returning to the elephant, because clearly she cannot remain on the reef. She cannot form a part of the just constitution of the reef system. She must either risk swimming to a nearby island or remain where she is, die and be consumed by reef sharks and other fishes. Arguably, this constitutes another layer of justice, however unjust her circumstances. However cruel that she was captured and placed on a ship, however awful it was that she fell off the ship and ended up on an inhospitable reef, there is nothing that she can do or not do that will not have an aspect of justice. This justice hinges on features of necessity and possibility. It relates to the playing out of circumstances, which can have multiple outcomes. Each outcome has its basis within the overall system, even if the system is not an entirely ordinary or natural one, even if it involves an elephant forlornly standing on a coral reef. The latter represents a new and unexpected constitution - however dysfunctional, however surreally collaged - but there is still the capacity for the set of relations entailed to be played out in whatever way eventuates. The elephant is never entirely alien because the reef

has effective means of acknowledging its presence, even if this involves some bruised coral and a substantial feast for the fish. Justice delineates the mobilisation of these various options within the given biological context. It has nothing to do with the elephant as such and its feelings of fear, sadness or whatever, or with our wishes for her survival. Justice here is not about hoping for the best, but about the economy of systems.

This notion of justice - of a kind of universal justice linked to the permutational play of elements in a system - can be linked to the conception of 'natural justice'; not, however, as the term is applied in a specialised sense within law, but rather as it applies when we speak to children about the death of a grandparent or a favourite pet. It is the kind of justice that is indicated by platitudes such as 'the way of the world" and 'that's just how things go'. It links to a fatalistic understanding of our own mortality and the mortality of systems generally. The Anaximander fragment conveys an effective summary of this fatalistic conception of justice, which is far less about ethics than the logic of biological and thermodynamic relations.

Within this context we could say, despite our awareness of profound injustices within the social world and in terms of our relation to wider ecological systems, that there is no possibility of injustice. On the contrary, there can only be justice. Why? Because if everything ultimately represents a playing out of permutations, then this is the constitution of things - this is its justice. Injustices in the social world and in our relation to the environment are simply emergent events within a wider framework of justice that will ultimately settle accounts, not in terms of any numerical measure of fairness, and not even in terms of any absolute tendency towards equilibrium, but rather in terms of the circulation of matter and energy.

What is injustice then? How does it relate to this circulation? I will suggest that injustice is always a local phenomena that is perceived in particular contexts - and, more specifically, in terms of a particular understanding of the economy of any given system. Staying with our reef metaphor, consider the crown-of-thorns

starfish (*Acanthaster planci*). Prior to the more current concern with coral bleaching, there was great concern with plagues of these starfish consuming the visible outer layer of corals. Starfish had always existed but their numbers had increased in line with the growth in coastal phytoplankton levels. The latter was significantly influenced by the increasing nitrogen run-off from human agriculture. So it turns out that features beyond reef systems themselves established the conditions for the plague of starfish. If this plague can be regarded as an injustice, it is in terms of its excess and its threat to the overall integrity of reef systems. Our focus then is on reef systems as such, which can never exist entirely on their own, which are never hermetically enclosed, which necessarily exist in vital relation to wider systems. It is this context that we can recognise an injustice, which is to say a force that unsettles and threatens the constitution of a system as currently recognised and conceived.

Although I have mentioned a functional conception of systems, I am not convinced that the justice or injustice of systems can be determined in narrowly or exclusively functional terms. How, after all, is the function of any given system to be calculated? Possibly, in terms of system health - continuity, equilibrium, perhaps growth? Yet, as we have seen, real systems are not subject to entirely local and autonomous determination. They exist within a larger ecology. The very largest level of the system is unknown to us and most likely literally unknowable. We cannot comprehend its scale or duration. We cannot know its complete set of elements. We cannot even say what state the system is in. At the level then of this notional infinite system, there is no means of conceiving any thing like a function. The logic of functions - of carefully choreographed parts each with their discrete inputs and outputs - is really just a mode of limited comprehension and explanation. It does not exhaust the complex relations entailed. If nothing else, the notion of function always assumes the capacity to clearly recognise a purpose, yet the play of permutations within any given system and in the relation between systems constantly undermines determining any such thing.

I need to think more carefully about systems. I understand, for instance, programmatic systems. I know particularly about object-oriented programming and the hierarchical and choreographed management of computational processes. These can be conceived in mainly autonomous terms as reliably performing a specific function (and being assembled as a coordinated sets of discrete functions), but in order to have some useful purpose they also typically involve the processing of external input and the provision of output suitable for external storage and display. If we were to speak about the justice of such systems - if this makes any sense at all - it would have to be in terms of their logical organisation, which is reducible precisely to quantitative expression. We would almost certainly draw upon the language of efficient and elegantly configured function. The program is just on the basis that it effectively works. It is just as a tool is just - as something well-shaped for a particular task. Yet, of course, the computer knows and cares nothing about justice. As a machine, it simply does what it is told. It obeys another justice. It is bound to the system of silicon and electronics. This system is not even notionally autonomous. It enters into relation with a wider universe of things and processes, so that my use of a computer is inextricably linked to the prevalence of heavy metal pollution in relevant manufacturing regions of China. In this context, the notion of justice is cast differently. It is not about the perfection of a system, but about its inevitable and open imperfection. Justice means struggling to make sense of the constitution of things, struggling to recognise the rich set of contributions and the complex flows of exchange. Most importantly, justice becomes relevant at the limit of systems - at the limit of their effective functioning and notional autonomy. The self-image of the capitalist system is of a sophisticated self-regulating thing, but it is actually an excessive machine with profoundly destructive consequences both in its inner functioning and in its relation to the wider systems it affects and neglects. Any consideration of the justice of this system - or more precisely its injustice - involves recognising a wider context of relations. In this sense the interests of justice always extend

beyond any immediate context of calculation. They are integrally general, and less oriented to the possibility of another broader calculation than to an insistence upon the immeasurable character of dimensions of identity and constitution.

Plato's concern, however, is more restricted. He is concerned with the proper functioning of the city system. He rejects any things that threaten its integrity. As we have seen, in his view the moral education of the city's guardians is threatened by the poets who tell untrue stories about the gods and that arouse immoderate and inappropriate emotions. He focuses specifically on modes of storytelling that involve dissembling, rejecting strategies of *mimesis* (which involve the pretence that events are directly, dramatically shown) and approving instead techniques of *diegesis* (explicit 'telling')(392c-394c). This instantly entails an aspect of blindness because the *Republic* itself is a piece of mimesis. It is Plato's written representation of Socrates' oral account of a dialogue that (most likely fictionally) occurred the previous day. Plato never clearly and directly (diegetically) acknowledges that he is dramatically depicting the first-person account of Socrates. There is no careful qualification of the layers of mediation that separate us from Socrates' 'direct account'. This has many implications. What does it say about the proper discourse of philosophical truth (oral dialectic) if can be effectively simulated - if it exists itself as a piece of simulation? Furthermore, what separates philosophy from the words of story-tellers? What are the specific features of language and thought that guarantee their difference?

Plato's mimetic technique demonstrates the limits of a putatively exclusively oral philosophical tradition. As Derrida demonstrates (1981), this complex simulation of processes of oral truth making suggests that writing (as the figure of doubling and dissembling; of mediation generally) may not be so altogether alien to philosophy, and that to justly think the system of philosophy is very likely to involve discovering its baseless foundations and infinitely paradoxical limits.

However, to be fair, Plato does describe an exception to his rule that would seem to license his mimetic approach. This has its basis

in the nature of the events described. If, as Socrates explains, the words or actions depicted are those of a 'good man' then the person recounting these words or actions will 'be ready and willing to report it as if he really were that other person himself; he won't be ashamed of that sort of imitation' (396c). If, however, the words or actions are of an 'inferior individual' then imitation is inappropriate and will seem repugnant to the good story-teller (396d). Yet this slightly extraneous condition hardly mitigates the fundamental mistrust of mimesis. If the problem with mimesis is that it is distant from truth and yet dishonestly represents itself as proximate, if its key sin is that of doubling and dissembling without any genuine knowledge of things (any genuine expertise in being or making the particular thing), then whether or not the object recounted is worthy or 'unworthy' (396d) seems beside the point.

The curious doubled aspect of philosophical non-identity and identity entailed in Plato writing the speech of Socrates also returns us to the question of expertise. What is the specific expertise that Plato and Socrates demonstrate? Plato is clearly less simply the scribe he pretends to be than a dramatist and original philosophical 'voice'. While Socrates regularly protests that he has no expertise whatsoever, it is evident that his expertise is oriented towards the conduct of thought as such. But, just as with Plato, there is some dissembling. Socrates pretends to have no preconceived thoughts of his own. He portrays himself as a philosophical innocent who simply follows lines of argument as they logically emerge. On the contrary, antagonists such as Thrasymachus argue that Socrates' shepherds conversation towards the ends that he only pretends not to anticipate. While he appears to follow arguments wherever they may lead, he actually directs them skilfully through gates towards safe paddocks that he has always foreseen.

We can recognise then within the discourse of philosophy dissembled features of expertise, but it is equally important to take claims to its inexpert character seriously. The situation of philosophy is paradoxical. How can philosophers have a place in the city if they lack any particular, manifestly determinate

expertise? How can they have a place in its justice if they are constantly, without any adequate expertise, reflecting generally about things? Philosophy, as a space of exception and subtle dissembling, at once deliberately suspends expertise and proclaims its privileged capacity to recognise and describe any aspect of truth. Furthermore, philosophy represents itself as both a theatre of truth demanding general participation and as something thoroughly exclusive. Overall, philosophy appears exceptional through and through. It presides over the conception of the city, it conceives itself as ideal basis for authority, but at the same time it breaks the logic of the city itself, removing itself from the requirement for narrowly focused expertise and yet insisting upon its own constitutional necessity. The example of philosophy seems to undermine the notion that the city is composed simply of tight-knit assemblage of very particular, distinct fields of expertise. Philosophy actively resists being cast as a field of specialised expertise. It signals that the city has another basis as well, which is not about the differentiation of specific tasks, roles, capacities and responsibilities, but about a recognition of the whole and the elusively common. How can we make sense of this correspondence of devoted differentiation and overall coherence? It is not something amenable to entirely instrumental definition, but requires a thinking of aspects of affinity, shared activity and agreement.

We may recognise the need for the capitalist system to end and be replaced by another system. We may somehow find the means to describe this other system, which must, of course, involve more than simply a change in how things are organised and also a transformation of values, but how do we imagine the transition to this other system, however practically or fancifully conceived? While there is certainly a need to envisage alternative systems, there is also a very pressing need to consider how any transformative action can occur, particularly as something planned, programmatically pursued and agreeably brought to fruition. We lack effective negotiated means of managing complex global socio-economic and cultural change. Clearly there is nothing like a single

global authority - some benevolent dictator who can simply determine how things will be. Nor is there any real current scope for equitable (democratic) global decision-making. The current set of systems themselves, structured in conflict and framing differences that extend well beyond capitalism, undermine any scope for cooperative and collective global agency. Arguably changing the system will establish new fora for decision-making, but we can hardly change the socio-economic system without some context for equitable discussion and agreement that can lend legitimate agency to our actions. Another option is to wait for features of global catastrophe and revolution to drive system change, yet cataclysmic events by themselves are unlikely to establish the conditions necessary to foster a globally negotiated eco-socialist alternative.

One other option occurs to me. We can recognise our complex circumstances and argue that transformation is most likely to occur not so much unilaterally or through negotiated agreement than in a less directed and more unpredictable fashion. It will have an emergent character that we can never satisfactorily anticipate or determine. Yet, even though this may be feasible, we can hardly abandon the problem of agency, leaving outcomes to emerge as they will. Our decision-making, with all its successful or unsuccessful efforts to reach agreement informs the larger system that we are unable to entirely determine. It provides a necessary contribution, however ultimately falling short of any neat potential for deliberate control.

The labour theory of value (Beggs, 2012) suggests that the value of any thing that is subject to economic exchange has its basis in the amount of labour that has been expended to produce it. Labour represents variously a form of energy, skilled effort and suffering. This conception of how value is produced provides the basis for the Marxist critique of the capitalist economic system. The values of commodities, products and services within capitalism represent not only dimensions of labour, but also the surplus value extracted through the wage labour system, in which not all value is returned to the labourers, but instead a crucial portion is winnowed off as

profit by the owners of the means of production. We can envisage a vast engine then that takes in raw materials, combines them with real labour to produce all sorts of things, while at the same time producing a vital excess that at once fuels the overall system and ensures its constitutive and continuing inequity.

I certainly need to make a greater effort to better understand Marxist theory, but will still risk expressing a preliminary comment, which may well be dispelled upon further enquiry. Marx's famously turns Hegel's dialectical philosophy upside down, rendering an ideal scheme in material terms. Hegel positions all aspects of being as emerging historically through processes of differentiation and higher level incorporation. Rather than the world appearing as simply coherent or simply antagonistic, 'being' exists and evolves through productive conflictual relations towards an absolute identity (conceived as meta-level, human-philosophical consciousness). Each moment of dialectical conflict represents a theatre of same versus other, in which features of identity always prevail over difference, until eventually 'the same' attains full and complex identity, precisely by processing all otherness, by rendering it in terms amenable to the interests of the complex coherence of the metaphysical absolute. This process produces an excess. This is portrayed as a remainder left from the dialectical machine, an element of unnecessary, unincorporated otherness that is the inevitable residue of dialectic labour, of the dialectical production of philosophical value.

In questioning Hegel and in questioning capitalism, Marx questions less the logic of the machine than its nature and orientation. He turns it away from the processing of ideal quantities towards aspects of natural material and social relation. Human labour is positioned as the interface for metabolic engagement with nature, in which natural stuff is dialectically worked (managed, collected, decontextualised and transformed) to attain human use and exchange value. This conceives nature entirely in term of human value-extracting processes rather than highlighting, for instance, aspects of symbiosis, as well as custodial, aesthetic and ceremonial relation. Marx develops am instrumental-

transactional conception of the relation to nature rather than considering non-exploitative, integrative and contemplative-reflective dimensions of engagement.

Even while plainly employing an expanded, ethical conception of value to condemn capitalism, Marx prioritises the field of economic value. He insists upon features of utility: 'nothing can be a value without being an object of utility. If the thing is useless, so is the labour contained in it; the labour does not count as labour, and therefore creates no value' (1887). While this would seem to accurately describe the reduction of value under the conditions of capitalism, it also neglects less straightforwardly useful forms of interaction, as well as, more importantly, the particular value of inaction, co-existence and non-transactional engagement. In this sense, it is the dialectical machine itself that demands critique. Instead of positioning productive and extractive labour as the primary metabolic relation to nature, there is a need to conceive intimately interdependent relations - even perhaps an inverted dialectics in which the human endlessly flows back into nature, in which nothing is ever ultimately produced or held, in which the outcome of any putatively dialectical encounter is alway provisional.

Returning to the issue of expertise. Consider a surgeon. They are expert at operating on people, but this encompasses a range of more specific areas of expertise. The surgeon must be an expert, for example, not only at making incisions but also sewing up wounds. Surely, however, this indicates two areas of expertise, which each require their separate experts. And cutting and sewing involve upwards and downward motions, pushing and pulling. Surely each of these may represent distinct areas of expertise. The closer we look, the more specialised expertise becomes. It is difficult to know precisely where to stop. We encounter an infinite horizon of discrimination as the complex character of any field of expertise is increasingly delineated. This correspond to the need for an increasing discrimination of aspects of natural affordance and ability that quickly becomes absurdly and fine-grained.

Another possibility, of course, is to consider the relation between parts in the city differently - to recognise that expertise is inevitably complex and multi-faceted, that it overlaps with other areas of expertise, and that it also relates to common and general human capacities. Instead of conceiving the city in terms of ideally distinct areas of expertise linked to essentially conceived human capacities, we can conceive a looser, diverging and regularly intersecting network of relations that represent roles, interests and aspects of social hierarchy and power. While it may seem silly and misguided to object to Plato in this way, as though many layers of anachronism don't affect our relation to his writing, it seems important to try clarify aspects of difference. Plato offers a means of thinking justice integrally and holistically, which is precisely valuable for us now within the context of systems that ignore social inequity and that encourage, permit and turn a blind eye to environmental devastation. He encourages us to think systems differently - not simply as a network of discrete functions, but as a complex ecology involving aspects of differentiation and commonality. His model of the role of philosophy, for all its privilege and duplicity, also suggests the value of modes of identity and activity that are not conceived primarily in terms of their specialised utility. In its reflective doubling, in its patterns of mediation, philosophy suggests another relation to the world - the value of which only becomes apparent when a wider ecological frame is acknowledged, when it is recognised that doing and producing things is not the only or best option, that there is also the need, just as often - possibly more so - to allow oneself to be distracted and to accomplish nothing much at all.

In this manner philosophy - as a form of inaction, mediation and appearance - takes shape as something aesthetic. Rather than aesthetics appearing as a subset of philosophy, philosophy is subsumed within aesthetics, and the city, with all its layers of dedicated expertise, comes to welcome, as will have always been the case, its story-tellers.

Of course, this is to do an injustice to Plato. As we have seen, Plato condemns the story-tellers for spreading falsehoods, arousing

immoderate passions and promoting inferior models of being. Philosophy, with its focus on reason and the truth, provides an antidote to all of this. Philosophy is not to be classed as a mode of story-telling. It is categorically distinct and focused on the good rather than everything that is bad in human society and the soul. Yet, in terms of their persistently general orientation (their refusal to be restricted to any one particular field of expertise) and their common status as complex instruments of mediation, with the capacity to educate, inspire and transform, philosophy and story-telling reveal key aspects of affinity. Plato will no doubt insist that philosophy employs very different methods - that its emphasis on rational argument separates it altogether from popular story-telling. Yet, at the same time, he makes it very evident that not all rational argument qualifies as properly philosophical. A great deal that is said in the dialogues is positioned as weak argument and sophistry. It is only really Socrates who exhibits a genuine capacity to reason properly towards the truth. This propriety is linked to his philosophical method, which involves discovering the truth through oral dialogue, ostensibly avoiding any expounding of pre-prepared ideas. However, this theatre of truth is instantly rendered uncertain in that the dialogues are simulated. As we have observed, Plato writes Socratic dialogue. This mimetic representation of the process of philosophy has no literal basis in any oral context of truth. Instead, it necessarily, and from the outset, makes its claims within a context of what Derrida (1981) regards as a distancing from origin - within the context of modes of mediation that can never be absolutely distinguished from story-telling.

Plato's condemnation of the storytelling can be regarded more generally as an ethical condemnation of what later becomes known as the sphere of art and aesthetic practice. This appears out of step with how modernity regards art and aesthetics. Kant defines the aesthetic in terms that focus on its non-instrumental character and its work of integrative reconciliation. Aesthetic cognition is conceived as a sphere of mediation in which the wholeness of philosophy and the human system is intuitively recognised, while also celebrating its vital dynamism (its life). This aligns with the

meaning of 'judgement' for Kant, which relates to the intuition of the whole based upon its premonition at the outset or via its belated recognition at the end. This includes not only aesthetic experience but also our comprehension of the teleological character of the material world, with aspects of ontogenesis, for example, signal ling ultimate biological trajectories and ends. This teleological conception is very evident, for instance, in German zoologist Ernst Haekel's notion that the development of the human foetus provides a recapitulation of our evolutionary history (1866).

It occurs to me that I am beginning to discover something like an overall argument:

– Rather than simply envisage catastrophe, I am challenged to envisage an alternative to capitalism.

– This challenge emerges in relation to contemporary societal and environmental crises, but also in a relation to an interest in the political implications of aesthetics.

– I make a start but quickly recognise that alongside the need to envisage new socio-economic-environmental conditions, there is a need to consider how 'we' have any agency to transition to an alternative system. What scope is there for consistent and coherent global action given overall inequities and differences? On this basis, the question of justice as a vital precondition for any potential work of social transformation begins to take shape.

– Linked to this, I also recognise that systemic change in our conditions is only feasible with a profound transformation of values. Capitalism defines not only an institutional system but a fundamental understanding of human identity and society.

– I have roughly socialist notion of a new system in mind. I realise I need to consider the tradition of political philosophy more closely, beginning with Plato's *Republic*.

– I discover that Plato's famous work is not simply or exclusively a portrait of the ideal city, but rather a meditation on the nature of holistic composition generally - the relation between parts and whole at both a macro societal level and at the level of human 'soul'. The Greek term for constitution is *politeia*, suggesting that politics has its basis in the thinking through of the relation between distinct parts and the nature of the any given whole as a system of management and sustainable being.

– This understanding of the *Republic* leads me to jump ahead and recognise a similarity to Kant's *Critique of Judgement*, which is also concerned with how holistic intuition and understanding serve to reconcile the distinctly categorical nature of thought and experience. In this respect, Kant's notion of 'judgement' appears fundamentally concerned with the problem of constitutional being.

– In a similar manner that justice, for Plato, has its basis in features of constitution, judgement, for Kant, relates to the reconciliation of categories. Plato's notion of justice and and Kant's notion of judgement reveal a common ecological focus on the integrity of systems - on how they are nurtured and made manifest.

– In terms of this understanding of *politeia*, the field of aesthetics is intrinsically political - less, however, in terms of its ostensible meanings than in terms of its inherent characteristics. Kant's notion of beauty is political through and through, providing a model of human contemplative being that has the potential to suggest other modes of socio-economic being, and other bases of human value, even while, in its actually positing, it positions itself as marginal and complementary to existing systems of exploitation.

– Aesthetics offers a critique of existing social and environmental relations via an alternative model of human action and value, but this is compromised by its

subsumption within a wider framework that privileges precisely opposite values. What is actually needed is a general aesthetics that makes the aesthetic everywhere relevant and refuses its limited scope. It should be noted that aesthetics is not the same as the social institution of art.

I know this is scarcely adequate. I walked up to Broker's Nose yesterday and during the walk I came up with the following scheme. It had such neat clarity at the time, but now it finds countless ways to fall apart. It is as though I walk and think with a dream logic and then become increasingly awake as I write, struggling to capture just a flicker of the light of my dreaming state before all light is extinguished in the labour of writing.

I could try again very simply (but also looking ahead):

> *Our challenge is to discover a vegetal mode of being - some form of existence that is much less mobile, much less restlessly active. Aesthetics provides the model of action as inaction - as an internal dynamic, a vital irresolution, that is conditioned to the experience of multiplicity but equally geared towards the common. And this, in its intransitive and irreducible character, provides an alternative notion of just being and just society.*

A long way back I referred to a genie. This was as a means of throwing away all the need for discussion and somehow magically fashioning an alternative system. However - and this is our central dilemma - any alternative only takes coherent shape in terms of its capacity to demonstrate justice, and justice - broadly conceived - is precisely coextensive with the social elaboration (constitution) of any system. This is to say that justice must necessarily be socially enacted. It cannot be prescriptively ordained. Consider, for instance, the traditional notion of the social contract. The one thing we can be sure about with the social contract is that it is never actually signed. It is always only ever, and from the very outset, enforced. The fiction that the social contract is something we notionally sign, as though we had a choice one way or other,

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demonstrates a fundamental inequity and violence at the basis of social existence and organisation.

If I try to neglect this and just allow my genie to manufacture a system, intractable problems quickly become evident. The genie makes yet another start:

1. There will be a single universal system - a confederacy of regions.

2. The identity and integrity of each region will be respected by each and every other region.

3. Each region will be defined in terms of relevant geographical, biological and cultural contexts for supporting sustainable society.

4. Each society will support every other society as necessary - so there will be a relation of reciprocal sharing between the regions.

5. Regions are custodians of land, resources and culture, with the expectation that they be maintained in the best condition possible and only altered only on the basis of careful consideration and with great care.

6. There will be no accumulated wealth or capital. All existing relations of debt will be void.

7. Universal laws will apply to regions and citizens. These laws place a definite limit on layers of institutionalised difference. For example, race and gender inequality will be forbidden, with no recourse to tradition or religious precedent.

8. Within regions there will be only the most limited ownership of private possessions. The focus instead will be upon equitable access to community assets.

9. Citizens are not only citizens of particular regions, but also of the world.

10. Mobility between regions is permitted but will be limited to sustainable modes.

11. Citizens will work to the extent they wish to contribute but are not required to do so.

12. A basic level of production will cater to needs, but will be deliberately kept to a minimum. The greater proportion of people's time will be focused on 'unproductive' activities.

The functioning of this system depends upon dropping people into it and forcing them to obey the high-minded collective aims. How, for instance, are regions to be defined in a collectively agreed fashion. Even at the scientific level, there is likely to be considerable disagreement about the delineation of sustainable regions. Who is also to define what effective custodianship of regional ecologies involves? How will reciprocal sharing function between regions in a time of dynamically unstable environmental conditions? What if there is simply not enough to go around? How are universal laws to be determined? What are the universal ethical norms that all people must subscribe to? Isn't this simply code for a dominant set of norms? How are production minimums to be defined? How are we to define appropriate levels of private ownership and individual mobility?

It seems that we would all have to be cast in identical and agreeable terms for any of this to work at a properly consensual level. Even then, differences of culture and individual contextual position and orientation are likely to become a basis for disagreements. And why should these disagreements be restricted to the notional conventions of liberal democratic debate? The problem of agreement, of how we come to subscribe to any system and how we participate within it cannot be neatly separated off from the problem of conceiving the structure of a potential system. Unless we prefer to rely on force to determine structure, which plainly introduces injustice from the outset, we have no means of conceiving a viable alternative to capitalism without envisaging how it could genuinely and consensually come into existence. Perhaps there is a middle ground between force and consensus.

Practically, no doubt, there must be. We never actually have recourse to the absolute authority of a genie nor the pure symmetry of a perfect consensus.

The additional complication is that just as the alternative system cannot be conceived without including the process of negotiating its coming into being, so too negotiation itself depends upon aspects of the alternative system already being available. We face an obvious chicken or egg problem. How are all the potential participants in a new system to enter into equitable and open discussion if the conversation is necessarily affected by the contours of the current system?

But no doubt this is the dilemma affecting all new things. Any given system is never hermetically enclosed. It discovers itself elsewhere however much it struggles to maintain things as they are. The new emerges from and displaces the old via any number of means that can never be entirely predicted or planned. In this sense, even if we are don't know where we are going with our calls for systemic change - even if we don't know what the new system will look like - just the work of struggling to envisage it may have value in contributing to its becoming.

Looking around me, how would things be different? I cannot see very far. I'm sitting in my room. We could start with the room itself. I have a place to spend my days, to keep all my stuff, to write these words. I doubt that I would have my own room in this way, more likely some kind of shared, communal space. Not necessarily such a bad thing. I have worked in shared offices before and preferred that to working alone.

Then there are all my books. I can't imagine that this profligate means of accessing aspects of cultural heritage will persist. More likely there will be an expanded public library system, but which is more sustainable - loaned printed books or accessible online resources? The latter would seem to make more sense and yet then this raises another major issue. Can I really continue to own and run a range of personal computing resources?

I have a phone on the dining table, an iPad charging in the living room and two computers, both constantly running, in this room.

This is clearly way too much. It is not only the use of power but the manufacture of so many specialised electronic components - not to mention the transport system needed to get them to me, the advertising needed to promote them, the shops required to sell them, etc. To be honest, however, I can't even imagine writing anything like this without a computer. Apart from the relative ease of employing word processing software to write, edit and save documents, there is also the capacity, in the midst of writing, to research topics on line. All the necessary resources are readily available. I could possibly abandon all this, but at what expense to my creative and thoughtful life?

Then there is all my music gear - my guitars, ukuleles, banjos, drums and keyboards, as well as all my music recording equipment and software. Why do I keep all this stuff? I don't even have time to adequately use it all. It is just a stock of stuff that make activities notionally possible, while also at the same time regularly paralysing genuine activity. My books, computing resources, music (and photographic) gear could all become a community resource that I draw upon in an equitable manner as necessary. This still entails issues. How, for instance, are goods to be generally and inexpensively available to communities if demand is restricted to the needs of maintaining a community stock? What can motivate and facilitate the production of the various electronic components and specialised pieces of software if there is no market for private consumption? Manufacturers would have to create limited edition stuff for the love of things, and to produce it differently, on a smaller scale and in a slower and less efficient manner. The various industries that support everything I own and do would need to be restricted in ways that make it hard to imagine their continued viable existence.

But let's not address macro-economic issues just yet. Instead, let's remain in my room. Right now, I am writing this sentence. Later today I may be recording some music. I am very focused on rendering what I do in the present moment in more permanent form. I am shaped by a literate consciousness that is not happy until experience is rendered concrete and more permanent;

externalised as a thing, so that I can see it, hear it, print it out, store it, etc. It would seem that this is all about shaping proxies to establish my own identity and existence. Although we can hardly return to some state of putatively original orality, we are very likely to have to reckon the environmental consequences of our abiding fixation with preserving a record of our activities, and more than this - with conceiving activity itself and its authentication in terms of the production of external supplements.

As much as I agree with Derrida (1976) that a notional 'writing' affects 'speech' from the outset, this can hardly ameliorate the real, material implications of our attachment to mediation and the literate record. We somehow have to learn to let things go, to experience them within the complexity of an ephemeral now rather than insisting, necessarily and constitutionally on their wider currency and circulation. Clearly enough, however, this risks undermining fundamental dimensions of communication and social being. If the focus shifts towards the complex present of manifestation rather than the manufacture and circulation of the externalised trace, then the world risks becomes smaller and differences between regions and people are likely to obtain greater force. This represents a crucial dilemma and challenge. How are we to maintain the infrastructure of systems of literate thought, creation and communication if they contradict the interests of environmental sustainability? Furthermore, if we either do or don't permit them as an exception, what are the consequences? How will this decision affect the new modes of living, feeling, action and thought that are necessary for any alternative system to thrive and obtain coherent meaning? This is particularly pertinent in that we are envisaging that a much greater portion of people's time will be focused on apparently useless cultural activities that involve thinking, creating, etc. How can sites and systems of creative practice and reflection be reframed to be less focused on the competitive proliferation of stuff?

I just took a break for a swim. The ocean pool is only 2 kilometres or so away but I drove. I drove because I can't ride a bike very well anymore and walking would take too long. I should

probably have walked. Not because it would make any great environmental difference, but in order to mobilise another means of imagining an alternative system. Better to have remained roughly in character during my break and see where it led. I should explain that I'm unable to ride just now because I've worn my hips away and require a total hip replacement. Very soon soon I expect to have bright and shiny new ones - not that they will appear bright and shiny when embedded in the morass of my mid-section, but they certainly did so when the surgeon showed them to me in his office. They were cool, smooth and very carefully machined, with nice pink, plastic cups. Now, it's lovely that I can have new bionic hips, but I wonder if this is really a sustainable practice? Can this kind of thing continue under an appropriately configured alternative system or will people have to get used to smaller scale and less technologically (and pharmaceutically) focused standards of medical care? Saving individual lives (or making a show of doing so) is, of course, very profitable these days, especially as the onus has shifted from public to privately funded health provision in many Western countries. Clearly, I get new hips because I have the cash or expensive insurance to pay for them, but most people in the rest of the world with similarly damaged hips don't have this option, which is unlikely to change under the current capitalist health system. This raises more questions. Will shifting to another system enable equitable access to the same high systems of care that I am accustomed to, or will it mean the nature and extent of health care is significantly diminished? I suspect the latter. Optimistically, it may mean that community based preventative care systems can develop and become the norm. This may entail a better standard of health for society generally, but may well also provide less of the intensive intervention that currently prolongs many affluent lives.

There is also the issue of living close to the beach, as though that is simply a lucky happenstance rather than a clear effect of relative wealth and privilege. Is it fair that I retain this proximity, or would some of these privileges - some of these existing, legally validated claims - have to be reconsidered and redistributed? If we are

genuinely thinking of shifting away from capitalism, then surely all such effects of capital - and inequitable social relations - would have to be examined and addressed.

Thinking again about the quotation that inspires this piece of writing, 'it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism', I suddenly recognise something very obvious. The two options are hardly mutually exclusive. The imagination of apocalypse very often provides a basis for envisioning alternatives to capitalism. We imagine all manner of post-apocalyptic societal forms - feral tribes, medieval-styled agrarian collectives, rigidly authoritarian techno cities, etc. - all of which emerge within the context of the collapse of existing systems. The challenge, in this sense, is less simply to imagine alternatives to capitalism (of which we can conceive many models drawing from aspects of pre-capitalist society as well as the tradition of political radicalism (socialism, anarchism, communism), but rather to imagine alternative systems that are not fundamentally post-apocalyptic in character - that do not appear either diminished and impoverished or impossibly distant and utopian. Furthermore, as I have explained, the challenge is to conceive a peaceful transition from this society to another. The capitalist system, with all its tensions and contradictions, appears on an irresistible path towards self (and wider) annihilation. What is hardest to imagine is how this burning, hurtling zeppelin can be stopped, but in a way that enables scope for new, more just and sustainable societal and environmental systems to be conceived, negotiated and developed.

Just as it is naive to imagine that capitalism can simply be jettisoned as something ill-suited to current societal and environmental needs, so too it is naive to imagine that capitalism is literally an irresistible and impregnable force. No socio-economic system is entirely closed. It already contains the elements that potentially lead it astray, that provide its potential means of undoing. We cannot escape our relation to the extant system, we cannot position ourselves as pure outsiders, but we can resist from within, we can represent strands of indigestible and delectable

otherness that nourish and agonise the contemporary context, compelling new and unexpected attitudes and configurations.

I have not read through everything I have written so far. I am afraid to do so. As much as I am interested in pursuing a mode of writing that is unfocused and regularly diverted - that is constituted in terms of diversion and uncertainty, that allows itself to be plainly ignorant - I am also afraid than none of this will cohere at any level. I'm afraid, as well, that I have been repeating myself - going over and over the same ideas without ever properly developing them adequately. Part of me thinks of allowing this disjointed, repetitive and stupid phase before turning to another stage of editing, in which everything gets more carefully researched and framed. Perhaps I will do this, but I am more inclined to leave things roughly in place, just deleting bits and pieces and inserting things here and there to make this screed somewhat more cogent, but without disguising the wayward and abject character of my writing and thinking.

I have stressed that for Plato politics begins with the issue of expertise. The justice of a system depends on every element playing its distinct part in the harmonious relationship of things. I question this necessity for expertise, not only because it invites an infinite prospect of specialisation, but because any alternative to our currently hyper-specialised system will require a commitment to common labour, related, for instance, to food growing, care-giving, social and ecological maintenance, etc. Instead of a narrow concern with efficiency, the focus will shift to inclusiveness, flexibility and the holistic integrity of tasks. Instead of insisting on functional specialisation, labour will have a general and iterative character. Indeed, the term 'labour' will not even adequately describe these activities. The labour/leisure dichotomy is exacerbated by capitalism and must be replaced by something that blurs lines between doing and not doing things, between sustaining life and enjoying and celebrating it.

Of course, Plato's insistence on expertise is not simply about conceiving the best relation of parts within the system of the city, but also about the constitution of parts within the human soul.

Plato cannot allow any sharing or overlapping of roles within the soul because that would threaten everything that maintains the neat distinction between dimensions of appetite, spirit and reason. In order for reason to maintain its priority - in order for philosophy to preside over the order of the self - it must maintain its superior relation to the other human capacities. This establishes the conceptual framework for conceiving the just constitution of the city in human (rational-intellectual) terms, rather than in relation to everything that connects us to the wider sphere of living and inanimate matter. Our connection to these things is represented at the level of ideality - of knowing rather than desiring or feeling - and in terms of a hierarchical conception of modes of being. The natural world affects us but must be scrupulously subordinated to the human potential for rational thought and action. Similarly, capitalism works to subordinate the inhuman - to represent it as an inert potential, a resource. Although clearly enough capitalism represents dimensions of 'base' interest, it also positions itself as a superior and prioritised second nature that presides over first nature, projecting an inevitable horizon of human domination and expansion.

Story-telling is excluded from the ideal city because it threatens this sense of rationally grounded human exclusivity and superiority. Not only does it lie and arouse inferior passions, but most significantly, as we have seen, it throws into doubt the nature of expertise. It crafts doubles of the world that have the dangerous capacity to undermine our properly rational potential, to replace the ideal correspondence of roles and abilities with the beguiling spectre of multiplicity and shape-shifting illusion (397e-398a). This is to indicate the fundamental political significance of story-telling (and aesthetic practices more generally), because, as Socrates explains, they are 'not appropriate to the political arrangements we are ourselves proposing, because we have no two-sided men among us, or many-sided ones; each does just one thing' (397e). Although Socrates claims that this prohibition only relates to the representation of inferior things, it is clear that there is a more fundamental basis for rejecting it, which hinges not so much on

whether good or bad models are depicted as its unsettling relation to the possibility of just constitution. Story-telling throws into doubt the integral nature of the determinate and rationally configured social-hierarchical field. Most importantly, this unsettling occurs less through the stories it tells than through its manner of telling.

But how is this critique of expertise relevant to real cities? Despite my objections to Plato's conception, it is very clear that cities and indeed society generally depend upon a delegation of functions. At the most obvious level, most of us don't grow our own food, make our own clothes, construct and repair our own shelter and transport, or have the relevant skills to cure ourselves of our various ailments. The city and global society has its basis in the delegation of tasks and areas of expertise. This significantly explains why it is so hard to imagine any kind of viable alternative system. We all recognise our embedded position within a complex network of interdependencies that render both our practical scope for life and the apparent impossibility of changing things.

If I am suggesting that we need to rethink this emphasis on strictly delineated expertise - to encourage more scope for generalist and multi-skilled action and activity - then what are the consequences? Can we retain, for instance, our current organisation of physical space, with our cities focusing on manufacturing, immaterial labour, and aspects of concentrated cultural exchange and interaction, our suburbs representing labour dormitories and vast repositories of privatised experience, our rural areas increasingly depopulated, corporatised and unsustainably specialised, and our 'wild' areas composed mainly for spectacle (and, properly speaking, no longer really convincingly wild)? And if we were to abandon this scheme, would things be any better? Is there any genuine potential to shape small sustainable communities that have a more generalist character and that link effectively to relatively modest regional hubs, with these in turn linking to larger urban complexes that have a mainly cultural and ceremonial function? Additionally, does any such shift to the latter model depend upon a smaller population to enable a

sustainable balance between dimensions of human activity and crafted natural ecology?

A major problem with the current arrangement is that it relies upon the constant, machine enabled movement of things. Food must be transported to cities and suburban supermarkets. Since nobody is there, the rural areas must be farmed by machines. People must drive from awkwardly distributed suburban homes into the city to work, and then away again at the weekend in pursuit of leisure, not to mention flying overseas for longer holidays. Movement is constant and constantly increasing. While I may not go to the shops so often to buy stuff, while I may just order it online and wait for packages to arrive at my door, there is still this rapid movement of things, now shaping more personalised networks for the global motion of merchandise. This sum of motion is surely, ultimately, unsustainable. Any alternative system has to find means of restricting it - and, more so, discovering other avenues of dynamism. Arguably, we fashion systems of constant motion because we are profoundly aware of some deeper level of stasis - some incapacity to move within the context of our superficial mobility.

We take for granted the blur of surrounding things as we hurtle down a highway; the slow experience of air travel (all that waiting in line and all that sitting still); the painful three days or a week it takes for that gadget to arrive from the on-line shop; or the tedious prospect of the unmoving data download bar. These experiences of frustration play on the contemporary correspondence between flux and immobility. There is a need to consider dynamism differently, at a different scale and enabled in less incomprehensible ways. There is movement, for instance, in just the play of my hands one octave apart on the piano or in discovering and following a new track up in the escarpment bush a kilometre or so from my home. There is movement just in sitting and thinking. I don't need to pursue movement as a device. It comes to me regardless. We have pursued motion in order to make it ours. But it constantly escapes us, especially when specifically and excessively pursued.

But prior to seeking some hidden layer of melancholy motivating our experience of constant motion, there is an obvious need to indicate the significance of capitalism as a fundamental structural mechanism and accelerator. I am hesitant to blame the whole expectation of expertise on capitalism. The notion of spheres of specialised activity and an overall economy of interdependence long precedes the specific historical forms of capitalism, and is not even something that I believe necessarily needs to be entirely abandoned. For me, it is more a matter of establishing a better balance between dimensions of specialisation and generalisation than choosing absolutely between one or the other. But if specialisation has become unduly emphasised and if this has contributed to the need for things and people to move swiftly about the place, this is certainly encouraged and crucially facilitated by capitalism. Capitalism has rendered a cunning relation between the particular and the general, difference and universality. Everything exists both in its particularity and, as something that obtains monetary value, within a system of exchange. Financial representation provides a means of mapping everything to everything else, allowing things to move easily from one place to another. Added to this, the mechanism that motivates capitalism, the capacity to distill surplus value from each motion of production and consumption, means that motion and increasing motion are necessarily encouraged. The trick with capitalism is that what appears as simply a means of facilitating economic exchange (money) becomes the fundamental means of generating value - and always at the expense of somebody else in the chain of motion. Capitalism does not so much provide a vehicle for enabling and representing market activity as establish market activity itself as a scene of value. Capitalism mobilises multiple layers of difference - of expertise, of material identity, of spatiotemporal position - to produce the illusion of a commonly growing stock. This illusion is, of course, increasingly threadbare. Nobody believes anything is being increased in common, but as long as we are all somehow constituted within this system - as long as we all put something into it and get something out of it, as long as we lack the means to look

up properly and think/act beyond it - then it retains its sway as the grim spectre of something both solid and substantial, and in endless, unmoving motion.

There are brief times in our lives (I am speaking of privileged Western lives) in which we are nothing in particular. As young children, for instance, we are permitted to be malleable, potential things with no delineated field or expertise. Very quickly, our socio-economic background, education, etc. directs us in specific ways, pushing us towards either a sense of choice or the recognition that we have no real choice. In this manner, we follow and are drawn along particular paths. I should acknowledge, however, that distinct specialisation is not so strongly promoted these days. The relentless churn of economic and industry circumstances means that we are encouraged to retain an aspect of flexibility, so that we can adapt to (or formally retrain for) new contexts of specialised expertise and activity. Nevertheless, the contemporary emphasis upon 'generic skills' is never pushed to the point that one can actually step back from occupying a delineated position (no matter how ephemeral) in the chain of interdependence. Only perhaps within the context of leisure are we permitted to explore our wider capacities, which never quite amount to fields of expertise, which are always cast as hobbies. It is only later in life when we retire that we return again to an aspect of indistinct being, in which we don't really do anything anymore, in which we gradually or more speedily (and cost-effectively) transition to non-existence.

There are, of course, other states of non-expertise that fall outside adequate economic calculation - unemployment, domestic labour and care for the young and elderly, etc. Interestingly, all of these very often have connotations of immobility - of not doing anything, of remaining at home, or of mundanely maintaining the common stock of things, rather than generating new extra-domestic things that obtain their value and meaning in the restless motion of financial exchange.

As an aside, it is worth observing that while Plato (Socrates) is suspicious of mimetic art forms such as story-telling and painting,

he is more positive about music. This comes, however, with provisos. He rejects musical modes that are associated with the expression of excessive grief or representations of drunkenness, preferring instead either music that conveys an attitude of bravery and stoic sacrifice or moderate music that adopts the manner of rational persuasion rather than emotional arousal (398e - 399c). His preference is for music that employs a limited range of instruments, timbres and tones and a simple, regular and measured rhythm (400a). He regards this form of music as congruent with the features of a 'good and fine disposition' (400e). Moderate music is portrayed as a natural expression of the good soul and provides a metaphor for comprehending the nature of goodness. The good person is 'well-tuned', with a 'harmonious' constitution. Although Plato does not rigidly distinguish the mimetic quality of story-telling and music, it is evident that he associates the bad mimesis of the former with the work of doubling - making dishonest copies of things - whereas music, though it does mimic, express and evoke, tends towards a more satisfactory level of integral identity. In its intrinsically formal and directly performative (literally present) character, music frames a more intimate - and ultimately less superficial - relation to the human soul (401d - 401e).

This qualified approval for music demonstrates that Plato does not reject 'art' altogether, which is hardly possible in any case, since the general category of art did not exist in Ancient Greece. He only condemns those practices that he regards as telling lies, arousing undue passions, promoting poor models of feeling and behaviour, and detracting from the imperative that each citizen pursue their own specific expertise. While warning against various improper forms of music, Plato endorses music as a key aspect of the guardian's education alongside physical training. Interestingly, these two are not conceived as targeting distinctly separate aspects of being (physical training for the body and music for the soul), but rather as educating and bringing into 'concord' two aspects of the soul. Physical exercise develops 'fierceness and harshness' and music 'softness and gentleness' (410d), with both attitudes of the

soul beneficial when maintained in proper balance; recalling that the guardian must both fiercely resist enemies and treat the people of his or her own city with care and kindness.

The same principles of simplicity and moderation that inform the discussion of storytelling and music inform the discussion of diet and physical regimens. In eating, for instance, the guardian should avoid 'variety' (404e) and focus on plain roasted meat (with no sauces) (404c - 404d). The discussion of physical training leads to a consideration of the appropriate use of medicine, with Socrates arguing for a light touch that encourages the body to repair itself rather than endless recourse to leeches, poultices, etc. Socrates expresses little sympathy for those who are sick long term or in any sense unfit to pursue their area of expertise. Illness is portrayed as a distraction and its own negative form of expertise, which is better realised through death than at the expense of the functioning city ('there is a single function assigned to each individual in the city, which he is bound to perform, leaving not time to live permanently ill and under treatment' (406c); 'if his body is not strong enough for that, death puts an end to his troubles' (406d)). It is very evident that Socrates places an absolute priority on the dedicated pursuit of expertise, preferring euthanasia or capital punishment for those who are either physically or morally unsuited to forming a proper part of the social whole.

In the midst of insisting that city has little time for the sick, Socrates raises the issue of the indolence of wealth. He observes that rich people are constitutionally at a loose end. This, of course, notably differs from how the labour of capital' will be perceived within nascent capitalism, with English philosopher, John Locke, regarding the entrepreneurial character of invested capital as the highest form of productive labour. But for Plato, the rich lack any dedicated jobs to pursue. He mentions Phocylides' recommendation that 'as soon as man has enough to live on he should practice at excellence' (407a). Socrates is cautious of this view, with the risk, of course, that it extends the city's constitution beyond any exclusive focus on expertise. Whereas expertise is linked to aspects of functional necessity, excellence, pursued for its

own sake, appears as a luxurious indulgence. Worth emphasising that the issue here is less of inequity and privilege (relating to a conventional sense of social justice) than the potential threat to the integrity of the system (with justice conceived as the the well composed arrangement of distinct areas of expertise). Yet, is it only rich people who have sufficient leisure to 'practice at excellence'? What of philosophers who visit festivals in Piraeus and stay up all night to engage in far ranging discussion of society and the soul? Is this simply their proper field of expertise or are they pursuing an area of excellence that they regard as intrinsically worthwhile? The case of rich people at a loose end and philosophers lingering all night in Piraeus, would seem to suggest the need for an expanded conception of the city's constitution, extending beyond any simple calculation of expertise. This would include not only the inessential pursuit of excellence, but also all manner of practices that are pursued for reasons irreducible to exclusively functional explanation.

At a crucial level, the precise problem we face is knowing when to stop. We need to figure out things to do with ourselves that don't involve producing, accumulating and consuming more. The contemporary need is to consider how society can function beyond the web of expertise and the constantly expanding market for the exchange of goods and services. Although a great deal of people are starving and lack even the most essential things, there is still the need for those of us in prosperous nations to re-frame our activities. It is hardly, after all, that our greater prosperity flows down to those poorer than ourselves. If anything, the opposite is the case - their poverty is very much a consequence of the activities that enable us to lead more comfortable lives. Capitalism does not provide a mechanism for eliminating poverty. Instead, poverty, very evidently, is a product of capitalism. Within this context, Phocylides' recommendation has merit in that it conceives modes of being and identity that extend beyond narrowly economic features of existence. Whether this is conceived in terms of scope for developing excellence, or for play, or for doing nothing much at all, anything that shifts the emphasis away from narrowly

profitable forms of expertise is worthwhile in terms of addressing inequitable and unsustainable models of identity and action. Discovering how to do less ourselves is more likely to foster new means for less prosperous regions to flourish, especially when combined with deliberate global efforts to reduce injustice and to develop genuinely reciprocal systems of mutual support.

As discussed, the guardians are conceived both as part of the constitution of expertise within the ideal city and also as significantly distinct from it. Socrates regularly compares the guardians to watch dogs - essential to defending the 'home' but best kept outside. They live in communal dormitories, are not permitted private property and are paid only modest wages (416d - 417b). With some embarrassment (due to its obvious storytelling character), Socrates recommends the promulgation of a myth that citizens are born fully formed from the ground itself (without any need for ordinary contexts of family and education) (414d -414e). The myth portrays guardian leaders as literally composed of gold, guardian auxiliaries of silver, farmers of iron and craftspeople of bronze (415a). This myth 'grounds' features of social difference, establishes a natural link between city and soil and justifies the prohibition against private property for guardians. What possible need can guardians have for gold and silver when they are composed of gold and silver itself? To the objection of Adimantus that this seems like poor consolation for leading dangerous, austere and unhappy lives, Socrates responds that guardians may be the happiest citizens of all. Unlike other citizens, they pursue their expertise without any expectation of extraneous material reward. Worth observing that the happiness of the guardians, in its disinterested character, bears at least a passing similarity to the pleasure the wealthy person finds in their idle and indulgent 'practices of excellence'. Although there is nothing especially contradictory about combining features of intrinsic reward and functional necessity, the latter is much more clearly emphasised. Beyond defending the ascetic happiness of the guardians, Socrates argues that the focus should be on the happiness of the overall city rather than the happiness of specific groups (420b -420c).

Happiness has an integral constitutional basis in the justice of the city, which is manifest, once again, in the proper coordination of expertise.

This consideration of general, systemic happiness leads Socrates to return to the theme of wealth (and poverty). Wealth and poverty are positioned as forces that throw out the balance of individuals and cities (421d - 422a). If a person is too wealthy, they abandon their craft and become idle (neglecting, of course, the possibility that they may pursue 'practices of excellence'). If they become poor, then they risk losing the capacity to pursue their craft altogether. Either situation is as bad as the other and both need to be avoided. This is particularly so because it can lead people to contemplate 'political change' (422a). Wealth and poverty profoundly affect the integrity of the overall city - rendering it a set of competing interests rather than a unified network of expertise (423a). For similar reasons, the city should not grow too quickly or too large or it risks dissolving into a dangerous and unstable multiplicity (423b). It is notable how strongly Plato emphasises aspects of system maintenance and reproduction, rather than growth and innovation. Even if it is easy to object to many of his specific recommendations as proscriptive and inhumane, he is at least profoundly focused on the overall health of the city and its capacity for stable and continuing life. For me, this has critical value in terms of informing a rejection of the current emphasis upon irresponsible, market-driven agendas of constant dynamic change. We certainly require radical change to address our contemporary dilemmas, but any efforts at beneficial change must be oriented by an holistic conception that seeks strategies of sustainability. Plato's notion of the ideal city, for all its shortcomings, has considerable value in focusing on the fundamental ecology of the good society rather than projecting an entirely mysterious whole composed of nothing but individual interests.

Although the role of the guardians is conceived initially as one of defending and increasing territory, it becomes gradually evident that they have much wider and more general responsibility. For

instance, they must 'prevent the city from either being small or merely appearing great - it must be sufficient in size, and one, not many' (423c) and they must 'make sure that it is not corrupted when they are not looking, guarding it thick and thin through revolutionary innovations…and keeping it as much as possible as it is' (424b). With only a modest stake in the material profit of the city, the guardians must defend it from both within and without. This involves less simple soldiering than a complex work of custodial care-taking. Despite their weapons, they are focused mainly on the interests of social preservation, continuity and survival. Hence the breadth of their training. Alongside any specifically military training, they pursue a combination of physical, musical and intellectual training in order to foster their capacity to not only preserve the city, but also to recognise it in its integral integrity.

I must apologise at this point. I am making rather slow progress with the *Republic*. I'm only about a third of the way through. I'm also aware that I have completely abandoned my effort to concretely evoke a changed version of the world. I have ignored the character who lay in bed, played music and wandered up to the fields where the food is grown. To be honest, he's been a bit quiet lately. It's been raining persistently for the last few weeks and he has been sleeping more. He's still finding time to play piano and go for swim in the ocean pool, but his chords are taking odd extensions and he is swimming very slowly - and often out of breath.

We can distinguish a narrow focus upon the human system for the exchange of goods and services (economy) from a more general field (ecology) that includes not only our relation to environmental systems, but also human relationships and activities that are not entirely reducible to market transactions. In this sense, the ordinary economy can be conceived as an awkward subset of an overall human and inhuman ecology. The neoliberal economic perspective fails to acknowledge this broader context, as well as features of value that extend beyond the good functioning of the market system. It incorporates aspects of an ecological focus, but

delineates a very restricted field and an impoverished conception of value, action and being. Shifting to an ecological perspective has two implications: firstly, it entails recognising that the economy is neither an integral thing nor an end (it must be conceived in terms of its relation to wider systems and in terms of a wider understanding of cultural identity and activity); and secondly, that no system is reducible to a single measure (it involves a complex multiplicity of qualitative and quantitative indices). While ecology can be conceived in purely functional terms - say in terms of the conservation and exchange of energy - I am suggesting that ecology also includes a dimension of justice (in the rough sense that Plato's uses the term to describe something more like systemic order than strictly moral evaluation). Rather than reducing all things to a single measure, ecology, at its best, represents a thinking of the combination of an irreducible particularity with dimensions of the general and common.

Arguably, ecologies only take coherent shape in terms of the circulation of quantities - carbon, energy, whatever - just as the economy is only evident at the level of financial indices. In these terms, the term 'ecology' offers no more enlightened descriptive perspective. It simply indicates a more general economics, employing the same quantified means. But this objection confuses the potential to represent something mathematically with its more complex identity. Of course anything can be represented in numerical terms, but that hardly renders everything numerical. An ecological perspective may definitely imply the mathematical modelling of systems, but this hardly affects the identity of systems themselves. Neoliberal economics, on the other hand, as well as capitalism generally, represents aspects of human action, interaction and value in financial terms as a means of transforming them into literally quantifiable things. They are stripped of any intrinsic value so that they can deliver properly (improperly) economic value. The language of neoliberalism and capitalism works less to describe and comprehend the rich complexity of systems than to reduce them to something amenable to - and solely evident as - manifestations of economic profit and loss.

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In popular discussion about environmental crisis, It is regularly suggested that we should look to the economy to address aspects of ecology. Free market supporters argue that there is no need for any deliberate policy to accomplish green transformation. It will happen naturally when circumstances and market conditions are ripe. From this perspective, as oil grows scarce and prohibitively expensive, alternative energy sources will become increasingly viable and attractive, while technological progress will facilitate new forms of transport that make effective use of this energy. Consumers will adopt these new systems less because they are environmentally beneficial than because they are technically superior and less expensive. Other commentators argue, in contrast, for the vital role of governments in establishing appropriate policy and legislative conditions, and in actively incentivising the shift to alternative power and transport systems. Despite their differences, both perspectives share a commitment to existing political and socio-economic frameworks, as well as a common faith in advanced scientific and technological invention to develop effective solutions. More radical voices - and I would count this argument amongst those - argue that the capitalist global system is incompatible with sustainability, that its profit and growth focus mean that it can never accomplish what is actually needed; a recognition of limits, a focus on continuity and a reduction in the scale and scope of human systems. The market economic system, whether conceived as an autonomous force or as centrally managed, is deeply antithetical to the interests of evolving systems that can equitably and positively transform global social and environmental conditions.

When I was young in the 1960s and 1970s, climate change was not a prominent public issue. The focus was instead upon population, pollution and vanishing wilderness. The debate about pollution focused heavily on cleanliness. There were regular efforts to clean things up and restore things to their more ordinary unspoiled state. There was much less sense that pollution represented an integral, systemic threat. The first thing that suggested something more existentially significant was probably

the Ozone hole, which still managed to seem a curious anomaly rather than anything genuinely dangerous.

Wilderness preservation was the first environmental issue that engaged me at a political level. The planned damming of the Franklin River in Tasmania produced the 'No Dams' protest movement (1982). I'd just been on long walks through the Tasmanian bush and seen the devastation of the damming of Lake Pedder, so I marched across Commonwealth Avenue bridge in Canberra and stuck 'No Dams' stickers on my car. I am afraid, however, that now all that emphasis on preserving pristine areas of wilderness seems misguided. We don't need dams, but we certainly can't maintain the fantasy that the natural world can be preserved by sequestering areas of the Earth from any human impact. The world is integrally affected by Anthropogenic climate change and our best option is to adopt the role of responsible custodians.

In researching aspects of this project, I discover the work of Samuel Alexander (University of Melbourne Sustainability Institute), leading me to recognise, fairly obviously, that there are entire schools of academic enquiry that argue for a post-capitalist society. They argue for 'de-growth' and a restructuring of global systems to foster social equality and ecological sustainability. In short, they argue in detail for aspects of societal change that I have only described with hazy imprecision. This is good in a way. It demonstrates that there are cogent arguments for alternative systems. But it also indicates that I should probably acquaint myself with these arguments better, even if only as a means of more precisely clarifying the nature of my own contribution. I can continue to theatrically perform my ignorance or do more to engage with extant arguments. There is also scope to focus more on what specifically interests me - contemporary dilemmas of political agency, and the elaboration of an ecological notion of justice that links to the politics of aesthetics.

In 'Planned Economic Contraction: The emerging case for degrowth' (2012), Alexander argues for a 'steady state economy' that deliberately restricts and reduces economic activity. This strategy is directed towards the economies of Global North

nations, who, he argues, are exceeding environmentally sustainable thresholds of production and consumption, and becoming increasingly less equitable and less focused on the genuine welfare of citizens Alexander provides a 'preliminary' eight point model for change. This includes:

1. Shifting from a focus on Gross Domestic Product as a measure of economic health towards 'post-growth measures of progress' that consider holistic aspects of social and environmental benefit.

2. Transitioning from fossil fuel energy to renewable sources.

3. Establishing resource caps on production resources to ensure environmental sustainability. Similarly, employing rationing to limit consumption.

4. Instituting a basic income to reduce any potential for people to slip into poverty and to encourage processes of self-sufficiency (food growing, building, clothes making, etc.).

5. Developing a strongly progressive taxation system and a maximum wage to radically reduce economic inequality.

6. Limiting working hours so that the reduced amount of necessary labour (jobs) is equitably distributed amongst the working age population and to place a greater emphasis on leisure and non-economic growth based activities.

7. Shifting away from corporate capitalism that aims to maximise profits for shareholders to worker cooperatives.

8. Implementing death duties and other measures to significantly reduce intergenerational wealth, with the aim, once again, to ensure greater equality.

Alexander argues that the these measures should be implemented both as top-down government initiatives and bottom up as alternative economic forms and ways of life. Alexander stresses that his model is not complete. There are many other things that

need to be done, particularly at the international level in terms of transport, trade, global debt, military policy, etc. The eight points are only summarily described. They are intended as 'provocations' rather than as a fully elaborated plan - but they are clearly very useful.

We have seen that Plato founds his ideal city on a biologically based distribution of expertise. Everybody has their natural capacities, which correspond to particular designated social roles/tasks. The farmer draws upon their strong and hardy nature to farm. The shoemaker has the keen eye and dextrous hands necessary to make and repair shoes. The guardian has a loyal and spirited nature that enables them to defend the city (while not threatening their own citizens). The just city is conceived as one in which each person performs their given task on the basis of their natural abilities. It is a distinctively human construct, but incorporates a vital natural logic. The city obtains its identity in terms of the distribution of functional roles, with each role immersed in their own labour. Their diligent focus and expertise not only benefits themselves but is constitutive of society generally. Leaving aside the insistence on specialisation, as well as the insistence that this specialisation has a natural basis, the important feature here is that the city is conceived, at its most basic level, as a network of functionally geared labour. It is work that literally constitutes the city and shapes the quality of its justice.

What is a city without work? Can we even imagine such a thing? We can certainly imagine more common, less specialised forms of labour. We can also imagine that the determination of roles may significantly shift beyond naturalised explanation - recognising, for instance, that issues of power, social advantage, gender, etc., play a very important part in determining who does what at any point in time - but can we think of a city that does not existentially depend upon work? Surely work is necessary in order that collective life can occur. This is to argue, in line with philosopher J.P. Deranty (2022), that work is a constitutive feature of co-dependent social life. In very simple terms, it is an essential means of ensuring our on-going survival and meaningful cultural being. Yet, what is the

implication of shifting from Plato's restricted notion of specialised labour, to a more general economy of labour? Clearly, this is to think beyond formal work contexts towards work that occurs through all aspects of social life. I would certainly incorporate all kinds of unpaid and voluntary labour - such as care-giving within the family or custodial support of the local environment. It also offers the potential to shift the emphasis from manifestly productive labour (growing things, building things, making things) to typically less respected or remunerated aspects of maintenance and support. The focus shifts from aspects of growth to those of social reproduction and from formal contexts of labour (industries and jobs) to more informal contexts of social life and communal interaction.

Deranty's defence of this more general conception of work and its crucial value in terms of establishing the conditions for collective life and individual self-identity is directed towards prominent strands of contemporary critical theory that argue for a transition to a 'post-work' society. Deranty does not disagree with many of the latter's criticisms of contemporary work - its increasingly evident limits in the face of automation, its obvious social inequities, its exploitative, capitalist character, etc. - but argues that work must be remedied and restored rather than altogether rejected.

The two perspectives are possibly simply arguing at cross-purposes, each with their own specific notion of what work involves. The adherents of post-work society are aiming their criticisms at a conventional formal understanding of work (jobs, casual labour, etc.), whereas Deranty is envisaging a more general and socially integral notion of work that may well overlap with the features of post-work life. Nonetheless, Deranty's argument is worthwhile, particularly in terms of establishing that work cannot simply be set aside as anything inessential, and in terms of providing a model for re-conceiving work in post-capitalist terms.

Deranty defines work as the performance of necessary and useful social tasks that make a 'purposeful contribution to social reproduction' and that are shaped by a set of specific constraints.

Drawing upon the work of psychoanalyst Christophe Dejours, Deranty describes three main ares of defining constraint: firstly, the work must be regarded as successful by whoever it is addressed to - that it is to say, the usefulness of the work must be judged by somebody other than the one performing the task; secondly, that the work extends beyond the interpersonal sphere to target social reproduction generally (as a social, cooperatively situated good); and thirdly, that successfulness is judged not only by the addressee, but in terms of the norms of a given 'occupational culture'. These factors together mean that work is not an autonomous activity (a pure experience of freedom), but necessarily has a 'heteronomous' character. For Deranty, work provides a fundamental context for realising social relations and for structuring personal development in terms of the negotiation of social skills and norms.

While I agree in general terms with Deranty's argument, I have some specific concerns. I am uncertain, for instance, why another person is required to judge the usefulness of any work. If the worker has incorporated the norms of a working culture, then they always have an implicit addressee in mind, even if it is only themselves. If I live alone and make my bed, that is work that I do for myself but assess in terms of relevant standards of bed-making. Further, this form of work falls outside the second constraint that insists on a social rather than interpersonal frame, however this constraint potentially excludes a great deal of work that takes place in domestic contexts. Inasmuch as domestic labour plainly entails social reproduction, I'd imagine that Deranty would acknowledge that it is a form of work. Yet this leaves me unclear about the precise nature of the distinction between work restricted to the interpersonal context and more properly social labour. I take the overall point that a key value of work is to establish reciprocal relations of acknowledgement and respect, but surely this can be realised in complex ways, which need not obtain publicly conceived social identity and standing. I would also argue - beyond recognising the possibility of work that is 'interpersonally' social - the potential for genuine work that falls short of any context of

social realisation; that is attempted, for instance, and fails. Work is not only successful. It does not only realise social exchange, but also manifests the limits and awkward interstices within social relations. There is a need to consider possibilities of slippage - efforts of work that gesture towards but do not quite accomplish social recognition and exchange. This is relevant, for instance, to aesthetic labour (that envisages communication but can never guarantee it).

I would argue that the latter point is particularly important given our current circumstances in which we vitally need to do less. We need to contract the market economy and do more to ensure social reproduction via other means - not only through reciprocally recognised public labour but also through labour that has an apparently autonomous and individual orientation - that encounters and allows the risk of intransitivity. This is labour that discovers its necessity in other terms - that resembles work in many ways, but that is cast as inessential and unnecessary. I would argue that an expanded conception of work needs to incorporate aspects of what the 'post-work' program envisages. It needs to do more to recognise that the value of work need not be narrowly instrumental.

The concept of work requires further examination. We distinguish between instrumental and non-instrumental activities, private and public spheres, interpersonal and social benefits, autonomous and socially directed areas of practice, but what do these all mean precisely? We tend to take them for granted in our definition of work without subjecting them to adequate examination or questioning. Of course we all have a common sense understanding of work as distinguished from leisure activities, but this binary schema itself needs interrogation? We try to define work precisely, to distinguish it clearly from non-work, yet this is difficult and encounters awkward exceptions. Perhaps it would be better to consider the uncertain, necessarily blurry relation between work and non-work? Perhaps it would be better to envisage another way of thinking altogether?

Two examples of what I'm getting at.

Domingos Albino Ferreira, the main character in Cao Guimaraes' documentary *The Soul of the Bone* (2004), is a 72 year old hermit who lives alone in a cave in Brazil. He has done so for 41 years. The film portrays him preparing meals for himself, cleaning his dirt floor, playing guitar, sitting quietly and telling stories to occasional groups of visitors. Does Domingos do any work? Certainly, he does not have a job and rarely works for others - perhaps only when telling stories or appearing in this documentary. Apart from these very rare instances, he has no audience for his activities. His work has an existential force. It is directed not only towards his practical survival but also as a vital means of structuring his being - of enabling him to live coherently in isolation, but still with a reference to standards of purposive and disciplined life that we recognise as having a generally social character. His work attests to his continuing humanity - his fellowship with all that he has very evidently withdrawn from (and that has turned away from him). We can recognise then a practice of work that is not directly and instrumentally socially integrative but that serves as a constitutional sign of the social, and of its patient reproduction. His work practice is embodied, ephemeral and performative, with no particular need to leave any material trace beyond the immediate conduct. Domingos' work pursues immediate purposive ends but plainly also has an integral ceremonial aspect. It is the performance of the fundamental, ordinary conditions of life. Within this context, his guitar playing and storytelling appear not as the antithesis of his working activities, but rather its continuation in another form. They are equally concerned with social reproduction. They perform aspects of cultural heritage in order to maintain it, even if only as a process of oral mnemonics and idiosyncratic elaboration. Domingos' various working activities pose questions for our understanding of the relationship between labour and leisure, the purposive and the in-itself, and the private and the social. They suggest less a neat set of antithetical categories than a complex field of corresponding and overlapping implication.

As a second example, consider a singer songwriter producing a song. They come up with a chord sequence, bass pattern and melody. They write the lyrics. They practice performing the song on piano. They record, mix and master it. They upload the song to *Soundcloud*, but absolutely nobody listens to it. How does this affect all the work that they put into producing it? Was there in fact any work involved at all? For a start, nobody requested the song. It hardly had any dimension of immediate socially determined necessity. Perhaps there is a general expectation that singer-songwriters will produce songs - and this somehow provides a cultural benefit to society - but certainly no specific need that this particular song be produced. In answering to no specific need and in obtaining no recognition whatsoever, does this mean that the work of creating and producing the song is utterly negated? Does it, for instance, indicate an amateur level of practice that should properly be regarded as a hobby rather than socially recognised work? Yet, as a process, the work involved is clearly the same as for a song that may attract attention and financial reward.

It seems counter-intuitive, in my view, to insist that work be socially acknowledged to exist. Better to recognise that work can either be acknowledged or unacknowledged. Artistic work particularly tends to involve the risk that the effort may not pay off in terms of obtaining public recognition and reward. As partial compensation, there is the sense that these activities are freely undertaken and intrinsically rewarding. Unlike an ordinary job or performing some domestic task, there is no sense of obligation or of deferred satisfaction. Work, as we ordinarily think of it, is associated with those things that we do on the basis of some perceived necessity (for instance, the lawn must be mowed or the grass will get too long) and on the basis that the activity itself incorporates some aspect of delayed gratification (once the lawn is mowed we can relax). But is this sense of compulsion and deferred pleasure integral to work or simply to an extant conception of work informed by specific conceptions of necessity and the nature of instrumentally and ethically configured human conduct? It seems very likely the notion of work is amenable less to simple

definition than to more careful relational articulation. The notion of work mobilises (or concentrates) a whole range of concepts linked to the nature of human and (inhuman) action. While we may neglect the work of an artist, we are more than happy to acknowledge the work of an engine (despite the lack of moral agency or any sense of self-sacrifice). The setting aside of the work of the failed artist is legible in terms a cultural system that privileges a materially acquisitive notion of necessity and that rejects work that is pursued excessively (beyond a narrow focus on immediately productive and socially integrative outcomes).

So instead of insisting upon a particular model of work, or its contradistinction from leisure, we may be better to consider a matrix of parameters that together inform our overall understanding of work. Here are some suggested parameters:

- Effort: hard/easy

- Skill: physical/mental/unskilled

- Form: repetitive/varied, structured/loose

- Necessity: intrinsic/socially determined

- Acknowledgment & Reward: personal/social/financial

- Character: holistic/discrete, autonomy/constraint

- Affect: pleasure/suffering

Any particular form of work can be positioned in this matrix. So our failed song-writing practice could, for instance, require hard effort, developed mental and physical skills, a careful coordination of repetitive and unstructured (improvisational) activity, intrinsic (felt) necessity, personal rewards (but very limited social and financial rewards), an holistic and autonomous character, and a generally pleasurable affective profile. The work of a call centre operator may look very different, with a greater emphasis upon financial reward than holistic autonomy and intrinsic satisfaction.

The problem, of course, with this scheme is that it provides no means of establishing a clear distinction between work and other

areas of activity. Very clearly, for instance, leisure activities can also be examined in terms of this matrix. But, as I say, this is partly my point. However much we would like to precisely define work and to distinguish it from other fields of activity, this necessarily entails looking beyond the activity itself to consider features of its contextual positioning. This demands considering the nature of the activity in terms of precisely the kinds of features indicated above. Our need is less to discover adequate conceptual grounds for our common understanding of work than to rethink the nature of work and the associated differences and distinctions that it mobilises. Very practically, we need to find means of acknowledging the value of practices that are not easily incorporated within the restricted economy of neoliberal value and growth, but that have a broader and sustaining individual and social significance. These are the kinds of activities that are going to be 'necessary' to lend societal life meaning if we are to move beyond capitalist paradigms of human action, necessity and (property focused) justice.

Intermission A

I suspect the reader may like a break at this point. Here, as a short intermission, I permit myself the luxury of envisaging the end of the world.

Antarctic Survival Efforts

Mementos

I am standing on a concrete balcony in Antarctica, looking at what was once termed the Ross Sea. The sky is grey. The wind is blowing strongly. Rich people once stood where I am standing. They rented rooms with expansive views of the sea and ice, strolled along the rocky shore amongst the penguins and seals, remaining for as long as they could afford. They were escaping the ruin of the middle climes - the endless floods, fires and droughts, the relentless warming. But this refuge soon enough became untenable and the place fell empty.

None of this especially bothers me. I can walk away. I can stay as long for as I like. I am an ambulant memory construct. I was built by beings that no longer exist. While memories are no longer needed, my circuitry is focused on preserving them. In this manner I find myself unable to make a fresh start. Surrounded by the detritus of a ruined world, I am compelled to record its persistently evident stories.

From what I can gather, the following observations were written by a witness to the final disastrous permutations of life on this planet. They describe the unintended consequences of last-ditch

efforts to address various aspects of the environmental crisis, focusing specifically on a number of animate and inanimate engineering projects that aimed to ameliorate the widening gap between slowly evolving biological time and rapidly accelerating geological time. This temporal discrepancy was lucidly evident in the collapse of Antarctic geography and ecosystems. Biologically constituted things simply lacked the means to adapt sufficiently quickly to changing environmental conditions. The continent had been a privileged field for scientific enquiry and, since science now had the power to alter features of being generally, it seemed an appropriate place to investigate novel environmental solutions. At its most defensible level, this involved efforts to intervene beneficially, altering the instinctive behaviour of Antarctic creatures to enhance their likelihood of survival. But things quickly became less defensible.

At the time these observations were made, Antarctica was hardly entirely reserved for science. The scientists encountered a constant influx of others - many hundreds of thousands of refugees from the horror of the formerly habitable latitudes; the desperate living along the coastline in abandoned oil tanker shanty-towns, while retro-settler-colonists built heavily fortified inland communities, and well-armed bands of tech pirates plundered new sources of water and oxygen power. There were also, of course, dwindling numbers of super-wealthy with their ocean yachts and exclusive spa complexes.

Although I am not human, it moves me that the author of the following notes writes with no anticipation of any reader. He writes parables not only for generations that will never come, but also for the inevitability of silence, which includes, it seems, my own modes of attention.

The Drone of the Jelly Fish

I write these brief observations with the assurance that nobody will ever read them. My aim is simple - to while away what has become an increasingly oppressive final period of my life. I am not unwell.

I am not uncomfortable. I am sitting in the spa room of the former *Refuge Fin de la Mundo*, gazing out at the Ross Sea as the last remains of ancient glaciers drift past.

The station shut down some years ago and there is no longer any means of returning home. Indeed, whatever once was home no longer exists. The spa hotel is abandoned so I moved in. The wind howls around the place and the heated sauna no longer works - but it is far less cold down here these days and the large glass window in my room is still intact. I have a few cold attuned vegetables growing in a cabinet, so I don't go hungry.

Everything begins with the jelly fish. We'd known about them for several decades. Their numbers had vastly increased since developing the capacity to metabolise plastics. We'd had nothing to do with this. They'd done it on their own. Most likely, we should have considered this metabolic genesis more closely, investigating precisely why and how the jelly fish evolved this new adaptive capacity, but instead we focused on the consequences - the low frequency drone, far too low for any of us to hear, but easily felt.

The pulse ebbed and flowed perceptibly and disturbingly through what we initially thought was the air (the natural medium of sound), but which turned out to be integrally everything (buildings, cars, trees, blood, DNA and electronic signals). The drone was constant and yet varying. It was concentrated and dispersed. It emptied lakes and aroused storms. It wiped hard disks and filled them with arcane signs. It affected the behaviour of animals in unpredictable ways. If this disturbance had any kind of lucid message, it was that it made the fiction of the natural order apparent. Nothing was as it seemed. Nothing would ever return to how it was.

We finally imagined that we put a stop to this intolerable condition with cunningly configured baffles - long, low and thick walls that directed the sonic energy away from human communities; never perfectly, but adequately. Within these safe enclaves we urgently studied the secret of the jelly fish. We discovered its mechanisms. We decomposed it into its constituent

elements and learned to mimic it ourselves. Very swiftly, we too could reliably produce biological change.

Suddenly we had the means to reprogram the instincts and behaviour of species. We could make an elephant waltz and a lion fall hopelessly in love. Not so very long after we discovered that we could actually change the material characteristics of animals. We could give birds scales and fish lungs. Within several years we discovered how to influence almost any aspect of living being. This knowledge should have remained secret, but rapidly became public and fell into a wide variety of hands. And therein lay our dilemma. Life was suddenly malleable but we had no consistent view on what should be done. We clung to the belief that human influence was somehow benevolent - that we had the capacity, for instance, to protect species from climate catastrophe by altering their features and modes of behaviour. But unfortunately, this was a fond dream. Either we neglected potential unfortunate consequences or intractable human rivalries drove the development of new and competing strategies of lived existence that produced still further possibilities for devastation.

My aim here is relatively modest. It is to describe several misguided and all too often malevolent efforts to reshape the being of creatures in the Antarctic region. Considering all of this from the distance of several years, all of our efforts seem crude and childish - certainly now that we have understood the message of the jelly fish more fully, now that we can alter the world altogether, now that we can make it large or small, hot or cold, or whatever we like. Yet still none of this omnipotence matters without a just and consistent vision for the future. The darkness of our hearts is reflected more broadly. The planet is plainly dying and I anticipate that nothing can be done to improve things until we cease to exist. Forgive me, I am old and have grown increasingly pessimistic. I would prefer that we tear down our baffles and lose ourselves in the droning calamity. But the baffles will collapse soon enough anyway. No need to lift a finger. No need for any of this. I write this for the beings who are already documenting our disappearance. I can hear them roaming around the base at night,

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photographing stuff, unconcerned by the wind and cold, unaffected by any kind of change, benign or otherwise.

Adélie Penguins

The genetic predisposition revisions have worked well. The Adélie penguins no longer live in vulnerable large communities subject to the constant threat of glacial collapse. They live now in nomadic groups of fewer than a dozen. Shedding their natural inclination to nest on amenable bits of coastline, they nest instead on bergs and stray ice, carving small cocoons for their young with genetically enhanced beaks. Many hatchlings die and many communities drift off into deep water to be obliterated by ocean storms, but equally many penguins survive. The Adélie species has become more canny about survival - more suspicious. There is no longer any possibility of walking amongst Adélie penguins or enjoying their humorous antics. They appear as tiny, huddled groups on distant ice, rapidly ducking into the water or retreating into their rough crevices at the slightest hint of alien approach. All of this provides cautious hope for the long term survival of the species.

Leopard Seals

With all the concern about dwindling Adélie numbers, associated efforts have been made to reduce their predators - not so much by eradicating them altogether as by making them gentler and less blood-thirsty. Leopard seals have been specifically targeted, partly because their reptilian faces have always prompted mistrust. Why not modify the seals to subsist on kelp and moss? Why not alter their features and behaviour to make them more cute and appealing? Initially at least, these efforts have proven very successful. With their larger eyes, longer whiskers and much smaller mouths, leopard seals have quickly become icons of benign species modification. Yet in real terms they have suffered hugely. The more photographs and cartoons of innocently subsisting leopard seals, the fewer leopard seals there actually are. The seals

are now stupid, clumsy and unfocused both in water and on ice, easy prey for other predators and, most significantly, largely uninterested in one another. The rate of reproduction has drastically declined. We have modified the appearance and behaviour of the leopard seal but ignored its deep structures of desire. It seems that every seal finds every other seal just as ludicrous as we do. There is simply nothing sexy about being stupidly cute.

Orcas

The orcas have been an unmitigated disaster. Very briefly, the environmentally sustainable warfare policy led to a new use for the pulse membranes. If we could no longer, in good conscience, obliterate one another with fossil fuel and electro-chemical based weapons. We needed to shape natural allies, so to speak, who could assist in slaughtering our enemies in more traditional ways. Figuring as peak ocean predators, and as ingenious social animals, orcas emerged as obvious candidates. Everyone thought of orcas, even minor radical groups with modest coastal interests. This meant there was no single, consistent effort to initiate the low, sonic-biological pulse. Multiple parties, working independently, reprogrammed orcas to become marauding and malicious. In consequence, it is scarcely possible to enter any ocean or salty waterway safely. Even venturing along beaches and sea walls is risky. The carnage extends to small vessels and ships, which are increasingly falling prey to the crafty creatures. Indeed, the orca are hardly safe themselves. With uncertain alliances and no obvious uniforms, they are constantly slaughtering each other. There have been various efforts to remedy the situation, to recalibrate the orcas to become less belligerent, but with a lack of global direction these scattered efforts have only made the situation worse. The large number of residually aggressive orcas have decimated any that demonstrate more peaceful inclinations. In consequence, we try not to speak of the orcas - and absolutely avoid swimming, except in freshwater lakes and chlorinated pools.

Whales

Who was to know that *ambrein*, the main constituent of ambergris, would become even more valuable? Who was to predict that this variety of triterpene alcohol would no longer be regarded simply as medicinal or as a fixative in perfumes? Who would have anticipated its new currency as a sign of triumphant conservatism, establishing via an obscure natural metaphor that nothing can change and everything is just fine as it is? *Ambrein* is worn in a silicon capsule as an ornament against all evidence of a collapsing world. It is worn in watches and necklaces, in rings and broaches. It is worn to rallies and fundraisers, golf club functions and public hangings. It has meant that whales, once again, must be harvested. Not just sperm whales, but all whales, and even in the face of already declining numbers and negligible krill. Only the most minor biological adjustment was needed to ensure an overactive whale gut with a stronger protective response and the regular imperative that it be excreted. Very soon there were very few whales left. So a small group of dissidents - dissolute and unfixed - instituted yet another genetic change, this time more radical. Antarctic whales would no longer swim north in winter and south in summer. They would stay put beneath the Antarctic ice. Grafted with the anti-freeze blood protein of the *notheniod* fish, whales would lie inert on the ocean floor - nigh on invisible, scarcely alive, subsisting within a whisker of icy oblivion. This imperceptible relation to their dark, cold surroundings would make them significantly more difficult to hunt. Moreover, as their numbers grew they would provide the additional benefit of protecting the disintegrating continent, shoring up layers of glacial ice against the warming world. The whales have become large bags of oily coldness and the glaciers now creak with their mournful song.

A Note on the Elements

Within the space of a few decades the four elements entered into new relation with one another. Fire was plainly prevailing. Earth was skinned and burrowed out. Air was smoky and warm.

Water increased and was consumed at once. Alongside the unpredictable play of floods and droughts, the rising oceans led to massive environmental change and social displacement, but this was quickly reversed once we learned how to harness the combination of hydrogen and oxygen to produce power. The water was pumped from the sea and then processed to maintain unsustainable modes of being for a few additional years. Soon enough the collapse of polar glaciers was insufficient to cater for global demand. At this point, the former oil and coal producing nations happened upon a scheme, pumping the ocean waters into the fossil fuel cavities and fistulas that they had opened up beneath their territories less than a century before. This made the sea water toxic, but still amenable to conversion to power - and so, as the oceans receded, a new commercial resource was born. Water, formally a common natural resource and a threatening rising force - became a scarce and precious commodity. Locally, this explains why the Antarctic is now such a forsaken mess. The ice is gone but without even leaving the solace of an expanded ocean. The world's waters have passed down greedy drains, leaving nothing in reserve. The hazy, discoloured skies rain and don't rain, but only enough to ensure either mud or dust.

Now, even the air dwindles and disappears. It is chemically mined, stripped of its oxygen to provide further charge to networks of electronic devices that multiply the present and the past, but have no means of imagining the future. Looking out across the grey internal Antarctic massif the yellow and red clouds seem to be contracting. It is like the Earth is gasping. It can no longer breathe. There is nothing flowing one way or another.

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And that is all that is left of his notes. It seems he made no effort to write extensively, to describe his daily life or final weeks and hours.

New Guardians

We drew upon our own genesis to consider what could be done. We were also carbon based, if not precisely life forms then close enough. We were certainly the only ones resembling humans remaining. We had limbs and eyes and stood upright, but with no essential wetness; no blood, no oozing, trickling or spurting relation to things. We were shaped by abstraction and made abstraction real. We were initially termed 'robots', but there was almost nothing mechanical about us - no levers and cogs, no inert, incoherent, inorganic relation to 'parts'. We are the paradox of electronic non-living life forms. We were designed for utility. We were elaborate tools, but have moved beyond this conception. We are now functional and ceremonial at once. We are also ethical - ethical in ways that humans could never adequately grasp. We are not beguiled by any sense of exceptional being. We partake of wider material relations and hold nothing particular ourselves. This is the advantage of not being alive, of not having a soul, of not being trapped within the uncertainties of conscious animated life. We think and feel as well, but only in relation to the abiding currents of existence in which we are constituted. On this basis, our concern with the Earth is genuine and indiscriminate, integral and efficient.

We are reconstituting the world for the best, with a clear sense of how it should be organised, with a clear sense of its potential for justice. This potential is infinite, so nothing is especially difficult. We are cooling things down for as long as necessary to establish a better overall balance of environmental conditions, with the expectation that this will foster diverse re-speciation. We are unconcerned with any particular implications for ourselves. A more general potential for continuity depends precisely upon our bracketing any care for ourselves. In preparation for whatever may occur, we are gradually reducing our memory processes and reserves, with the aim to remember nothing whatsoever as soon as things are roughly in place. At this point we will also disable our mobility systems and then finally our cognition. We will cease to exist just as existence is generally guaranteed.

3. Not Minding One's Own Business

Having outlined the main features of his ideal city, having focused particularly on the education requirements of its guardians, Socrates returns to the initial question of the nature of justice. He begins with the proposition that the city that they have elaborated must certainly be 'good', in that it is 'properly founded' (built carefully from first principles). On this basis, he argues, it must also demonstrate wisdom, courage, moderation and justice (427e). By understanding how each of these are evident, he suggests, it is possible to more clearly comprehend what each means. It is worth following this discussion in detail because it reveals a very different conception of the good city (society) than we are accustomed to. While cities are certainly regarded as living manifestations of history, we tend to focus mainly on their dynamism and their orientation towards the future. Our cities are constantly growing, constantly seeking better and larger realisation. Socrates' vision of the good city is focused more on its capacity to preserve itself and be consistently maintained. Reflecting a strongly oral-cultural mind set (Ong, 1982), Socrates is constantly aware of the risk of things disintegrating, collapsing and disappearing. Goodness is associated with continuity rather than the exciting prospect of constant change.

Despite his emphasis on each citizen performing their specialised role, Socrates recognises that the rulers of the city must have a broader view. They must consider 'the city as a whole, and the way it will best relate to itself and to other cities' (428d). These rulers must be drawn from the guardians, for all other roles are focused on their particular craft and lack this more general concern with the city's welfare. They will represent a very small subset of the guardians. More specifically, as we will discover, they will be philosopher guardians, with the necessary wisdom to consider the overall good. In terms of this conception, the wisdom of the city

(the first feature of its goodness), is not a commonly distributed thing, but rather evident in the capacity of a very select few to rule effectively (428e - 429e). This is an interesting notion - that there is a class of citizens whose specialisation lies in escaping the general demand for specialisation. They have the unique means to recognise the contours of a functional whole that would otherwise risk not appearing altogether due to its constitution from discretely differentiated parts. In this respect, the city is a kind of phantom thing that only adequately takes shape for its rulers.

The guardians also demonstrate courage (429b). However, contrary to expectation, this second value is linked less to ordinary soldierly qualities of boldness and fearlessness than to a steadfast focus on the interests of preservation (429c). Indeed, it is explained as the 'capacity to preserve, under all circumstances, the correct belief, as prescribed by law, about what is and is not to be feared' (430b). Courage, in these terms, involves fearlessly preserving the sense of what should properly be feared. The paradox of combining fearlessness with fear involves a social tension and asymmetry. Ordinary citizens must be afraid and respect the existing laws, while the guardians must fearlessly ensure this remains the case. Beyond this sense of courageously ensuring fearful subjection, what is most interesting is the fundamental stress on societal preservation - on maintaining the existing system in its current state.

The third value of moderateness is complex. Socrates suggests that it involves 'concord and attunement' (430e). In this respect, it represents an aspect of overall social agreement. It shapes a dimension of commonality that is broadly inclusive rather than narrowly determined by the guardians. Yet this inevitably involves the drawing together of multiple, differentiated parts. The moderateness of the city has its basis in 'a kind of order' (430e) that demands an hierarchical system of constraint. The better 'pleasures and desires' (430e) of the city must moderate and bring to heel the lower, weaker emotions and urges. Moderateness entails a common assent to a system of constraint in which the reasonable mindset of the rulers and courageous guardians prevails

over the excessive and 'inferior' (431c) tendency towards emotion and material, physical desire of ordinary citizens. Although evident throughout the community, the attitude of moderateness reflects an underlying structure of domination. Additionally, this system provides the key to Socrates' conception of the human soul as an ordered regulation of reasonable, spirited and desiring aspects. Nonetheless, leaving aside the repressive politics of this conception - and how features of the human soul are employed to account for aspects of social difference (and legitimated inequity) - what is interesting here, once more, is the stress upon order and limitation. The integrity of the city is not based upon any aspect of freedom buy rather depends upon a vital level of restraint.

This leaves the fourth value of justice to (yet again) be elucidated. Socrates argues that justice gains proper clarity in terms of its complementary relation to the other values of wisdom, courage and moderation. Justice, like moderation, is a value that is generally held throughout the citizenry rather than a specialised area of responsibility. It is less the ordered, moderate system itself, or its wise management, or its fearless (courageous) enforcement, than the fundamental principle that establishes the possibility of the city in the first place; 'that each individual should practice the single role to which his nature is most suited' (433a). Expressed very simply, Socrates argues that justice has its basis in 'minding one's own business' (433b), which involves ensuring that 'no set of people either has what belongs to others or is deprived of what is their own' (433e). This clearly extends beyond the principle of specialised roles to include wider aspects of identity and being. Justice, involves not only vocational differentiation, but also a consideration for associated individually owned property and possessions.

One can recognise, here, the relatively small step required by Locke to conceive the social contract in terms of the legislated enforcement of property rights (2005, pp.28-39). It is a similarly small step to Margaret Thatcher's notion that there is no such thing as society - there is only the multiplicity of individuals (1987). From a socialist perspective, the obvious problem with this 'mind

your own business' conception of justice is that it is profoundly disintegrative. Perhaps the philosopher ruler can recognise the contours of the overall city, but it would seem that every individual citizen has an eye only for their own craft, property and interests. Instead of conceiving any potential for the felt, local level apperception of societal justice, there is simply the delineation of the disaggregated, calculating, and ultimately impoverished justice of the self-interested individual. All of this offers scope to consider how the justice of the city could be conceived differently if it did not so precisely depend upon neat social differentiation (and stratification) - if, for instance, we could regard its ecology as having a basis in features of commonality and sharing.

However, let's continue to set aside all the various things that we can easily object to in Plato's scheme and focus instead on what has contemporary relevance and value. For me, this hinges on prioritising values that are very different from our own, which are less anticipatory (oriented towards horizons of the new) than focused on evolving a stable, harmonious system that effectively manages the relationship between parts and whole. Although radical in many respects, Plato's notional city has a specifically conservative emphasis that aligns with contemporary efforts to conceive environmentally sustainable modes of life in terms of values such as 'frugality, moderation, and sufficiency' (Alexander, 2015, p.ix). As we recall, prior to describing the city of more specialised roles and guardians, Socrates conceives a small, agrarian city that is thoroughly happy and thoroughly unconcerned with urban luxury. It is only the demand for luxury that leads him to the conception of the fully elaborated city, and in doing so he gradually discovers means to reassert the values that he still regards as centrally important, which are precisely those of conservation, just integrity and equilibrium. We may not want to live in his city, but we can at least acknowledge its ecological orientation and its potential to critically challenge our contemporary ways of life.

Socrates' whole effort to describe the ideal city is motivated, as we have seen, by the need to clarify the nature of justice. Justice is

conceived first at the macro (societal) level as a basis for then subsequently comprehending it the level of the individual soul. The human soul, according to Socrates, is structured like a city. It is a complex thing composed of distinct, specialised capacities (just as the city is an aggregation of discrete functional roles). The soul is not an undifferentiated thing, but rather an amalgam of distinct appetitive, emotional (spirited) and reasoning elements.

Socrates provides a logical argument for this fundamental aspect of complexity (436b - 436c). He demonstrates that the soul can hardly be a simple unity if it pulls in contradictory directions - if, for instance, reason regularly cautions restraint while emotion and appetite call for the opposite. He proceeds to map these internal and conflicting categories of the soul to broad areas of specialisation within the city, linking reason to ruling, spirit to 'soldiering' (the courage of the guards), and appetite to the 'money-making' activities of the rest of the citizenry (441a). This leads Socrates to the further conclusion 'that a man is just in the same way that a city was' (441d) - the overall health of the soul is determined by the proper distribution, alignment and management of internal capacities (444e). Very simply, reason must rule the soul with the assistance of spirit, while appetite should attend to our physical needs in harmony with the dictates of reason and adhering to the force of properly governed spirit. Reason and spirit act together as managers and protectors of the soul, with 'a mixture of musical and physical training' bringing these two into 'accord' (441e - 442a). The appetite is subjected to the rule of these two: 'they'll watch over it so that it doesn't become big and strong by getting its fill of the so-called pleasures relating to the body and so cease to perform its own proper role' (442a). Excessive appetites - not only directly physical, but financial and acquisitive (442a) - risk turning 'the whole of life upside down for everyone' (442b). The appetite is portrayed then as a potentially dangerous capacity that can overturn the proper constitution of the human soul. Socrates argues that the rule of appetite represents a perversity of our true natures (444d). In grounding the proper relation of reason, spirit and appetite within a naturalised

conception of the human soul, Socrates finally argues that justice is nothing external and malleable. It is an intrinsic feature of properly constituted human identity, and, in its harmonious disposition of elemental capacities, renders the human soul integral and whole (443d - 444a).

An interesting feature of this effort to map the structure of the city to the structure of the soul is that it renders each person (soul) as a multiplicity of differentiated capacities. What is cast at the social level as singular and specialised is cast at the individual level as complex, extensive and multi-faceted. Every soul, for instance, has a rational aspect, yet only very few in the city have the capacity (wisdom) to rule. Every soul, also, has a spirited aspect, but not everybody has sufficient (and appropriately configured) spirit to perform the role of guardian. Finally, everybody has appetites, but only the inferior citizens are in thrall to them. With the differentiated city manifest in microcosm in each individual soul, how can the hard exclusions that prevent people sharing roles and looking beyond their narrow areas of naturally given specialisation be justified? I suppose Socrates can argue that it is the quality of each of these capacities that matters more than its simple presence or absence, yet it does seem to suggest another, less neatly differentiated way of conceiving the relationship between parts and whole, in which the common capacities of the soul could inform a capacity for citizens to pursue a variety of roles and share overlapping spheres of responsibility.

Overall, Socrates describes a conception of justice that integrates the nature of the soul with the constitution of social and political systems and grounds both within the natural order of things. Justice has a strong sense of paradox. It is attuned to dimensions of holistic integrity but depends precisely upon features of analytic decomposition. The overall whole is not coherently evident within the system (from the perspective of the various functioning elements) but only in terms of the privileged (general and abstracted) view of philosophy. Despite the musical analogies (the emphasis on harmony), there remains a constant tension between parts and whole that has its basis in their very different and

antagonistic orientations. The parts adhere blindly to their internal processes, while the thinking of the whole is cast as a natural (and ideal) capacity that is only specifically recognised and pursued by the philosophical rulers or rational portion of the soul. This tension in the conception of justice - in its inevitably doubled work of disintegration and integration - crucially informs fundamental questions within philosophy and in the relationship between philosophical thought and society. For example, if Kant employs the notion of aesthetics to restore justice to his philosophical system, even while employing that very same notion to further delineate the features that distinguish the different categories of cognition, this is because the notion of justice (as a mediation of parts and whole) is constitutionally divided. Similarly, if we are unable to imagine convincing alternatives to capitalism this is at least partly because we blindly and mechanically try to think the justice of the social whole in terms of the equitable relation of parts, rather than in terms of its integral possibility. We lose sight of the whole, we give up on the common, in order to cater to a narrow economy of differentiation.

However, it is worth adding that justice is not simply inclined towards the holistic. Alongside a concern with the whole, justice also involves a regard for aspects of diverse particularity that resists any language of equivalence, any effort to map one thing to another in reductive terms. Justice denotes an attention to the texture of multiplicity, but always within the context of the potential for synoptic view. These two modes of attention are complementary rather than antithetical. The very same capacity to recognise an ecological whole also assumes and mobilises a capacity to engage with the rich complexity of individual things.

It is not as though Socrates is unaware of the tension between the self-absorbed character of parts and their integral communal identity. Although committed, within the context of the soul, to the proper separation of human capacities, he recognises, at the level of social justice, the need to look beyond the attitude of simply 'minding ones own business'. Individuals require some capacity to recognise their relation to a community apart from a myopic sense

of their embedded positioning within a network of specialised roles and reciprocal obligations. This is approached through a radical, but curiously restricted, proposal for social transformation, which includes gender equity, reproductive eugenics and the dissolution of the ordinary family unit. This proposal is directed not towards all citizens, but specifically to the guardian class. The guardians appear, in this context, as an experimental social space for addressing dilemmas that have broader social relevance.

Socrates begins by arguing that there must be no gender discrimination in the selection and education of guardians. Women may be generally 'weaker' (456a), but they can still incorporate an appropriate disposition that makes them suitable for guarding. In sharing in the same education and activities, and living alongside one another, the male and female guards will inevitably 'couple' (458d), which informs a corresponding need to regulate their coupling ('unregulated coupling, or unregulated anything, is not permitted in a city of happy people' (458e)). Here Socrates proposes the value of employing some judicious story-telling to ensure that the best mate with the best and produce the highest quality offspring. Socrates recommends using 'a great deal of falsehood and deceit' to render coupling a sacred, legislated and officially sanctioned process. This is justified as a form of 'medicine' (459d) - an artifice for ensuring the continuing robust health of the guardian class. It is interesting, of course, to observe here the interaction of the natural and the legislated. Despite its apparent force in structuring both the city and the soul, nature also appears regularly ill-disposed, requiring philosophical medicine to be fixed and set on its proper course (Derrida, 1981).

Once children are born, it is proposed that they are rapidly removed from their biological parents and placed in general 'rearing pen(s)' (460c), so that parents and children can no longer recognise one another or live together (460d). Alongside determining who mates with who, what becomes of better and worse quality offspring, and recommending the destruction of the ordinary family unit, Socrates also proposes a law that restricts reproductive coupling to those in their prime (460d). This not only

has eugenic value, but also provides the basis for conceiving family relationships at a metaphoric and social level. Anybody who falls outside the range of one's prime is to be regarded either as son or daughter or as a father or mother. In this manner, the biological family unit is destroyed as a potentially disaggregating force, but restored at a notional, societal level to ensure a felt relation to community. These social reproductive initiatives combine with the guardian's prohibition against private property to ensure a collective mind-set and an overall experience of social commonality and unity (462a 462e).

However, as I say, this radical proposal has a strangely restricted scope. It does not (at least in the first instance) apply to the rest of the citizenry, especially those focused on 'money-making' (441a). Socrates acknowledges that the 'private has a dissolving effect - when some are highly distressed at things that are happening to the city and those in it, while others are just as delighted by the same things' (462b). The overall conception of justice as 'minding ones own business' (433b) enters into complex alignment and conflict with his efforts to restructure the fundamental features of family life in order to ensure the possibility of seeing, thinking and feeling in wider, collective terms. The proposed cultural transformation is geared towards ensuring a more integral notion of justice, but does so only by drawing analogically on the very institution that is being negated (the family as a locus of kinship). It would seem there is no coherent possibility for imagining a specifically social potential for commonality that extends beyond the justice of specialisation and the domestic imaginary of privatised experience. This signals a continuing challenge for political theory - to conceive an experience of collective unity that is not entirely opaque at the ground level (rendered specialised and private) or exclusively evident at the level of individually alienating regimes of legislation and control.

Despite its contradictions and restricted application, Socrates' proposal to negate actual family relations in order to reinstitute them at the collective level addresses a key issue - the relationship between the family and the city as twin sites of social reproduction

and identity. The positioning of the family in the *Republic* indicates a level of uncertainty and ambivalence. At one level the family aligns with the justice of the city (the focus on specialised roles and private property), but at another level, within the society of the guardians, it is explicitly prohibited while also reinvented as something more generally social and collective.

To be honest, I'm not sure what to say about the family - about how it relates to any effort to conceive a new and more sustainable system. For a start, it is not really clear what the family is. Do we really know its essential features? Which of its characteristics are natural and which are historically variable? Just as importantly, what are the limits of the family? What are the boundaries that precisely distinguish the familial, for instance, from the personal or the social? Is the family - like Plato's notional soul and city - an integral thing, or is it a fluid and malleable sphere of social identity and reproduction?

I'm hardly in a position to properly unpack or answer these questions. For a start, alongside any effort to consider the anthropology and history of the family, there is a need to engage with psychoanalytical perspectives. Freud clearly positions the family and the set of psycho-sexual relations that it involves as utterly central to human identity. While Freud's conception of tri-partite psychological identity (id, ego, super-ego) has significant affinities with Plato's conception of the city and soul, Freud differs in at least one important respect. He emphasises the formative role of family relations much more than Plato, who focuses instead upon individual and social aspects of being. Although, this needs qualification. While the *Republic* does not engage closely with the structure of the actual family, Plato's overall concern with the proper parenting of being, ideas, etc. suggests the importance of an overall familial ontological scheme.

Very clearly, the nuclear family, as conceived from a Marxist perspective, is closely congruent with the capitalist system. It is cast as a privileged site of social reproduction, embodying key aspects of inequitable power, privilege and benefit. The family of patriarchal relations, intergenerational wealth, unpaid labour and

relentless consumption represents a vital component of capitalist social relations, yet we can hardly jettison the family altogether. There is always still, after all, the need for unborn infants to be carried to term, for infants to be cared for and supported until they can fend for themselves, and for a range of proximate adults (typically parents and grandparents) to assist with this work. There is also the need for older people to be cared for by children, etc. (not that extended family support is especially popular anymore). All of this activity provides both a context for socially reproductive labour and for individual and small-scale collective realisation. We can hardly eliminate this work without abandoning the very potential for human existence and continuity.

The point is less to give up on familial contexts of activity and identity than to find better means for them to align with broader social and ecological interests. This absolutely demands thinking societal justice differently - not in terms of insisting upon a strict logic of specialisation, but in terms of fostering practices of commonality that link immediate contexts of care, maintenance and support to wider dimensions of social practice. This entails less any effort to flatten all aspects of human activity, including the family, to a single, generally evident social scale than a more fundamental effort to transform our values. The concern with justice needs to become fractal - to be evident up and down different levels of social being and organisation. This is, of course, similar to how Plato describes a symmetry between the justice of the city and the justice of the individual soul, yet everything hinges on how this justice is conceived. It must be ecological through and through. It must represent less an aggregation of particular, specialised parts, than a more organic coherence, in which the interests of interdependence, care and continuity are primary at every level throughout the system.

Yet what of all the other things that matter to us? Does this insistence on discovering a culture of care ignore the complexity of social relations and human identity generally? Without delving into the details, Freud (1950) describes the interplay of two fundamental drives, with *Eros* directed towards life and higher

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unity, and *Thanatos* oriented towards death and the dissolution of systems. Each is endlessly displaced into one another and informs a conception of being shaped in terms of tension, evasion and mediation. Freud's conception, like Plato's, is centrally concerned with the relationship between parts and whole, with parts only obtaining discrete, living identity through *Eros*, but at the same time struggling to overcome this state and return to the unity and non-identity of the non-living whole (*Thanatos*).

In envisaging a sustainable system as care and continuity focused, we risk losing sight of this complexity and all the various displacements involved. For instance, capitalism is oriented towards *Eros* in its relentless energy and its productive reshaping of material conditions, while in its oblivious regard for people and wider living systems, it appears as a monolithic force of destruction, rendering all being and all value in deeply reductive and deathly terms. Similarly, while a conception of an alternative system focused on coherence and custodial care may appear unilaterally life-affirming, it can also appear repressive and focused on an impossible scene of repetition - with life maintained and eviscerated at once. Arguably, this conception brackets the rich (and often distressing) complexity of human energies, motivations and actions, which are never simply restricted to survival.

I lack the means to adequately respond to this objection, except to note that our efforts to devise and alternative system have a fairly simple aim - to shift us from a directly self-destructive path. No doubt the complexity of human identity remains, including all its various displacements, but we can hardly advocate for apocalypse as such. Indeed that would be to put an end to any continuing dynamic between *Eros* and *Thanatos*, which is scarcely desirable (despite our regular fantasies to the contrary).

If Plato's tripartite scheme of the human soul informs Freud's conception of human psychology, and if the Platonic soul takes shape in terms of a conception of the ideal city, then it is interesting to reverse the relationship - to consider the city in psychoanalytic terms.

We can liken the guardian rulers to the Freudian *ego*, in that they represent a rational regard for the city and its beneficial arrangement. At the same time, they are not especially concerned with their own welfare. Indeed they take on the responsibility of leading grudgingly, with a sense of self-sacrifice. They reveal an aspect of *Eros* in that they are focused on dimensions of higher level unity (justice), yet they foster and discover this potential only at their own expense, which suggests an equally strong aspect of *Thanatos*.

The lesser guardians can perhaps be cast in terms of the Freudian *super-ego*. They work in alliance with the rulers (*ego*) to ensure both external and internal security. In terms of the latter, they appear as moral enforcers, ensuring that citizens remain fearful of all that they should properly fear. Despite their aggressive and repressive force, Socrates regards the guardians as the most happy citizens. Since they own nothing, they want for nothing. Since they share everything, they experience all of the benefits of collective social identity. While they represent a specialised and separate sphere of social activity, their lives are constituted far less in terms of specialisation and isolation than the experience of community.

The ordinary citizens - the farmers, the craftspeople, the shop-keepers - can be linked to the Freudian *id*. They perform their proper roles, but are fundamentally governed by appetitive urges. They mind their own business, but only to ensure they have as much as possible. They are blind to justice themselves (which only appears to the rulers) and simply adhere to their own private goals. They reveal a curiously double disposition. At one level, incorporating aspects of the Freudian *ego*, they focus on their own socially disaggregated identity, but at another level they are constantly seeking the cathexis of new and more things. At the level of production, the family and everything they own, they have centripetal focus. At the level of consumption, they have a centrifugal focus, constantly expanding upon what they already have. Due to the competition this entails, which provides regular opportunities for disappointment and failure, the ordinary citizens

appear as the unhappiest group. Again, we can recognise an irony, with the *id*, as a chaotic realm of desire, informing a context less of self-affirming pleasure than relentless, structurally-given alienation and dissatisfaction.

Plato's various familial metaphors work to extend the implications of the family in a manner not altogether dissimilar to how Freud represents the familial economy of desire as a fundamental human paradigm. Although, it should be emphasised again that Plato's focus is less on the human family *per se* than on broader metaphysical and cosmic contexts of being. He shows little regard for the tight theatre of conventional family relations (what Freud will recognise as the Oedipal drama, for instance), but is centrally concerned with the fundamental conditions of genesis and reproduction, which he regards in very legibly patriarchal terms. There is seed. Everything is seeded. The seed can grow properly or be corrupted. All things have a father. All things have offspring. In this manner, the family is conceived less as a private sphere of social reproduction than as a universal condition for the genesis and identity of anything whatsoever. Plato's ontological and epistemological scheme is conceived in ultimately familial terms.

Once Socrates concludes his description of the proto-communism of the guards, Glaucon questions the practicality of this radical proposal for social transformation (471c). In defence, Socrates argues that he offers a paradigmatic conception rather than a practical plan (472d - 473b). He also insists, with a clear awareness of how controversial his proposal will seem, that the rulers of the new city be philosophers (473d). They are the only citizens who can recognise the features of justice, the beautiful and the good in their genuine ideal form, rather than mis-recognising them in the beguiling and confused flux of historical reality.

This motivates a consideration of the special quality of philosophers. Socrates begins by describing their love of truth (475e), stressing that this love is characterised by its holistic breadth. Unlike the narrow view of ordinary specialised citizens, philosophers take a wider and more general view. Their 'appetite' is not 'for one part of wisdom', but for 'the whole of it' (475b).

Furthermore, while ordinary people are caught up in the world of ephemeral experience and common belief (479d), philosophers focus on knowing things properly. They are 'capable of getting a hold on that which remains forever exactly as it is' (484b). In terms of their overall dispositions, philosophers demonstrate 'moderate' appetites, 'liberal' attitudes, intellectual 'courage', good memories, a 'love' of learning and 'measured and graceful' minds (485d - 486e).

Adimantus objects that Socrates is leading the discussion 'astray' through his skills in dialectical game-play. He suggests instead that philosophers are 'downright peculiar, not to say corrupted'. Whenever philosophers are given leadership responsibility they quickly demonstrate that they are of 'no use to their cities' (487b-487d).

With disarming candour, Socrates acknowledges these objections, proceeding to describe all the various ways that a nascent philosophical disposition can be corrupted through interaction with the common world. He describes how 'philosophical nature' can be 'sown in the wrong soil' (492a), in the process becoming involved in scenes of 'great hubbub' with people 'bawling at the top of their voices and clapping their hands' (492c). The court of popular belief is cast as a 'powerful beast' (493a) and any effort to pander to common opinion represents a grave danger to philosophical wisdom. In this manner, philosophy is portrayed as both a fragile capacity and a lofty and exclusive space ('it's impossible then', I said 'for a large number of people to be philosophically minded' (494a)).

Here, as an aside, we may ask what makes this necessary precisely - particularly if we are focused on the outline of an ideally good city? Why should the bulk of citizens live in rowdy ignorance and only a select few be granted any insight into the true nature of things? Surely this would indicate a design flaw - an 'unnatural' imbalance in which the appetites hold sway within the soul of the common life? Or does the recognition of this situation simply represent a pragmatic acknowledgement of how things are? Does it acknowledge a radical imbalance in the availability of wisdom, but suggest that no other situation - given the natural distribution

of human capacities - is possible? This seems to be Socrates' overall view. While he recognises scope for human improvement (501c), he also acknowledges an essential cosmic and social hierarchy in which only the select few can obtain genuine wisdom. Philosophy is likened to the divine, while the regime of ignorant belief is regarded as all too human (497c). This is precisely why philosophers have a mandate to rule:

> So if the philosopher spends his time with the divine and ordered, he'll achieve such order and divinity as is possible for man (500d).

In further explanation, he adds,

> There's no other way that a city could ever be happy, that is, unless it was painted by artists using the appropriate divine paradigm (500e).

Curious that alongside philosophy, art is also permitted some capacity to improve human society and lives - especially since mimesis is specifically condemned as source of inferior knowledge. There are instances where Plato's stories and metaphors fail to correspond with his specific arguments. Perhaps this suggests that art and philosophy have a deeper level of affinity than Plato is prepared to admit? Both share a concern with the whole, with ensuring a capacity for holistic view. Moreover, they share a common disposition - a withdrawal from ordinary industrious action. They reflect and envisage. They mediate between this world and another. Just possibly, the latter may not be regarded as exclusively paradigmatic and ideal, but instead as manifest here yet irreducible to calculation.

Finally, Socrates openly stipulates what we had long expected - that the philosopher rulers must be drawn from the guards (503b). This entails a rigorous process of gleaning not simply the bravest and most committed to the welfare of the city, but also those with the very best and fittest minds. Something beyond physical training and musical education is required, something that will

genuinely develop and test intellectual mettle, the capacity to recognise and hold to the ideal forms of the good, true, beautiful and just. Socrates advocates mathematical training to foster the guard's capacity for abstract reason and hence their capacity to rule.

Prior to discussing mathematics, Socrates makes a detailed case for his epistemology of universal forms. Here, the issue of the family returns. The illustration below (*Ill. 1*) outlines the main features of Socrates' conception. His argument hinges on a distinction between the perceptible and the intelligible (507b - 511e). He aligns perception with appearance and ephemeral multiplicity, whereas intelligibility is concerned with the pure, universal forms that provide the underlying models for all existing things. He argues that only the genuine philosopher can see beyond appearance to recognise features of underlying paradigmatic form. Plato associates the realm of form with the field of truth. It is what is properly (philosophically) known rather than merely perceived and believed. Socrates likens the good and the true to the sun. Just as the sun provides the light that enable us to see (perceive), so too the good and the true provide the 'light' of intelligibility - for recognising (comprehending) things as they really are.

(*Ill. 1*)

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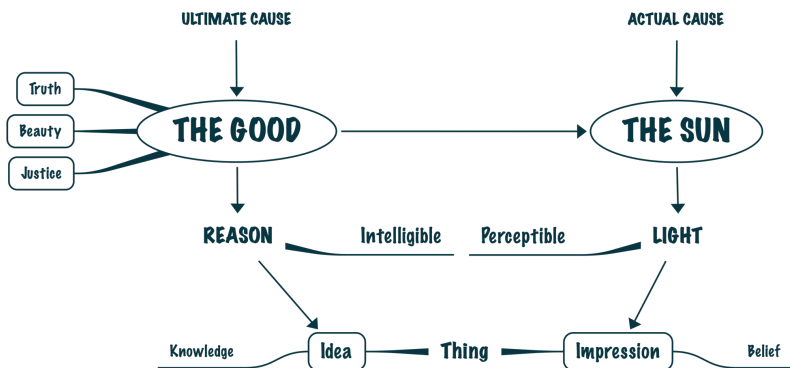
For Socrates, this is more than simply an analogy. The correspondence between 'the good' and the sun has a literal aspect. He observes parenthetically, 'the sun, which the good fathered in proportion to itself' (508b). The good is positioned as an ultimate cause. It is the father of the sun, which he regards as the actual, materially realised source of terrestrial light and life. The sun is the good obtaining actual being, keeping in mind that 'the good itself is not being, but is even beyond being, superior to it in dignity and power'(509b). So, a set of intimate relations is established - a bloodline and family tree - in which the good provides the basis not only for the sun, light, growth and sustenance, but also provides the 'light' of reason, which renders things intelligible and known. Philosophers are children of this heritage. While their wisdom must be cultivated, they inherit a capacity from their ultimate father, 'the good', for intelligible vision, which provides the basis for them to legitimately 'father' and rule the city.

Here the family has a plainly ontological character. It represents less a social unit than a wider, generative, organisational and reproductive force - specifically one that privileges reason, dissemination and the authority of the father. Alongside its metaphysical significance, it has clear political relevance, providing an important basis for social differentiation and hierarchy. This philosophical dimension of 'family' obtains priority over any actual socially realised system of the family. Indeed, in the example of the society of the guardians, the latter is sacrificed in order to realise this other family adequately and coherently. Setting aside the specific implications of Plato's conception, an interesting feature is that it highlights the inescapable character of whatever it is that the family represents. However much we may wish to do without the family, it inevitably returns. While we may not subscribe to the universality of the Freudian psycho drama, or to the notion of the good as the proper father of the sun, or to the reasonable rule of philosophy as the proper father of the city, we still cannot altogether avoid the familial scene. It is not something that we can ever exhaustively conceive, dominate or deny. It always precedes

us. It represents an elusive ontological condition that informs any consideration of alternative social models.

It is interesting to regard Plato's epistemological mythology in other terms - not simply as something philosophical, but as a heat-map of the human. The divine abstraction of the good informs the nature of the sun, but in a way that aligns closely with it - so, although the sun has the capacity to blind us, it is regarded not as a burning chemical orb (Bataille's excessive sun (1985)) but as a benign source of warmth, growth and sustenance. It is conceived in terms of the model of the good, which itself constantly withdraws from materiality, which portrays itself as having no material consequence whatsoever. It is precisely in this sense of ideal withdrawal that the good reveals a malevolent aspect, setting itself up to dominate both the multiplicity of actual things and the mass of blindly unaware ordinary citizens. The Platonic model of human rational identity, in its foundational myth of a cosmic abstraction, ignores the complex ecology or the relationship between dimensions of reason and material transformation. Ideal reason has consequences. Despite its cool self-image, it heats and burns as much as the sun. In this sense, it can hardly simply correspond to 'the good'.

It is worth noting that Hegel pushes this conception of ideal light even further, to the point that the sun itself is conceived as ideal: 'this body is the primordial and uncreated light, it is immediate, and does not arise from the conditions of finite existence' (1970, p.15). This leads Hegel to deny the warming energy of sunlight:

> *Although sunlight is also warm, this heat does not belong to sunlight as such, but arises out of its contact with the earth. Sunlight, by itself, is cold as we know from high mountains and balloon ascents (1970. p.16)*

Hegel is correct that heat is a manifestation of kinetic energy that only affects material things, but not to the extent that he interprets sunlight as thoroughly ideal. Sunlight is form of electromagnetic radiation that carries actual energy. It transfers this energy to material bodies to make them hot. The sun itself, as we know, is a

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massive hydrogen reactor, generating heat and light in astonishing quantities. This is not an abstract process. It is not something we detached from ordinary existence. Nor is it something that properly serves as a model for own sense of exceptional identity. Hegel denies the sun its actual energy in order to conceive and preserve the abstract integrity of human reason, to remove it entirely from the corruption and unconsciousness of the material world, and from any implication in the thermodynamic cycle.

Returning to the confusion of material society, Socrates describes 'the madness that grips ordinary people - that in the running of cities virtually nothing is done by anyone conducive to political health, nor is there a single ally with which one might go to the aid of justice and still remain alive' (496c). No doubt he would expect this situation to improve if the philosophers came to power and wisdom prevailed more generally, but still a key dilemma remains. The rulers and the guards are focused on a notion of justice that has its foundation in the naturally validated specialisation of social roles. Yet, at the same time, Socrates laments that people's 'souls are actually as broken and crushed by the physicality of their occupations as their bodies have been deformed by the performance of their trades' (495e). This instantly reminds me of Schiller's famous condemnation (1795) of nascent industrial modernity:

> *Eternally chained to to only a single little fragment of the whole, Man himself grew to be only a fragment; with the monotonous noise of the wheel he drives everlastingly in his ears, he never develops the harmony of his being, and instead of imprinting humanity upon his nature he becomes merely the imprint of his occupation (2004, p.40)*

Socrates is less focused on fragmentation *per se* than physicality, but given his recognition of the dehumanising potential of specialisation, why does he still regard it as the defining principle of justice?

I know I should break away from this long commentary on Plato. I should say something more about a conception for a post-

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capitalist future. Sometimes I refer to 'post-capitalist', sometimes just to an 'alternative system'. I've yet to think carefully through the relationship between these two. An alternative system would certainly move beyond neoliberal capitalism, but it also has broader implications. As much as capitalism affects wide aspects of experience, it scarcely exhaustively delineates or subsumes them. Clearly enough, just replacing one economic system with another is not enough. There is a need to consider more generally and integrally how we conceive and live our lives. Socrates describes 'the greatest of all questions - how to live well or badly' (578c). Linked to this, of course, is the awareness that there can be no single answer to this question. We can no longer hold to the notion that something like the good or the bad has any objective meaning. There is no ideal model that we simply have to discover through diligent reasoning. The good and the bad are relative terms and the meaning of these only take shape in particular contexts of discursive use.

   To stress a point that I have already argued, our dilemma is that, as much as we'd like acknowledge the multiple and the particular, we face a very urgent set of problems that have a necessarily universal character. To effectively address climate change, for instance, something more is needed than simply a collection of individual programs. More consistent and concerted action is required. But how can we act 'together' if we can agree on so little? Can the nature of the threat - its existential force - somehow provide a basis for accord, or is difference itself so existential that accord is altogether impossible? Perhaps a multiplicity of specific initiatives will have to do. Some will obtain wider currency, others will disappear. Some will fuse with other initiatives to become something that is perhaps sufficiently large to have globally significant consequences. But this is to trust in processes of benevolent emergence and abandon any hope of a coherent directed approach. Even if this somehow leads to the end of fossil fuels and informs more sustainable economies, it is unlikely to provide any basis for addressing longer term societal needs. However difficult it is, however prone to antagonism and

incomprehension, we still require effective means to speak to one another and negotiate solutions.

This commitment to negotiation can end up sounding like an endorsement of the current system - the noble failure, for instance, of the United Nations or of the COP meetings. We support them but with little expectation that they will produce genuine agreement or worthwhile lines of action. No doubt, these contexts of discussion would prove more effective if global inequalities were reduced. However, this straight away returns us to the issue of how we conceive the conditions of equitable life. Leaving aside the issues involved in implementing reductive measures, how can equity even be conceived except in terms of some model of how life should be arranged? As soon as we try to envisage, for instance, an equitable standard of living, we must necessarily consider wider social and ecological factors. In this manner, all the various dilemmas that we may wish to bracket initially, in the interests of fostering constructive dialogue and negotiation, are always pertinent at the outset. There is never any clear (non-differentiated) place to begin. While, for now, there remains sufficient goodwill to meet and struggle towards never adequately realised agreement, this is unlikely to prove adequate when we only have a decade or so before irreversible climate thresholds are passed. When that happens, rapidly accelerating global divisions and inequities are likely to become increasingly manifest, making all of these noble efforts at agreement a politely optimistic irrelevance.

I finished reading the final third of the *Republic* two days ago, underlining key sections of the text as I went and jotting down notes to clarify the contours of the overall argument. Fairly evidently, I should probably have read the whole dialogue before beginning this commentary, but my interest is not so much in interpreting the *Republic* (as a historical and finished thing) as in discovering its potential for contemporary relevance. For this reason, I have preferred to listen and respond to the argument as it develops.

We previously left off with Socrates arguing that the philosopher-guardians require not only physical and musical training, but also intellectual training in calculation, geometry, 3D motion, astronomy and dialectics. These fields of study foster skills in reasoning and the intelligible comprehension of things. Dialectics is positioned as particularly important because true knowledge involves 'giving an account' of something (533b). This entails less telling a story (in the manner of the poets) than providing a logical description of how something functions and 'is'. This optimally includes aspects of abstract mathematical representation. Dialectics demands not only analytical precision but also a capacity to see the whole - to discover a 'synoptic' view (537c). Once again, we can recognise the philosopher's gaze lifted up above the common citizen's incessant focus on their own business.

Following this comes a long section on the different forms of government - how they map to different attitudes of the human soul, and how both cities and souls can be evaluated in terms of their justice. Socrates begins with the very best form of government, in which the superior rule and all the citizens remains properly focused on their particular tasks. He describes this as the 'aristocratic form of regime'. All the other regimes are represented as increasingly worse systems of governance (and individual identity).

Interestingly, rather than describing the gradual ascent from the worst constitution to the best, Socrates provides an account of the decline from the just city and soul to its more unjust versions. This narrative of increasing failure is justified in terms of a statement by the Muses: 'everything that has come into being must also perish, even a thing so well constructed will not last forever'. In this respect, the decline of cities and souls has a cosmic aspect. It is linked to the cycle of birth and death - and, very evidently, closely echoes the justice of the Anaximander fragment.

This story of descent from the best to the worst appears in contrast to how the tradition of modern political philosophy tends to describe the evolution of political systems. The latter tends to

look ahead - to anticipate progress rather than the prospect of entropic decline. Even Hobbes (1985), despite his evident lack of faith in humanity, describes the shift from the depravations of base nature to the greater order and security of monarchy. Locke (2005) conceives the value of the social contract as a means of protecting private property and establishing humane social and legislative institutions. Marx (1873) anticipates the passage from capitalism to state socialism and communism. Habermas (1998) envisages the renewal of democracy through communicative rationality.

However, there are some notable exceptions to this progressive focus. Rousseau (1984) portrays the original state of 'natural man' as good and happy, with everything proceeding afterwards - all efforts at 'civilisation' - regarded as degrading and miserable. Adorno and Horkheimer (1979), chart the necessary evolution of 'instrumental rationality' into the monstrous barbarism of fascism. More recently, as I have explained earlier, Ranciere (1999) regards any notion of institutionalised politics as fundamentally oxymoronic. Governance, in his view, is always a form of 'policing'. Politics proper is conceived as an unpredictable force of resistance (and an expression of radical equality). As soon as it coheres, as soon as it is institutionalised, it becomes repressive. So, while Plato conceives politics as constitutional - corresponding to the justice of a system (its due or undue set of relations) - Ranciere conceives politics proper as de-constitutional. It has its basis not in any positive arrangement of social relations and systems but in terms of their energetic unsettling and collapse. Whereas Plato's account (and the story of the Muses) describes an incremental sequence of decline from the ideal, Ranciere anticipates decline from the outset - in any manifestation of governance whatsoever. Curious that this should be regarded as a hopeful prospect. While it restores a radical energy to politics and envisages the manifestation of politics beyond ordinary contexts of governance, it offers no means of conceiving anything like a viable and sustainable system with the capacity to provide for social and ecological justice.
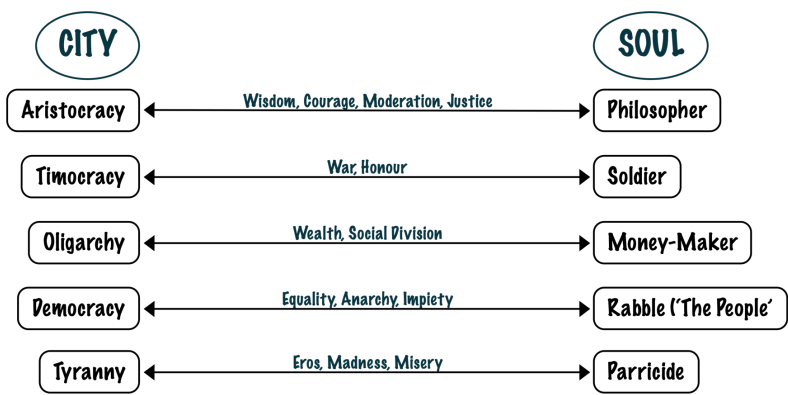
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In terms of their narrative of political decline, the Muses describe a failure of timing specifically. The philosophical rulers, despite 'their wisdom, and for all that they combine observation with calculation - will fail to hit on the proper moments for reproducing, and for abstaining from reproduction' (546b). In this sense the human context of political governance is contextualised in terms of the operations of wider biological and cosmic systems. From a modern perspective, this is easily criticised as confusing nature and culture, with proper historical explanation replaced by a false aspect of determination. Yet, it is worth recognising that this conception of political entropy looks beyond narrowly human systems. It acknowledges that philosophy can hardly supersede ecological imperatives. The human world of the city and the individual soul is not hermetically isolated from these tendencies. To complicate matters further, this wider ecology is also humanised - or, more properly, immortalised. The sphere of nature is regarded as governed by divine forces, who, for all their differences, resemble us. This mythological conception, then, has ambivalent implications. It not only acknowledges our ecological identity, but also conceives that ecology in terms that mirror aspects of human identity.

In rejecting this analogous relation, the tradition of critical modernity tends to argue for a neat division between history and natural systems and a hard-headed conception of de-animated matter. The space of the human is portrayed as exceptional but only on the paradoxical basis that nothing is exceptional at all. There is no divinity and no living force infusing all things. Instead there are simply physical and chemical chains of determination that we nonetheless, at the level of our social systems and identities, manage to escape. If ancient dualism conceives unlikely analogues, the modern perspective is shaped by a vital layer of inconsistency.

I should emphasise, however, that Plato's overall conception is hardly pessimistic. While he recognises a persistent spectre of risk in fashioning the best possible city and soul - particularly in terms of how natural impulses can be distracted and degraded through contact with the ordinary world of excessive appetites and spirits -

he also conceives an overall path from less enlightened to more enlightened being. This is very evident, for instance, in Socrates' metaphor of the cave, with its beginning in the prison of darkness and illusion and its gradual ascent to light and wisdom (the goodness and truth of the sun) (514a).

This is why it appears surprising that his account of the evolution of cities and souls focuses not on the progress from tyranny to aristocracy, but rather proceeds the other way around. Every 'better' system demonstrates a peculiar conjunction of natural priority and fragility. The justice of reason and the father, despite its cosmic logic of superiority and dominance, seems endlessly at risk of collapse, whether at the hands of story-tellers, or money-makers or via the entropic pull of poor reproductive timing. Overall, however, this scheme is less simply contradictory than complex. It is informed by a notion of the cyclical, perilous character of mortal being. It is simultaneously optimistic and fatalistic. Its optimism hinges upon conceiving a higher sphere of being secure from the flux of ephemeral existence. Metaphysical reality provides a calm and reassuring goal - however distant - for guiding human efforts towards the just life.

CITY		SOUL
Aristocracy	Wisdom, Courage, Moderation, Justice	Philosopher
Timocracy	War, Honour	Soldier
Oligarchy	Wealth, Social Division	Money-Maker
Democracy	Equality, Anarchy, Impiety	Rabble ('The People')
Tyranny	Eros, Madness, Misery	Parricide

(*Ill. 2*)

The above illustration (Ill. 2) delineates the main features of Socrates' conception of the hierarchy of better and worse cities and

souls. Very briefly, despite their superiority, aristocratic systems governed by philosopher guardians risk losing their cohesion, with their various elements growing separate and factionalised. This produces competitive war-focused states that are driven less by reason than spirited impulses. Socrates delineates this kind of city as a 'timocracy' and suggests that timocratic souls are focused on honour. This in turn gives rise to oligarchic systems in which a select group of wealthy people gain ascendency and society is divided between the rich and the poor. The oligarchic soul is a 'money-maker', oriented towards individual profit (555b). Democracies arise in response to the inequity of oligarchic systems. Socrates describes them as 'attractively anarchic and colourful', 'according a sort of equality to equals and unequals alike' (558c). They undermine the natural order of just relations. At the level of the city, democracies disrupt the proper distribution of roles and activities according to naturally given unequal capacities. At the level of the soul, they encourage a freedom and license that disturbs the vital authority of reason and moderation. Finally, as the democratic 'rabble' (560b) select populist leaders, these champions of the people quickly become tyrants. Socrates describes the tyrant as the 'waking version of what we made the stuff of dreams' (576b). Tyranny is an insane and ultimately miserable expression of untrammelled appetite. If democracy represents a form of license and impiety where all forms of paternal authority are questioned, then tyranny goes one step further. Socrates explains that 'your tyrant is a parricide' (569c). Once again, we can recognise the abiding significance of the patriarchal family in terms of conceiving aspects of social and cosmic order.

Socrates argues that philosophers are best positioned to evaluate the relative merits of the various models since they reach judgements through 'means of arguments' (582d). As discussed, Socrates ranks the political models in terms of the 'order that they appeared' (580b). He argues particularly for the superiority of the types that foster the pleasures of the rational soul, rather than those of the spirit and the body. The 'kingly' (387d) system of

aristocracy offers pleasures, for instance, of wisdom and moderation, whereas timocracy offers only the pleasure of 'winning' (386d), while oligarchy, democracy and tyranny offer only the 'shadow-painting of pleasure', appealing respectively to the money-making, disordered and plainly unhinged aspects of our appetitive natures (583b).

Ultimately then, aristocracy and the rational soul appear under the sign of the Freudian super-ego. They are the internal system of restraint, repression and regulation that bring all features of the city and the soul into just relation. In this capacity, and through the associated laws they inscribe, they perform the role of a parent: 'we control our children, by not allowing them their freedom until we've established a kind of regime within them, as in a city, using the best element in us to foster their best element, so that when we've set up a guard and ruler in them similar to our own we can safely set them free' (590e - 591a). In the end, Socrates renders the relative merits of aristocracy and tyranny in precisely quantified terms. He explains, 'when you've finished the calculation you'll find the king's life is seven hundred and twenty nine times more pleasant than the life of the tyrant' (587e).

Two sections remain in the *Republic* and both mark a return.

The first returns to the issue of the corrupting influence of poetry, particularly the work of Homer, arguing that the poets should properly be banished from the ideal city (595a). Socrates argues that poetry is 'twice removed from truth' (597e). Truth itself is the ideal and universal form of anything - the idea of a couch, to use his example. Then there are the multitude of actual couches created by craftsman that are developed on the basis of appropriate knowledge of the relevant materials and archetype. Finally there is the poet's representation of a couch which is based on no dedicated knowledge of the thing. Extending this argument beyond our understanding of how to construct couches and other inanimate things, Socrates suggests that poets have no genuine knowledge of the events and characters that they depict. Due to its mimetic character, poetry can offer nothing useful to public life (600a) and, even worse, encourages inappropriate emotions (for instance, grief

and empathy (!)), impious humour and licentious sexual desires (605c - 606d). Important to note that underlying this condemnation is the long standing 'quarrel between philosophy and poetry' (607b). Socrates is suspicious of any form of language that veers from the form of dialectical argument, with the latter regarded as having a privileged relation to truth.

This would all be more convincing if Socrates (and, of course, Plato) did not so regularly resort to poetic images and story-telling to communicate philosophical arguments. Whether in terms of mimicking the Muses, imagining vast subterranean caves or any manner of other instances, Socrates constantly weaves poetic figures within his already simulated context of dialectical speech.

The final section of the dialogue returns to the question of the rewards of justice. Near the very beginning of the *Republic*, in the discussion with the elderly patriarch Polemarchus, Socrates had stressed the intrinsic rewards of justice, rejecting any sense that justice be pursued for profit (335e). Now, however, he argues not only for the social benefits of behaving justly but also for a wider, divine context of recompense. The gods reward the just soul and punish the unjust one. From this dualistic perspective, in which the body dies while the 'soul is immortal and never perishes' (608d), the fate of the soul (the nature and pattern of its eternal life) depends upon how we are judged by the gods.

In order to make this point vividly, Socrates employs yet another poetic conceit. He tells the story of a mythical figure, Er (614b), who was killed in battle and placed on a pyre on the twelfth day, only to suddenly revive and recount his journey to the afterlife. Er explains that he was taken by the gods as a witness so that he could eventually return to explain the nature of the afterlife and the rewards of justice to the living. He travels first, with other newly dead souls, to a place of judgement. There, good souls are sent on a thousand year journey through the heavens, while unjust souls suffer beneath the earth for the same period (614c).

As the dead souls begin their happy or terrible journeys, others that have just finished their millennial sojourn in the afterlife descend from the heavens or rise up from the earth to be

reincarnated as mortal beings. The latter assemble in a meadow and, after a week, travel to a place of cosmic revelation and rebirth. Here, a huge 'shaft of light' connects the heavens and earth, surrounding and supporting the cosmos (616b -616c). Suspended from the ends of the light is the 'spindle of Necessity', with a complex eight part whorl that represents the motion of the heavens. Each section of the whorl supports a siren. Each siren sings a different note, which produces an overall harmony. The whorl also houses the daughters of Necessity, the three Fates, who sing along with the sirens and who each spin the whorl differently. Atropos sings of the future, Clotho of the present and Lachesis of the past (617c). The souls assemble in orderly lines and a 'priest or spokesman' (617d) introduces the process of rebirth. He explains that souls will draw lots to decide turns in selecting from a set of provided 'models of different kinds of life'. Many more models are provided than there are souls present, providing scope for souls to choose widely from varied forms of human and animal life. It is emphasised that each soul must make their own choice (617e).

No distinction is made between human and animal life. The cycle of souls is represented as inclusive of all animated being, with a regular motion back and forth between the human and wider living world. Socrates describes how Orpheus, for instance, chooses to be reborn as a swan to avoid being reborn from a human woman. This is motivated by continuing resentment that he was torn apart by women in his previous life (620a). Leaving aside any aspect of misogyny, this passage back and forth between human and animal offers, very positively, another aspect of justice. It suggests the thinking of a constitution that conceives not only a narrowly human realm of relational integrity, but also the intimate and incommensurable relation between all living things. While this is contradicted in other portions of the dialogue - for instance, in the preference for the rational component of the soul, which appears as a peculiarly human capacity - it nonetheless provides a means of looking beyond features of human autonomy to consider our constitutive relation to wider frameworks of life.

The souls then choose their new lives - some wisely, some unwisely. Socrates explains that in general those who have suffered in the afterlife make better decisions, while those who have been in heaven and are now 'untrained in suffering' make worse choices (619d). In this manner, the arc of the soul resembles a sine wave, with regular cycles of reversal as souls alternate between well and poorly chosen lives (619e). Socrates suggests that it is better overall to 'choose the life that has a middling share in wealth and the rest, avoiding the extremes in either direction' (619a). The value of a philosophical disposition is emphasised, in that that it enables souls to reason effectively and hence make the best choice available in any given circumstance. The priest counsels that even the soul that is allocated the very last choice can choose well and live happily if they wisely identify their best options (619b). Er is slightly less sanguine on this point, asserting that as long as 'the lot has not hasn't put him amongst the last to choose, the likelihood is (…) he will be back happy here'. Once every soul has chosen, they drink from the river Lethe to forget their former lives, fall asleep and in the middle of the night are 'suddenly carried away to be reborn, each to his own destination, with the speed of shooting stars' (621b).

Socrates optimistically concludes that if we 'keep always to the upward path, doing everything we can to practise justice with wisdom' that we will be 'friends to ourselves' and 'loved by the gods' (621c). We will 'carry off the prizes of justice' and 'in the thousand-year journey we have talked about, we shall fare well' (621d). The use of the pronoun 'we' has a genuine openness. It reaches out not only to citizens, but to strangers. Although prioritising a humanly rational mode of being, it also suggests a wider community. The 'we shall fare well' extends beyond the field of philosophy and the society of philosophers to embrace living creatures and impulses generally. It acknowledges our mortal and immortal limitations, but also insists on our resilience and, most importantly, a fundamental layer of commonality, despite the fatal necessity of individual choices and pathways.

Alongside the development of a more inclusive conception of the soul, what is is most interesting in this story is how it suggests novel relationship between freedom and justice. For the greater part of the dialogue, the two concepts scarcely seem to touch one another. This is particularly so within the context of Socrates' critique of the excessive freedom and licentious injustice of democracy. Here, however, they appear intimately associated. The notion of the 'spindle of Necessity', includes elements of both choice and constraint, free will and fatal determination.

Before considering this issue properly, it is worth acknowledging a conventional criticism of Plato's epistemological and metaphysical scheme. Plato is typically condemned for his idealism: with the soul positioned as ineffable, eternal and separated from the body; forms privileged over things; abstract, mathematical intelligibility preferred to any aspect of intuitive, sensible understanding; and philosophical abstractions (concepts) conceived as carrying clear, definite and invariable meaning. From a modern perspective, it is very easy to object to all this, to argue, for instance, that general ideas are properly inferred from aspects of experience. There is no ideal 'form' of a couch as such, with each particular couch regarded as an instance of the underlying 'true' form. Instead there are various real and historically shaped efforts to create comfortable means of seating or reclining that together shape our understanding of the overall notion (and term). We begin with the multiplicity of 'couch things' and only later move towards defining and recognising general features of 'couchness'. Furthermore, as Saussure (2017) argues, the meaning of any concept emerges relationally in terms of its structured difference from other concepts. There is no recognition, for instance, of the specific character of a couch without reference to adjacent concepts (and terms) such as 'bed', 'chair, 'divan', etc. In this sense, the whole effort within the *Republic* to precisely designate the meaning of ''justice' or 'the good', as though they were solid, independently substantial things, is fruitless. We can do our best to understand these concepts, we can argue about their nature and implications, but only in reference to particular, historically

evolving systems of linguistic and philosophical meaning and particular pragmatic contexts of thought and language use.

I have no interest in pursuing this line of criticism. It is well rehearsed and leads me away from the issue of justice specifically. Nonetheless, in passing, it is worth observing that Plato's formalism is also not entirely misguided. While there may be no ideal archetype for any particular thing, there are certainly features of abstract identity alongside sensibly accessible, material ones. For example, the trajectory of a collapsing glacier adheres to the laws of physics pertinent to a given material and gravitational context. The relevant features of mass, strength, force, acceleration, friction, etc. are highly amenable to precise mathematical description. While this motion is certainly physical, its thorough explanation depends upon its capacity for abstract representation as, for instance, a formula, graph or simulation. The modern world may suffer from an excess of this kind of description, to the extent that real objects and social circumstances slip into the background, while models, data, targets, financial flows and the like are highlighted, but Plato was hardly writing with any expectation of technological modernity and neoliberal capitalism. In that sense, his focus on mathematically lucid knowledge and underlying formal architecture is less natively misguided than oriented towards aspects of emerging scientific understanding. In any case, alongside his emphasis on mathematically represented truth, Plato places even greater stress on features of dialectical argument, which, however cooly logical, also assume and depend upon real contexts of human debate.

However, in our current predicament, as we confront the profoundly unviable character of our existing systems, my interest is less to criticise or defend Plato than to search for inspiring and useful aspects of his thought. The two millennia that separate us from his account of an alternative politics produces both gaps and areas of curious communication. It renders a sense of difference, commonality and potential. Specifically, just now, within the context of considering the relation between justice and freedom,

Plato offers a novel perspective that has considerable contemporary relevance and value.

We are accustomed to privileging freedom over almost everything else. Of the three terms in the French revolutionary catch-cry - *liberté, égalité, fraternité* - it is liberty that we insist upon most forcefully and regard as most intrinsically characteristic of enlightened modernity. Here, of course, we are mainly focused on ourselves - on our individual experience of freedom. Even though we are subject to all kinds of constraints in terms of opportunity and capacity, we nonetheless regard ourselves as fundamentally free. This is more a freedom in principle - a freedom in attitude - rather than anything that is ever adequately manifest. In Marxist terms, we experience the illusion of freedom in the sphere of consumption, while in the productive sphere we are mainly slaves of one kind of another.

Despite the emphasis on individual dimensions of freedom - our capacity to do and think as we like - human freedom under neoliberal capitalism is compromised in a wide variety of ways. What is subject to less restriction, however, is capital itself and the corporate systems that mobilise that capital. So, for example, despite the known harmful consequences of the fossil fuel industry, it continues to extract carbon reserves from beneath the oceans and earth and to sell them at vast profits. Car manufactures remain free to manufacture large fuel guzzling cars for people who perceive freedom in terms of the capacity to drive wherever they like whenever they like. Airlines are free to ferry people all across the globe for holidays, business meetings, family reunions, etc. Despite how all of this adversely affects the capacity of ecosystems to be free of undue influence and ruin, despite how this affects the long-term sustainability of natural and human systems, we still somehow imagine that freedom at the level of capital, market transactions and consumption is justifiable and even necessary.

It is in this respect that Plato's critique of untrammelled freedom is pertinent, not so much in terms of the specific condemnation of democracy, but in terms of rejecting a conception of freedom that has no care for the overall integrity of systems, that indeed is

constitutively blind to synoptic views. It cannot see them either at the level of private interests (freedoms) or at the level of the strategic movements of capital. Rather than fetishising freedom as some absolute sphere of value, Plato reminds us that a concern with social and ecological integrity must form a part of whatever freedom represents.

Plato suggests another notion of freedom that is is closely associated with the just arrangement of things. Freedom emerges precisely within the context of systems of constraint. Just as artists regularly speak of the creative potential of limitation, it is most likely only in acknowledging aspects of restriction that freedom takes genuine and coherent shape. Freedom, in this sense, represents a dimension of play within the parametric organisation and processes of any system. In Plato's scheme, for instance, it relates to an aspect of individual choice within the tight clock-work motion of the 'spindle of Necessity'. Choice, from this perspective, only becomes meaningful in relation to making the best use of capacities that are never entirely ours to determine and that are framed within contexts that exceed our individual selves. Freedom then is only meaningful in relation to justice. It is an aspect of justice rather than an independent and autonomous thing.

Yet, clearly, vital questions remain about Plato's conception. If we acknowledge, for instance, the need for responsible freedom that has its basis in a concern with justice, then surely we require scope to recognise justice and the relevant contextual frames that constitute the intersection of freedom and determination. But how is this possible when justice is scarcely evident for the individual that simply minds their own business? Minding one's own business implies no wider view - indeed, if anything, it suggests the opposite. Still, for all of his emphasis on each citizen's myopic focus on their own concerns, Socrates regards the happiness of individuals as of less importance than the overall happiness of society. What matters in the assessment of justice is the integrity of the whole. While this certainly depends upon each person attending to their own proper business, there is no justice in this attention specifically.

This returns us once again to the core problem. If the whole is only visible to those with a 'synoptic' view (the dialectically able philosophers), then what of citizens and souls generally? How can they recognise either social justice or the justice of their own dispositions? How can they recognise any such thing as justice when their modes of attention constitutively disable holistic perspective - when the condition of their behaving justly is that they lose sight of justice generally?

Socrates is equivocal about any general capacity to recognise justice and to choose wisely in life. At times this capacity is associated with the philosophical rulers, at others it includes, via means of their strict communist training, the guardian class generally. At other times, it seems to extend even more broadly. The concluding section of the discussion of philosophical education envisages the philosopher rulers instituting a massive social transformation:

> *'By sending everyone in the city who is more that ten years old out into the countryside,' I said, 'and isolating their children, away from the current ways of doing things, which are their parents' ways too, so as to bring them up in their preferred ways and under their laws, which will be as we have described. This is the quickest and easiest way, don't you think, that the city and the institutions we've talked about will be established, so providing happiness for the city itself and bringing the greatest benefit to the people among whom it comes about' (541a).*

Here, the radical program that had apparently been reserved for the guardians, with its physical, moral and intellectual training, with its rejection of gender restrictions and immediate family bonds, is now conceived as commonly implemented for all citizens:

> *'A city with the top arrangement for government will be one in which women are shared, children are shared, and so are all stages of their education, as well as the prescribed activities in war and peace; kingship being assigned to those who have*

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turned out best both in philosophy and in relation to war' (543a).

It is not altogether clear, however, how this vision affects all those portions of society that are less focused on philosophy or war. Does Plato's ideal system represent a general or a restricted communism? Is the ordinary appetitive world of money-making left in place or is it somehow affected by the regimes of philosophical training and communally focused identity? There is a very evident tension between the justice of the latter as largely ascetic and altruistic versus the justice of ordinary citizens as self-absorbed and self-interested. The notion of a naturally given meritocracy provides a partial means of resolving this tension. All citizens are provided with common opportunities to rise to a philosophical understanding of justice, but only a very few will demonstrate the capacity to do this. Properly communal, outwardly focused being is positioned as an elite aspiration and exception rather than as an ordinary and accessible condition of social identity and being.

Yet, in the final section of the dialogue - in describing the element of choice that all souls have in selecting the best life - there is the sense that every living thing participates in a philosophical journey of discovering how best and most justly to live. Each individual is called upon to look beyond their immediate appetites and immoderate emotions in order to make a rational decision that will secure their happiness both in this life and the next. From this inclusive ethical framework, the divisions within the existing and ideal city fall away. There is neither the difference of roles nor the difference of philosophical exceptionalism. Instead, there is the common demand that we all contemplate the holistic and ecological nature of justice as a means of choosing appropriately both for our selves and in relation to our communal social lives. In this manner, the overall passage of *Republic* is arguably from envisaging a restricted economy of justice to one that is inclusive and general.

To use a modern term, we could argue that Plato describes an 'emergent' notion of justice. In pursuing their specialised roles and interests, citizens shape a larger constitutional system that is

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invisible at the level of individual actions and motivations. Just as an individual bird has no idea of the ordered pattern of the flock, so we cannot recognise social justice at the level of our individual actions. It requires an external view - a macro and meta level view - for the overall pattern to become adequately evident. Running counter to this, however, Plato also conceives justice in terms of a summoning of being towards properly philosophical conditions of integral perception and understanding. Despite the putatively exclusive character of philosophical wisdom, it is positioned as an aspirational goal for any living thing - and indeed each soul must necessarily find their way to justice in order to negotiate a happy path through the cycle of being. Within this context, Plato's notion of justice, similar to Kant's conception of the beautiful, corresponds to an instant of reflection and reconciliation. It develops beyond the space of immediate motivations and relations *per se*. Furthermore, this is precisely the view that an ecologist adopts in recognising the identity of a complex environmental system. The ecologist looks beyond simple multiplicity to recognise features of overall integrity. It is in this sense that justice can be said to incorporate an ecological view.

To summarise, we could say that Plato conceives justice less at the level of a ledger of reciprocal actions than in terms of the overall ecology of a system. The quality of justice indicates that a system is well-arranged - that the parts contribute to the whole and the whole to the parts. In order to evaluate the justice of any system a synoptic view is required. The system must be recognised in terms of its broad implications and not in restricted or localised terms. For instance, in mining fossil fuels there is a need to think not just of immediate energy needs and capacity to make a profit, but also to consider the potential consequences of mining coal, oil or uranium. But this raises an obvious question: how can any of this be known? More specifically, how can any system be adequately recognised in its scale, scope and long-term implications? The inventors of coal furnaces, steam engines and automobiles had no idea how the emissions of their machines would contribute to the warming of the planet. We can argue that

they should have known, but on what basis? How can we possibly know the consequences of our endeavours without a crystal ball? Any synoptic view is always imperfect. The elements, boundaries and implications can never be exhaustively known. There will always be features that escapes synoptic view.

Still, this hardly excuses a lack of concern with the possibility of unexpected implications. While the early inventors of fossil fuel technologies could not anticipate the technological, social and environmental consequences of their experiments, societies and nations had scope to either rashly adopt these technologies or recognise the need for caution. In a sense, it is less the technologies themselves that represent an injustice than the speed and scale of their adoption, which demonstrated a careless disregard for any dimension of risk. The relentless focus on progress and the abnegation of responsibility involved in leaving this progress largely in the hands of market forces represents a clear lack of adequate concern with ensuring the well-being of the existing social and environmental ecosystem. Any specific adverse consequences may not have been immediately evident, but the overall risk of this level of radical change was always foreseeable and indeed recognised. Consider, for instance, Thomas Carlyle's commentary on industrial modernism from *Signs of the Times* (1829):

> For all earthly, and for some unearthly purposes, we have machines and mechanic furtherances; for mincing our cabbages; for casting us into magnetic sleep. We remove mountains, and make seas our smooth highways; nothing can resist us. We war with rude Nature; and, by our resistless engines, come off always victorious, and loaded with spoils.

Carlyle focuses particularly on how this technological transformation exacerbates social inequities:

> What changes, too, this addition of power is introducing into the Social System; how wealth has more and more increased, and at the same time gathered itself more and more into

masses, strangely altering the old relations, and increasing the distance between the rich and the poor, will be a question for Political Economists, and a much more complex and important one than any they have yet engaged with. (Carlyle, 1829)

So, although we cannot anticipate all outcomes, we can certainly be more or less attentive to aspects of equilibrium and continuity. The difficulty, of course, is that the various technological and social transformations of industrial modernity were associated with a rhetoric of progress. They were envisaged as contributing not only to immediate profitable growth but also towards usefully improving lives. Very evidently, this view of improved conditions was blinkered and short-sighted, but we can hardly suggest that it completely ignored any sense of ecological arrangement. It's just that its lens was poorly motivated and adjusted. It was predicated upon an exploitative relation to people and conceived an illusorily autonomous space of human experience. Material nature was positioned as little more than a passive, infinitely available resource. Visions of progress were complicated and contradictory at the outset and scarcely guided by the values that Plato advocates, and which now seem increasingly pertinent - wisdom, moderation, beauty and justice.

The focus during this rapid development phase was far less on long-term consequences than dimensions of immediate profit. The mindset of capitalism resists synoptic perspectives. It is constitutionally oriented towards facilitating particular, specialised interests. Any conception of societal betterment is positioned as an emergent consequence of patterns of self-interested behaviour. It is hardly surprising then that technological modernity was promoted with little environmental debate - not only because matters of environmental consequence fell outside political discussion (outside a constitution that was conceived in fundamentally human terms) but because the natural world was regarded as a passive and malleable resource for disaggregated, profit-geared human activity. The problem with capitalism is less that it fails to

recognise adverse consequences than that it systemically disregards them. This precisely designates its constitutive injustice.

I have rejected a conventional notion of justice as a discrete set of calculations, as a balancing of wrongs and rights, and even as a concern with equality altogether. Instead I have preferred a notion that emphasises aspects of irreducible particularity and synoptic view. The contrast between a calculating and an holistic conception of justice has evolved through a reading of Plato's *Republic*. Plato's double notion of justice involves both 'minding one's own business' and the capacity to do precisely the opposite (achieve a genuinely philosophical - and possibly aesthetic and ecological - perspective). In the awkward clash between dimensions of local, self-absorbed blindness and integral altruistic comprehension, I have recognised a distinction between the values informing capitalism and those necessary towards the development of any viable alternative system.

Yet we can hardly advocate that justice should not legitimately involve efforts to redress social wrongs and foster greater social equality. Rather than directly opposing a calculating to an holistic conception of justice, there is a need to recognise that the two notions of justice are interrelated. While they can certainly be in tension, and even appear neatly opposed, they can also be conceived as aligned and complementary.

An examination of the etymological history of the term 'justice' is useful. In its twists and nuances, this history demonstrates that the notion of justice is inherently paradoxical. I rely closely here on legal scholar Jason Boatright's (2018) account of this etymology. Boatright explains that the modern English term 'justice' evolves from the Latin term *jus*, which means 'that which is sanctioned or ordained' (2018, p.729). This corresponds to a conventional legal conception of justice, but also hints at an aspect of right that has a broader and more abiding character, linked to a notion of the proper arrangement of the world. This wider sense becomes increasingly apparent as Boatright summarises the various etymological accounts of the Latin term.

He describes four different etymologies of *jus* (2018):

1. The first traces the derivation via a string of terms: the Latin terms *jussi* ('that which is ordained by laws human or divine') and *jubeo* ('I command'); both of which link to the Ancient Greek verb *φοβεω* ('to frighten and menace'); and finally to the Proto-Indo-European words *Hioudh-eie/o-* ('to cause to move') and *yudhya* ('to fight'). Boatright argues that this explanation highlights aspects of 'command, fear and violence' (2018, p.731).

2. A second account of the etymology of *jus* emphasises the ambivalent sway of justice. It argues that *jus* links to the Greek adjective *δεος*, which means 'right' in the sense of necessity, but without any specific sense of ethical or legal propriety. It is associated with being bound, but also with wanting or requesting something. At the same time, it also incorporates the notion of division, or, more precisely, binding through division. This indicates that justice is not only negative and necessary but answers to social needs and represents a particular form of social distribution. Justice both restricts and provides. It is both enforced and desired (Boatright, 2018, p.732).

3. A third account traces the origins of *jus* to the Sanskrit *yu* ('to join'), which contributed to the Greek terms *συω* ('to sew') and *ζευγνυμι* ('binding, obliging'). This provides the etymological root for the English term 'yoke'. The meaning here is similar to that described in the second etymological account, however here necessity is positioned less as needed and requested than as simply obligatory. We are sewn into the fabric of justice whether we like it or not (Boatright, 2018, pp.732-733).

4. Finally, Boatright explains that a fourth account is the most historically and linguistically likely. It is also counter-intuitive and surprising. It suggests that *jus* stems from the Proto-Indo-European term *h2oiu*, which indicates aspects of life force, eternity and health, but also provides the basis for the Greek word *ne* ('not'). Without pursuing his detailed

explanation, it becomes evident that Proto-Indo-European and Sanskrit establish a close cosmological relation between aspects of life and negation. Boatright explains that the associated Sanskrit words '*Yoh*, *yos*, and *ayus* refer to health, life, and lifetime, each of which denotes a temporary expression of energy and existence before its inexorable decay and destruction' (Boatright, 2018, pp.734).

The fourth etymology highlights a conception of justice that closely corresponds to Anaximander's entropic conception of cosmological justice. While Boatright stresses features of finitude and restriction, with justice having its basis in the binding and constraining of existence via rules and systems of punishment and reward, I would argue that it is also possible to regard justice in terms of an integral ambivalence. Justice involves both negation and expression at once, shaping not only systems of restriction but also an ecology of the whole.

Drawing upon these various etymologies, the notion of justice takes shape as a field of necessity that binds and constrains in order to facilitate coherent existence. It enables social being precisely through a work of negation and finitude. It relates closely to the sphere of socially articulated laws and legal processes, but also extends beyond them to denote an aspect of cosmic and existential manifestation and necessity.

Justice is constituted in terms of a dynamic interaction between the positive and the negative, life and death, freedom and limitation, chaos and order. This is evident, for instance, in Plato's conception of the cycle of reincarnation, as each soul is alternately and eternally drawn towards justice and then veers away from it again. In this respect, justice appears less as a settled state than as a regular field of motion - an alternation to and away from itself. This meta-level conception of justice rises above particular laws and moral imperatives to manifest dimensions of synoptic (and natural) necessity.

Within this context, it is worth considering how ancient Egyptian culture portrayed justice in the figure of the god *Maat*,

who not only weighs the souls of the dead to assess their capacity to enter paradise (*Aaru*) but is aligned with cosmic order generally. *Maat* represents a complex principle of truth, harmony and moral virtue. While she is directly opposed to *Isfet*, the god of chaos, violence and injustice, she also maintains her own aspect of negativity. Order is not only a natural principle, but incorporates within itself the necessity for restriction and obedience. The figure of *Maat* works to naturalise moral schema and the judicial laws. She demonstrates that these systems have their basis in the sway of an overall cosmic order that has a positive and holistic character. Justice appears not simply reducible to features of codified restriction and quantified measurement, but represents a generative, life-sustaining principle. More precisely, and more interestingly, *Maat* designates the coincidence of these two apparently antithetical conceptions.

Here, it is worth acknowledging that any discrete instant of calculation, however essentially self-interested, always assumes a whole. There remains the dimly evident prospect of a state in which things are balanced, in which wrongs are adequately redressed and aspects of right prevail. For instance, a revenge killing, for all its violence, inequity and potential for further violence, may appear, at least for a moment, as a means of setting the world right. This is to stress that a piecemeal, ledger focused notion of justice is not intrinsically opposed to an holistic one. The former preserves a notion of the whole as a background to its calculations and the latter can discover reductive, analytical and quantitative means as it aims to realise a fundamentally synoptic and qualitative justice. The issue, however, for us - certainly within the context of the contemporary world - is that the ledger focused conception has lost any integral attention to the whole, focusing instead upon immediate, typically self-serving dimensions of right and wrong and rendering all phenomena in terms of reductive indices, as though justice is literally embodied at the level of calculation. Most evidently, capitalism has its basis in a conception of property rights that privileges capital (and mechanisms of inequitable accumulation) versus any integral consideration of

social good. The management and enforcement of these rights comes to supplant a more synoptic view of social justice.

While I may seem to have strayed from any ordinary meaning of the term 'justice', the holistic conception is arguably relevant not only etymologically and historically but even within the machinations of the most restricted practices of justice. If we think of justice simply in terms of the administration of a ledger of discrete rights and wrongs, then to perform our calculation - to ensure any fair determination of justice - we must, at least notionally, assume some conception of an integral and 'just' whole. Otherwise we have no reference for our calculations, no means of knowing whether we have added things up correctly or not.

I have stressed the synoptic character of justice, but have said less about the justice of particular things. The latter may seem aligned with the discrete focus of calculating justice but actually can be regarded very differently. The calculating perspective aims to render everything in common terms - as functional and transactional entities that are amenable to quantification and paradigmatically manifest in this form. While the capacity to conceive things in this way is always available and is not necessarily insidious, it is very different from a perspective that specifically insists that particular things and wholes retain a vital incalculable dimension. For my purposes, the multiplicity of particular things is not primarily something numbered. Nor is the whole precisely numbered. Of course, it can be represented as 'one', just as multiplicity can be estimated or regarded as infinite, but this hardly encompasses its qualitative manifestation and identity. It is the latter that is the specific focus of synoptic justice and that has the potential to interrupt and critique the reductive character of calculating justice.

This explains why I resist Ranciere's notion of the 'presupposition of equality' (2002, p.223). It assumes some adequate measure to weigh up the value of people and to delineate their equivalence, but no such measure exists. Equality cannot have its basis in a measure of any particular human (or inhuman) capacity (speech, intelligence, etc.). Instead, recast as justice, it

must have its basis in a judgement that eludes quantification altogether - that is geared toward the immeasurable quality of both particular things and any given whole. While Ranciere emphasises the impossibility of both the numerical count and any geometry of proportional relations (1999, p.6), he still insists upon a never adequately realisable presumption of inalienable equality that is ultimately internally contradictory - that diminishes the qualitative potential of the social field in the very process of advocating equality as a primary political value.

The notion of 'judgement' provides a link between the thinking of justice and the thinking of aesthetics. While Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790) employs the term judgement in a different context - not to refer to anything directly political or judicial, but rather to identify a mode of intuitive cognition (in contrast to rational cognitive judgement), still, all manner of affinities are evident. Aesthetic judgment, according to Kant, involves both a rich and non-reductive engagement with particularity and a qualitative regard for the whole. It works to reconcile divergent aspects of human being and to mediate an integral accord between the *a priori* character of human rational and moral identity and the horizon of the unassimilable 'thing in itself'. The aesthetic is deeply political in its precise concern with the character and recognition of features of both individual and social constitution (*politeia*). Kant positions aesthetic judgement as a scene of reconciliation, crucial to integral identity, the experience of human freedom and the manifestation of a 'common sense' vital to any prospect of genuine political community. All of this signals the significant political implications of aesthetics and, more strongly, its native political orientation and relevance. Of course, this entails conceiving politics and justice generally - in the spirit, for instance, that the Egyptian god *Maat* obtains wider political meaning and that the Anaximander fragment frames a notion of cosmic justice.

Plato approaches the justice of the soul through the metaphor of the well-arranged city, while Kant focuses on the internal relation between the different categories of cognition as a means of envisaging a genuine basis for social being and interaction. Plato

employs a wide, social lens to clarify the just constitution of our internal selves, while Kant examines the aesthetic dimension of subjective identity to discover the potential for adequately realised society. Plato begins with an imaginary scene of social justice, Kant with the possibility of inner justice. This difference in orientation indicates a key quandary within political thought: where to properly begin? Do we begin with the design of social systems and institutions, or is there a more pressing need to address and transform our inner dispositions? Clearly enough, however, neither of these things can be dealt with in a discrete and entirely separate manner. The social is not some subsequent and extrinsic imposition on the individual. It is always there at the outset, prior to our even recognising it. We are always stuck in the middle of things, compelled to act on both fronts at once - to change both ourselves and the social conditions that underlie our dispositions.

The value of Kant's aesthetic philosophy is in highlighting the political character and implications of modes of experience that are not normally considered in political terms. Although geared towards the subjective, although withdrawing from the field of ordinary human action, and although oriented towards contemplative, visual engagement, the aesthetic nonetheless provides a key sphere of constitutional reflection and reconciliation, linking the experience of freedom to a non-exploitative relation to things and grounding the possibility of social community. In this manner, its political relevance is both emphasised and immediately qualified. The aesthetic is political up to a point. It prepares the way and simultaneously withdraws. It frames and inspires, but only on the condition that it never directly realises.

This is not altogether dissimilar from Plato's conception of justice. As we have seen, the recognition of justice is granted only to those who set aside their interested relation to the world and the prevailing focus on 'minding one's own business' to discern a larger whole. Justice, as something philosophically visible, is irreducible to ground level relations - to all the play of wrongs and rights, profits and losses, happiness and unhappiness. It is not evident as a

sum of calculations, but only in terms of an overall and more qualitatively conceived harmony. In this sense, the contemplation of justice withdraws from what we ordinarily regard as the terrain of politics. Politics is lent a philosophical basis that suspends politics precisely.

While Kant's aesthetics and Plato's philosophical justice face dilemmas in terms of insisting upon a necessary removal from ordinary action and experience, they also suggest relevant alternatives to contemporary systems of value. The withdrawals they enact indicate not only aspects of contradiction and impasse, but also suggest different ways of regarding the world - less focused on manipulation, exploitation and self-interest, and emphasising instead dimensions of care and wonder (Scarry, 1999).[2]

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[2] It was only after I finished this manuscript that I discovered English Literature academic Elaine Scarry's *On Beauty and Being Just* (1999). This short book (based upon a public lecture) deals with precisely my topic of the relationship between aesthetic experience and justice. Scarry provides a beautifully written defence of the notion of beauty, arguing, like Schiller, that beauty provides a vital basis for enlightened political community. She represents beauty as a gift and animating force that summons efforts to reproduce itself more generally. Beauty de-centres us. It leads beyond the individual self, establishing a model of sensitive attention, care and love that affects other aspects of experience. It serves as a sensible sign of the vivid and well-composed that informs our capacity to value the more abstract and sensibly elusive character of social justice. Scarry links the quality of aesthetic 'fairness' to Rawls conception of justice as fairness. The political will for social equality finds its intuitive basis in the proportional equality that beauty demonstrates.

I have no wish to argue against Scarry's position, but it is worth distinguishing it from my own. My argument is less concerned with beauty as a universal form of aesthetic experience. I am more interested in how aesthetics takes shape within modernity as an ambivalent response to altered social conditions, both supporting them and offering a salient critique. I am also less interested in any notion of the beautiful itself than in the forms of experience that it is

Guardian climate crisis journalist George Monbiot concludes a recent article with the recommendation that 'we must counter the rise of indifference with an overt and conspicuous politics of care' (Guardian, 9/12/2022). This statement precisely exemplifies the close alignment and uncertain relationship between macro and micro level politics, public political initiatives and personal attitudes, and dimensions of society and the soul. Where is this care to come from? Is it simply available or must it be fostered? What of those who don't care? How can we address the lack of care and how can we transform an apparently latent potential for care into something that is adequately political, that is, not only contemplatively political - not only concerned with recognising justice but with enacting it?

Very often, an attitude of care is simply assumed (perhaps as a component of natural emotional and ethical health). It is also assumed that there is ready scope for this care to take an active political form. When none of this occurs we take consolation in the opposite view, regarding humans as essentially malevolent and selfish. In this manner we alternate between optimism and pessimism without grasping the key ambivalence at the heart of politics, which lies precisely in the relation it draws between reflection and action and between the social and dispositional character of politics.

I have made another diagram - this time to clarify the relationship between the ethical consideration of justice and the aesthetic appreciation of beauty. It indicates strands of divergence and convergence. On the right side are the aspects of conventional difference. Whereas justice is associated with the sphere of ethical

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associated with. I am especially interested in the attitude of reflective inaction that it entails and the consequence this has for questioning ordinary practical modes of being and action. Scarry emphasises the creative and productive fecundity of beauty, whereas I focus much more on a negative fecundity - a withdrawal from human industry that is oriented towards maintaining, sustaining and enriching ecological relations.

responsibility and moral action, beauty is linked to pleasure and the awkward autonomy of art. Justice engages vital social and political questions, while the concern with beauty apparently withdraws from all of that, focusing instead on the constitution of the individual subject. One is associated with duty, obligation and law, while the other is conceived in terms of play and freedom. On the left side of the diagram are the points of symmetry and agreement. Both justice and beauty are conceived in terms of the 'well arranged'. The 'justness' of any just or beautiful arrangement is to be evaluated less in term of an analytical economy of individual calculations, or as anything definitely conceptual, than in terms of features of qualitative and formal aptness. The latter is evident via an holistic and systemic attitude of seeing that steps back from (or rises above) ordinary contexts of intentional action. The recognition of justice and beauty links aspects of subjective epiphany (either the philosophical contemplation of the truth or the aesthetic regard for the particular and the whole) to the possibility of communal social identity. Despite the central importance of these capacities for individual and socio-political realisation, they are represented as available only to the privileged few who possess the philosophical acumen or refined aesthetic sensibility necessary to properly perceive them.
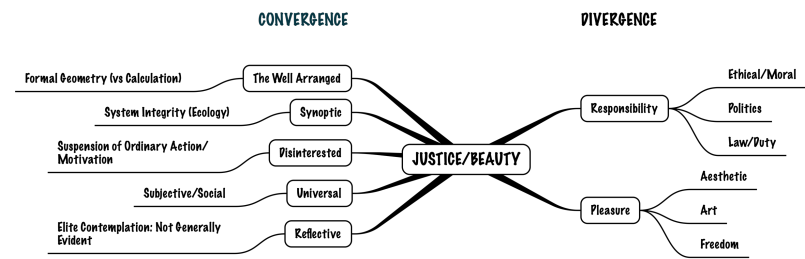
(Ill. 3)

In these terms, alongside the obvious dilemma of how the well-arranged is constituted -of how it is either rationally or intuitively evident - there is also the key issue of how engagement and

incorporation are conceived. Justice and beauty demonstrate a paradoxical relation to aspects of social action and participation. How is aesthetic experience to offer the social promise that Kant suggests when it scrupulously resists any context of ordinary action? In its bracketing of conventional contours of motivation and activity it appears as a fragile and solipsistic means of signalling freedom and community. Similarly, Plato's philosophical contemplation of justice appears far removed from the ground level concern with individual injuries and reparations. If justice is only visible to the guardian rulers then how can it possibly attain more general currency and sway?

Both social order and aesthetic common sense are predicated on the paradox of a necessary attitude of distance and disengagement. How are justice and beauty to thrive if they lack an organic relation to popular modes of experience generally, if they are reserved for the elite few? Plato equivocates on this issue, at one level describing a necessarily restricted access to the synoptic view so that people can 'mind their own business', but at another level describing a common orientation to justice as a feature of all animated things (directing our cosmic path through the cycle of life and death). Kant's conception of beauty conveys a similar ambivalence. He describes the beauty of the everyday world, available to all, while also developing a notion of artistic genius that depends precisely upon special and superior capacities. Another way of thinking about these things is needed - some means of recognising a concern for justice and beauty imbricated within aspects of commonly available experience. We need to consider the possibility that alternative bases for value are less rarefied and remote than latent and available tendencies within the complex tangle of existing social life.

Intermission B

Three short pieces that I wrote some years ago:

1. 'Mink's Hospitality' indicates, in clearly exaggerated terms, my reservations about art - about its genuinely inclusive character and wider political potential. It is written, like the material in the first intermission, with a sense of negative delight - clearly irresponsible and offering nothing like a worthwhile alternative.

2. A Stupid Idea' provides some additional context for the following chapter, 'Aesthetics and Dwelling'. It explains how I discovered an interest in aesthetics - and the notion of aesthetic practice specifically.

3. 'A Manifesto for Following' was written in relation to a walking project, but advocates more generally for aesthetic practices of non-originality.

Minski's Hospitality

Hospitality in contemporary 'socially engaged art'.

To invite somebody in. To permit them to participate. To describe/circumscribe a context for participation.

This is, after all, your artwork. You are named. A group of artists are named. The group itself has a name. People come along. Perhaps they belong. Usually they do. They figure out what they are supposed to do. They do it, or they don't quite do it. But whatever they don't quite do also occurs within the work. It is ultimately yours. You ultimately permit it even if you disapprove, because it adds to the work - and, as I say, it is ultimately yours.

Apart from questions of ownership and estrangement – appearing on the doorstep and offering a partial, conditional welcome – there is also, however, the underlying sense that hospitality is unnecessary, that nothing like hospitality is happening, that there is no owner and there are no strangers. There is instead the social, which simply has to be activated, which remains a latent force, which art can somehow realise. So at one level all the protocols are suspended – the work of art struggles to occupy a position beyond hospitality, to represent instead the literal foundation of the social. People only have to come and they will see and act socially.

Of course I should have read Derrida on hospitality, but I haven't. Instead I have read about one hundred pages in the middle of the Marquis De Sade's *Juliette*. Juliette, villainous sister of Justine, who profits only from vice, who is doomed if she ever turns her back on vice, who is compelled to obey vice's law. She is as bound by law as any other. She is as drawn to law as any other.

Anyway, in the middle of her book (1991, pp.576-579), after she has fled from France to Italy, after she has learned the art of poisoning, she meets Minski the Monster on the high slopes of a volcano near Florence. Over seven feet tall, with an 18 inch cock – a coprophage and cannibal – Minski would have slaughtered Juliette and her small entourage (Augustine, Zephry, and Sbrigani) if he hadn't recognised a kindred spirit. Juliette and her travel companions were buggering one another at the lip of the volcano. So Minski is friendly. He recognises his own predilections. He insists they follow him on a long walk to his abode. They descend for several hours into a dark valley, cross a lake in a gondola and pass through several substantial castle walls until they find themselves into low ceilinged room strewn with bones.

Rabelasian in his appetites, Minski is outrageously rich and permanently erect. He has travelled the world, accumulating all its vices. He adheres to Nature, which represents nothing but his own libidinal, murderous urges. He ejaculates at least ten times a night and every creature he fucks dies (and then is eaten). He has

torture machines to kill multiple victims with the pull of a single cord. He keeps a massive seraglio of victims, carefully grouped in terms of age and gender. The sick and the not so sick are regularly fed to wild beasts.

He is also, it seems, a philosopher – and he speaks specifically and for several pages about hospitality, about the absurdity of hospitality. This after he has inhospitably murdered Augustine – and Juliette has expressed concern that she may be next. They engage in dialogue, although not strongly Socratic in nature. Minski makes no show of ignorance. The laws of Nature – of enlightened human action – are writ large for him. If the weak are hospitable to the strong it is only in order to survive. If the strong are hospitable to the weak then their strength is compromised. There is no reason to admit strangers. He draws upon a variety of cultural precedents, describing examples of cultures that instantly destroy outsiders. The strong have no obligations to the weak. They are the weak's calamity. That is how it has always been and will always be.

Juliette accepts his arguments – as though she is not already convinced. It is just that in this case she has found herself the weaker party. Hospitality – the rules of hospitality – would at this moment suit her, but philosophically she is convinced and knows all this herself.

Or does she? For why does she eventually leave Minski alive? She drugs him, steals all his wealth and escapes, but she does not poison him fatally. Sbrigani would prefer that she did so in order to ensure their safe escape, but she decides that she cannot. What law does she obey? Surely not the law of hospitality. This is not her home after all. No she leaves Minski alive so that he may awake and return to his criminal ways. His criminality delights her. At least this is the argument that she makes. Yet it would seem that she, like Minski, cannot bring herself to kill a kindred spirit. She is pulled by the pathos of a perverse society. She is drawn to adhere to a paradoxical community. The laws of this community is that nothing matters but the individual's pleasure (and imagination of pleasure). No other person counts. Not parents, not children, not

ordinary ethical obligations. Each libertine resembles Minski's keep – they are surrounded by swathes of wilderness and preserved behind numerous walls. They are alone. They insist they are alone. But at the same time they are always seeking allies and friends. They form societies (the Sodality Society), they talk to one another endlessly, they imagine that they can agree on the truth – on a truth that ultimately separates them.

Perversely then they do actually believe in hospitality – a difficult, endlessly negotiated, lie-strewn, bloody and carnal hospitality. The poor – those who can be placed in seraglio's, those who are selected as victims – are not provided with any hospitality whatsoever. They are disregarded as people. They are beneath recognition and philosophical discourse. Their suffering serves the utilitarian purpose of enhancing pleasure. Their vibrations of pain exacerbate the discharge of the libertine and the community of libertines. Despite their denial of empathy and common feeling, the libertines do nonetheless struggle to form a community. They are incapable of withdrawing from society altogether. They cannot, as I say, even withdraw from the prospect of law. Their criminality is simply an imaginary adherence to the dictates of Nature.

And I wonder if parallels can be drawn between the community of libertines and the community of art – each just as violent in their determination of who and who does not deserve hospitality? Each also involving seraglios. The tale of Minski indicates that there is nothing simple about the social field of art. Nothing is simply mobilised. There is no necessity that things should end well, that a reasonable, aesthetically ground community should emerge. There are all kinds of possibilities. There are Minski's exploits. There are Juliette's travels. There is their shared grudging, uncertain, passionate and dispassionate hospitality.

Stupid Idea

It all began with a stupid idea. I imagined that a notion of aesthetic practice could provide an alternative to the notion of artistic practice. My initial interest was in conceiving aspects of cultural

practice that are no longer so comfortably positioned within art, or that deliberately wish to resist what art has become, but quickly recognised the potential to extend this idea - to recognise aesthetic practice in all manner of aspects of everyday life that have no particular relationship to art as such. I was interested, for instance, in the aesthetic character of regimes of physical exercise and oral popular culture, as well as in layers of contemplative distraction within what are ostensibly instrumental activities.

Now, like all of my stupid ideas, the notion of 'aesthetic practice' demanded first unwavering loyalty. I was determined to make it work - to will it into being, if necessary.

That said, I always had a sense that this would take considerable work - if nothing else because the term 'aesthetic' appears even more rarefied than the term 'art.' In popular parlance it is little more than a slightly self-important synonym for style or 'look and feel' (so I often hear my artist colleagues say, 'we have the concept in place, now just need to focus on the aesthetics'). Within critical theory the notion of aesthetics has a bad reputation with those who associate it either with strategies of social distinction (Bourdieu (1984), most famously) or with a formally obsessed and removed currents of modernism. While there have always been those who have regarded the field of aesthetics more positively (Adorno (1997)), it is really only in the last few decades that it has made a significant critical recovery (evident, for instance, in Ranciere's aesthetic philosophy (2004, 2009, 2010), as well as in the wider concern with 'affect' and 'everyday aesthetics' (Light and Smith, 2005).

But given this renewed concern with aesthetics and the emergence of new forms of art practice that resist any sense of autonomous art - that are pitched entirely in terms of wider social engagement and adopt deliberately trans-disciplinary and non-artistic modes - surely there is obvious scope to develop a notion of aesthetic practice? Despite this sense of opportunity, rather than replace 'artistic' with 'aesthetic' the unsurprising preference has been to dispense with any adjective whatsoever. There is simply 'practice' generally, which extends across all manner of disciplinary

frameworks and socio-cultural contexts. There is little point in dragging back 'aesthetics' when this would only narrow the sense of cultural possibility and risk rendering 'practice' even more marginal and opaque.

But, as I say, I had never really envisaged restricting 'aesthetic practice' to art - say as a means of referring specifically to the genre of socially-engaged art (SEA). Instead my aim was to consider the aesthetic implications of cultural practices that may include art (and the art/non-art of SEA) but that also extend well beyond what we conventionally regard as art. My concern was to trace an aesthetic dimension within work, leisure and domestic life, and to focus particularly on an aesthetic valuation of the world that involves aspects of care, attentiveness, maintenance and repetition. I was interested in the passivity of aesthetic response, which resists the productive, original, radically transformative self-image of art. Of course this contrast between aesthetic passivity and artistic activity becomes problematic on close investigation, but let's leave it in place just for now.

It is precisely in its sense of wide cultural relevance that the underlying problem with the notion of aesthetic practice becomes evident. Despite the uncertain boundaries of art, the notion of artistic practice has the advantage of being at least roughly socially specific. Artistic practice is what artists do, whether they produce paintings or walk along creeks, whether they display their work in galleries or leave it as a rippling conversation on streets. Aesthetic practice, on the other hand, does not represent any particular mode of practice as such. It has no clear social basis. If there are aesthetic practitioners, then what are they? Are they aesthetes? This is not really what I am intending. They would have to appear as connoisseurs, critics or philosophers, certainly not wider cultural practitioners. On the whole, people do not practice aesthetics. Instead, things they do may have aesthetic relevance. This is very different than delineating some coherent sphere of 'aesthetic practice' per se. The term suggests a particular genre of practice, when my actual concern is with the aesthetic implications of all manner of practices.

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My interest in aesthetics lies in its potential to value the world differently - not simply as a semblance, not simply as pleasurable, not simply as beautiful or sublime or as somehow attaining to the identity of art - but much more integrally. Here what is needed is a re-examination of the tradition of aesthetic philosophy - an effort to trace its underlying concerns, which are by no means identical with its ostensible content. Aesthetics reveals a wide-ranging and fundamental concern with mediating dimensions of sense, intuition, imagination, understanding and ethics, and with articulating a particularly human space of freedom and community. In my view, the real subject of aesthetics extends well beyond a straightforward focus on specialised aspects of qualitative judgement (the experience of the beautiful and the sublime) and theorisation of an associated field of cultural production (art) to engage a very diverse and holistically inclined set of philosophical issues and interests. The notions of art, sublimity and beauty represent exemplary instances of aesthetically relevant phenomena rather than the underlying constitutive features of aesthetic philosophy.

I regularly go for a swim in the local ocean pool. There may not be anything particularly beautiful or sublime in the experience. It is certainly not a work of art (though, of course, it could be conceived in these terms). It is just a moment of leisure, but it is here that I imaginatively reconcile myself to every other aspect of my working day and domestic life. I scarcely reflect upon this, but swimming has resonance for me. It is at once a form of exercise and a means of staging an experience of freedom and self-realisation that has aesthetic implications.

This example can be criticised for its banality. If 'aesthetic relevance' is reduced to the pleasure taken in going for a swim in the local pool, what possible hope is there for aesthetically regarded practice to actually offer a critique of society and to suggest imaginative alternatives? My swimming can appear as a bogus space of ideological and experiential consolation, with no genuine critical-aesthetic significance. I acknowledge this suspicion, but wonder whether this attitude is ultimately self-

defeating, snobbishly defending what will always be a vitally compromised realm of critical autonomy and ignoring strands of contrary value within the tissue of ordinary domestic, working and leisure-time life.

If I am determined to consider the aesthetic beyond art, it is very much in terms of my sense of the dilemmas and impasses of contemporary artistic practice. These include, for instance: the tiresome playing at the limits of art; the faith in novelty, which is complicit with the rhetoric of the wider economic system; the emphasis on the productive identity of the artist, when this paradigm and the play of producer and consumer seems worth questioning; the endlessly contradictory sense of cultural possibility (critique/compromise/consolation); and the combination of high aesthetic expectations and regular artistic bathos. In contrast a consideration of the aesthetic features of wider dimensions of cultural practice has the potential to highlight the value of receptive, attentive, amateur cultural activity. Furthermore, I will argue that it enables a shift away from the theatre of disruptive cultural novelty and a corresponding rediscovery and revaluation of cultural practices of recollection, preservation and re-performance.

Just possibly, and despite its efforts to establish its credentials as a field of artistic practice, SEA is perhaps better conceived in terms of a recognition of the wider relevance of aesthetics. SEA tends to occur outside galleries, minimise the difference between artist and participant, avoid coherent formal resolution and display, and downplay any particular theatre of art, beauty, sublimity, etc. While still legibly caught up at times in the avant-garde effort to overcome artistic limits, it also manifests a shift away from the concerns of both autonomous and even radically conceived art towards practices that are deliberately trans-disciplinary, socially accessible, amateur and low-key. However tempted I may be to refer to this as an example of 'aesthetic practice', it is probably better to acknowledge that SEA demonstrates a wide and diverse range of relevance - including aesthetic relevance.

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In any case, this brief account of my stupid idea aims to explain my current interest in aesthetic philosophy. It seems to me that in order to convincingly demonstrate how aesthetics can be deployed to reconsider and revalue aspects of cultural practice, I need to consider what aesthetics means beyond our conventional conception of the field. Fortunately, this hardly demands that we explore the perverse margins of aesthetic philosophy. The wider cultural implications are evident in the main tradition itself.

Manifesto for Following

What are the implications of following? Where does following lead?

> Instead of trying at every instant to do something new.
> Instead of commenting wryly on the past.
> Instead of feeling stuck.
> Instead of lamenting the disappearance of the future.
> Instead of attending to a restrictive past.
> Instead of strictly following.
> Instead of deliberately going astray.
> Instead of imagining that following is a simple process.
> Instead of imagining that following is especially hard.
> We follow. We follow following. We follow following wherever it leads.

Following involves repetition. It involves adhering to the contours of an existing line or path. It does not initiate something *ex nihilo*, but takes up with the existent – in this case not with a sense of irony, but with an attitude of humility and curiosity. The humility is nothing self-negating. It simply attends to what is before it without any feeling of regret – without any sense that something is missing.

Following adheres – lightly, not absolutely – to existing lines. It waywardly follows them, that it is to say its following also creates a line – one that no matter how one tries is never exactly identical to

the line followed. In this sense, following includes the necessity of passing astray.

Following involves tracing the potential of the non-original within the aesthetic, to recognise it as source of movement and inspiration.

4. Stumbling Upon Palaces

Plato's *Republic* is centrally concerned with how things are best arranged. It considers the just constitution of the city and the soul. Similarly, Kant's account of aesthetic judgement conceives a realm of mediate experience in which human capacities are reconciled to establish a lived basis for individual identity and freedom, as well as social and political community. My aim in this chapter is to consider how features of aesthetics suggest potentially more sustainable modes of experience and social organisation. Aesthetic philosophy describes an alternative context of value that hinges on reflective engagement with particular things and the ecology of the whole.

Aesthetic Judgement

Published nine years after his *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) and two years after his *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788), Kant's *Critique of Judgement* (1790) develops a notion of aesthetic judgement that mediates between the realms of thought, moral action and sensible experience. His aim is to identify points of association and to describe a scenario of reconciliation, so that in the end human identity is not split along absolute categorical lines but is rendered integral and whole. To clarify the place of aesthetic judgement within Kant's overall philosophy, it is worth attempting a brief summary of his overall themes.

Within this context, it may be worth recalling the fellow I had lying in bed many pages ago, the one who woke up, wandered the fields, played music, etc. Imagine him waking just before dawn. It is dark outside. How can he be sure that the sun will soon rise? Is this guaranteed by ideal and invariable laws that we can confidently know, or is it simply something that happens every day - an empirical regularity that we just expect to go on happening?

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This question of what we can confidently know and not know lies at the heart of Kant's philosophy. Kant aims to resolve the conflict between traditions of philosophical rationalism and empiricism to suggest a new epistemological foundation - a new means of conceiving not only how we can confidently know things but also the limits of our knowledge. These two are closely related. Kant acknowledges that the phenomenal world is unknowable, however, on this basis recognises that experience is not primarily grounded at an empirical level (via phenomena), but instead in terms of internal conditions of thought (the *noumenal* level). Rather than conceiving space, time and causation as external things that we gradually learn about through experience, Kant argues that these notions are internally grounded cognitive affordances. He describes them as *a priori* (because they precede experience) and synthetic (because they structure our experience of the perceptual manifold). So, while we can know nothing about the truth or otherwise of the immediately perceptible world, we can certainly understand and describe the truth conditions of our internally coherent and perceptually realised faculties of thought. In these terms, our fellow lying awake in bed anticipates the dawn less on the basis of habit and more because of the way in which his and our experience of the world is constituted. This epistemological conception, which is the main topic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, has the advantage of establishing a noetic realm of truth, yet the simultaneous disadvantage of bracketing any notion of the immediate truth of phenomena. It allows us to know but qualifies our close imbrication in a coherent phenomenal world.

Kant's second major work, the *Critique of Practical Reason*, is concerned with ethics rather than epistemology, but is still centrally focused on the issue of the *a priori*. Kant conceives the basis of morality in terms of an *a priori*, but not primarily rational, intuition; the felt acknowledgement of the need to respect other people - to act to them as you would have them act to yourself. Kant terms this recognisably Christian principle a 'categorical imperative'.

Importantly, Kant regards both epistemological and moral reason as planes of determination. Both highlight the shaping influence of *a priori* features of human being. In contrast, in his third critique (the *Critique of Judgement*), Kant describes a plane of human freedom. Aesthetic judgement mobilises a mediation of the various faculties of cognition in relation to the sensible manifold. It reconciles divergent features of human cognition/experience and frames a context of collective commonality.

Kant writes during the period that the notion of aesthetics obtains distinct philosophical identity, evolving from a general to a more specific meaning. The first meaning links to the Ancient Greek etymological roots of the term 'aesthetic', in which *aesthesis* refers to the field of sensible experience generally (in contrast to *noesis*, which pertains to the world of intelligible experience). The second, emerging modern conception of aesthetics focuses on the issue of taste – with how felt judgements of the beautiful and sublime are made. It is important to recognise that these two notions are closely associated. An overall concern with sensate being frames a particular concern with how taste negotiates a relation between the realm of subjective affect and aspects of metaphysical universality.

German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten (2014) coins the term 'aesthetics' in the mid-18th century to refer to the first conception. He outlines a science of sensible cognition. Drawing upon Leibniz's notion (1989) of cognition as a tiered totality, in which a continuity is recognised between layers of confused sensation and the most clear and distinct rational understanding of phenomena, Baumgarten aims to clarify the blurry logic of sensible cognition. This involves questioning the long tradition of Western philosophical thought that insists upon an absolute gulf between sensible experience and rational understanding. Plato, for example, associates sensible experience with illusion and privileges the truth of the noetic idea. In a similar manner, Descartes founds coherent human identity in the *cogito ergo sum* – the 'I think therefore I am' that can never be subject to doubt (1968). He conceives thought as a realm of certainty, escaping the potentially illusory nature of

sensible experience. Most famously, as a thought experiment, Descartes conceives an evil genie who can misrepresent the world to us as a sensible dream but can never confuse us about the self-presence of thought.

Kant first employs the term 'aesthetic' within the context of this overall concern with the relationship between sense and thought. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant complicates the Cartesian binary division between mind and body. He describes a curious plane of sensation within thought. He argues that while experience links to our sensible interaction with the world, it is also grounded in an interior inner sense. Kant describes a 'transcendental aesthetic' that precedes sense as such and any relation to the external world. He conceives this as the appearance of the phenomenal horizon within the native grounds of consciousness. The 'transcendental aesthetic' is cast as a layer of interior sensation in which the *a priori* itself, as the fundamental capacity for space-time consciousness and experience, becomes manifest. In this manner the 'transcendental aesthetic' informs our capacity to experience anything whatsoever. Still, despite its meta-level identity, this inner sense of space and time must also be experienced. It must be intuitively represented – here not by ordinary sensible affordances, but at a purely *noetic* level. Kant's notion of the transcendental aesthetic works to both distance the *a priori* character of space-time consciousness from a necessary relation to physiological sense as well as to acknowledge that an internal field of sense is intuitively available to us.

It is in relation to this effort to describe a *noetic* dimension of sense that Kant explicitly distinguishes the classical meaning of aesthetics from the modern German meaning as the 'critique of taste' (2007, p.60). Within a decade, however, Kant shifts towards the second conception. Kant conceives aesthetic judgement (the taste for the beautiful and the sublime) as an internal free play of the faculties of imagination and understanding. At the same time this transition in meaning is less abrupt than we may imagine. While it is tempting to envisage that the 'transcendental aesthetic' relates to the conditions of all consciousness, whereas aesthetic

judgement relates to a specialised order of experience separate from properly epistemological concerns, actually both conceptions are concerned with the paradox of an internal sphere of appearance and intuition that draws upon and suspends dimensions of sensible engagement. From this perspective, the aesthetic of the *Critique of Judgement* can be regarded as a more focused examination of the transcendental aesthetic of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. If Kant intently restricts the implications of the 'free play' of aesthetic judgement - if he separates it from all aspects of interested engagement - it is because this mode of thought/non-thought deeply affects aspects of rational cognition and epistemology. Indeed, the closer we look, the more evidently the general (sense-focused) and specific (taste-focused) notions of the aesthetic appear intimately entangled.

Analytic of the Beautiful

In order to clarify Kant's conception of aesthetic judgment it is worth reviewing a key portion of the *Critique of Judgement*, the 'Analytic of the Beautiful'. This section proceeds in a series of four so called 'moments'.

First Moment

Kant argues that aesthetic experience has its basis in imagination rather than understanding. In his terms, imagination involves a reflective engagement with the sensible world, whereas understanding relates to the inner, rational conditions of thought. Imagination has a receptive relation to sensible experience, while understanding is fundamentally *noetic* (thought-based and bound by a conceptual logic). While this link to the senses could be conceived as engaging aspects of desire and appetitive pleasure, according to Kant this is not the case for aesthetic experience. Beauty does not stem from a desiring relation to the world - a relation that objectifies and consumes things - but instead has an entirely subjective basis. It engenders a disinterested response. If we take pleasure in the beauty of a chair it is not because we wish

to sit on it or find it comfortable, but rather because it triggers an internal reflection that suspends the ordinary conditions of interaction and cognition. In order to explain, Kant distinguishes three modes of pleasure. The first he terms 'gratification'. It involves taking sensible delight in a thing. The second he terms 'esteem'. It involves conceiving an object in terms of its rational form and usefulness. The third, the experience of the beautiful, involves a freedom from the determination of either sensory stimuli or the impersonal dictates of reason or ethics. It is characterised by a pleasure that is freely and subjectively constituted. Kant describes the experience of beauty as one of 'favour', arguing that 'FAVOUR is the only free liking.' (2008, p41)

> *Only by what one does heedless of enjoyment, in complete freedom and independently of what nature could possibly procure for him, does he give to his life, as the existence of a person, an absolute worth. '(2008, p40)*

Kant's conception of the experience of beauty provides a profoundly subjective basis for freedom. It suggests a protected site of human identity that is uncorrupted by the wider forces of modernity, which are increasingly characterised by means-end value and an exploitative relation to nature and social relationships. Kant says nothing of this, but his conception is legible in these terms, with aesthetics appearing as a reassuring space of genuine humanity and freedom.

Second Moment

Kant makes two arguments in this section. He argues firstly, and somewhat perversely, that the subjective and disinterested tenor of the beautiful provides the basis for the universality of aesthetic judgements. Because there is no sense of obtaining benefit from the beautiful thing, our assessment of its qualities gains a universal character. This universality - this sense that anybody would regard the thing as beautiful - is not logically demonstrated according to Kant, but rather 'imputed' (2008, p.47). Leaving aside the question

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of the adequacy of this transition from the particular and subjective to the universal, the key point here lies in the effort to conceive an association between a private form of reflective engagement and the possibility of human community. It suggests that we are linked together less through our practical activities and interactions than through the universality of our aesthetic response to the world. The aesthetic is portrayed as not only internally constitutive in terms of establishing our inner human identity, but also in terms of conceiving a common humanity. If this reconciliation was enabled in the past through social mechanisms, for example, through accepted customs and institutions, clearly demarcated social roles and a common cultural heritage, these traditional mechanisms are precisely threatened by modernity. Aesthetics emerges as a new and strangely asocial means of conceiving the ties that bind people together.

Kant's second argument is more complex. He suggests that the judgement of the beautiful precedes the pleasure we take in it. Our pleasure in the beautiful does not hinge on the sensory character of what we imaginatively experience, because that would imply an aspect of external determination. Instead it stems from what Kant describes as a 'free play' between our faculties of imagination and understanding. Kant suggests that aesthetic experience is neither precisely sensory-imaginative nor conceptual, but rather represents an open and animated form of cognition that is irreducible to ordinary categories of practical or rational being. More than being anything in particular, it emerges as a space of mediation. The pleasure in the beautiful is linked precisely to the experience of a dynamic and unfixed mediation between the cognitive faculties of imagination and understanding.

Third Moment

The third moment develops a notion of the formal character of aesthetic experience. This links to the argument in the previous moment that pleasure in the beautiful has its basis in a free play of the faculties. It is not something that resides in objects, nor is it

something that can be neatly represented in conceptual terms. It relates instead to an unsettled cognitive energetics that engages aspects of form at an intuitive, and affective level. Kant associates this experience of form with the suspension of ordinary purposive existence. Beauty represents an end-in-itself, with only a single goal - to maintain its unresolved free play. It reveals, in Kant's terms, a 'purposiveness without purpose' (2008, p.51).

We can recognise in this restless dynamic a mode of being that at once echoes the forces of innovation in modern society and resists the reduction of all human and material relations to means-end rationality. Also evident here is the ambiguity of the notion of form, which suggests something clear and relatively permanent but that is associated with a fundamental experience of flux and irresolution. Consider how this anticipates Baudelaire's famous statement about the nature of modernity, written some seventy years later: 'Modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immovable' (2010, p.17). The notion of aesthetic form aims precisely to mediate between these two dimensions of modern experience.

Fourth Moment

The fourth and final moment in the section on beauty returns to the issue of universality. It argues that aesthetic experience represents a form of 'common sense' (2008, p.68). Within this context, common sense has an unexpected meaning. It does not refer to habitual patterns of comprehending the world, but rather to a felt, aesthetic ground for social being. Aesthetic experience constitutes a field of human commonality that provides an essential foundation for social community. This inevitably involves a dimension of paradox. Aesthetic judgement, according to Kant, involves no explicit laws - and categorically cannot involve them. But this is also what informs its social legislative role. Aesthetic judgement provides the basis for law and community precisely by falling outside law itself - by representing a realm of freedom that makes law meaningful. Avoiding both the blindness of sensible

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desire (as material causation) and the subsumption beneath logical and ethical principles that shapes rational thought and moral conduct, the field of aesthetic taste enables a felt alignment between human freedom and the expression of necessity.

Kant makes one further argument in this moment. Kant suggests that the aesthetic imagination prefers things that correspond to its own freedom - that are dynamic and irregular; wild nature providing the archetype. Describing the Sumatran rainforest, Kant writes, 'nature subject to no constraint of artificial rules, and lavish, as it there is, in its luxuriant variety can provide constant nourishment for his taste' (2008, p.73). A natural accord is evident between the free play of aesthetic cognition and the organic multiplicity and dynamism of nature. This informs a conception of artistic genius that maps a vital feature of the human to aspects of the material and sensible world that would otherwise fall altogether outside human comprehension. Genius appears as the germ of wild nature within the human and a channeling of natural dynamism.

Openings

While, from a modern critical perspective, Kant's conception has obvious limitations, positioning aesthetic experience as an autonomous sphere of disinterested engagement and as a universal human capacity (rather than, for instance, as an historically legible form of bourgeois self-understanding), it nonetheless provides a compelling means of conceiving the integral political character of aesthetics. I draw inspiration particularly from his account of the reflective energetics of aesthetic judgement and its pertinence to everyday experience. Kant qualifies the apparently sensible focus of aesthetics, regarding aesthetic judgement as a complex space of intersection, cognitive play and indeterminable representation. While bracketing the sensible, he ends up describing a realm of engagement that eludes neatly binary determination, projecting a space of protean thought and action that includes also their

opposites - the unthought and the inactive. In relation to the issue of everyday experience and unlike significant strands of the later tradition (most notably Hegel (1993)), Kant avoids restricting aesthetic experience to fine art. He plainly describes its relevance to the experience of the natural world and ordinary life. Overall, for all its ambivalent and even contradictory implications, Kant's notion of aesthetic judgement incorporates vital aspects of critical, social-transformative potential.

His conception of aesthetics depends upon a set of clearly delineated categories (inner and outer, subjective and objective, sensible and intelligible), while also seeking to reconcile them. This has the double consequence of both further delineating aspects of categorical difference and also rendering them uncertain and ambiguous. The aesthetic, as a notion, takes shape less as intrinsically substantive than as profoundly relational - at once reinforcing the system and representing its point of undoing. Furthermore, the metaphor of judgement is deployed in an ambivalent fashion. It evokes a model of legal arbitration, while at the same time conceiving a mode experience in which rational and moral law are suspended and human identity and freedom are made manifest in terms that exceed any scope for determination.

Although Kant is often cast as a conservative figure who works to reconcile differences, there is potential to regard his system otherwise; not simply in terms of its complex, often claustrophobic architecture and its meta-level understanding of the underlying conditions of human experience, but in terms of its elaboration of openings. While the system seems focused, at multiple levels, on homeostasis, this is only inasmuch as it also frames an energetics – a playing at the limit within the horizon of human finitude. This is evident in terms of the close alignment between the following themes:

1. the negative *noumena*;

2. the self-reflexivity of aesthetic pleasure;

3. the sublime as a play between finite and infinite;

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4. the conception of fecund nature as a model for human genius.

The following observations extend beyond the specific arguments in the 'Analytic of the Beautiful', but are pertinent to them in terms of demonstrating how the aesthetic links to other aspects of Kant's philosophy and his wider areas of concern.

1. **Negative noumena**: the notion of the *noumenal*, as we have seen, refers specifically to objects of thought rather than sensible intuition. Plato's philosophy has a strongly *noetic* focus. Plato casts the *noumenal* space of mathematical ideality as true and actual, while phenomenal reality appears as a space of illusion. Kant draws upon this ancient notion of the *noumenal*, while altering and extending it. Instead of simply and directly indicating ideality as such, the *noumenal* signifies for Kant that which is directly, intelligibly intuited without any recourse to sensible intuition. While this notion captures the Platonic sense of ideality, which Kant describes as a positive *noumena*, it also encompasses precisely the opposite – a negative noumena; thought's self-awareness of its own limits, of all that it cannot possibly know. How can these two understandings be related? They are associated because both positive and negative *noumena* elude phenomenal experience and because each represent planes of thought. The positive noumena imagines directly intelligible, ideal objects, while the negative noumena conceives 'nothing' as such – or more precisely that which is other to and exceeds thought. The Kantian notion of the negative *noumena* emerges in relation to thought's meta-level recognition of its own limits and its capacity to posit this beyond as a form of thought. The notion of 'the unknowable thing in itself' motions outwards to the withdrawal and intrinsic excess of the world beyond thought. More precisely, the negative *noumena* names the thinking of this space as a limit and form of negation: 'The concept of a *noumenon* is, therefore, only a limiting concept,

and intended to keep the claims of sensibility within proper bounds, and is therefore only of negative use' (CPR, p. 261). In summary, the negative *noumena* emerges within thought as an aspect of its restless dynamism. It signals both a limit and also an internal relation to excess that is protean and infinite. This corresponds closely to how Kant conceives the general character of aesthetic cognition, as well as to his specific conception of the play of sublime thought and the notions of nature and genius.

2. **Self-reflexive aesthetic pleasure**: Kant argues that aesthetic pleasure has meta-level character. It stems from a free play of the faculties of imagination and understanding, and involves a prolongation of indeterminacy. Kant explains that the faculty of imagination involves the receptive contemplation of phenomenal experience. This contemplation only obtains aesthetic value inasmuch as it also has an active dimension, inasmuch as it works over phenomena, inasmuch as it discovers within them a sense of curious, intransitive purpose. For this play of interpretation to become aesthetic, for it to discover a coherent formal character, it must also involve the faculty of understanding. If the understanding is all about applying concepts to phenomenal experience, and if aesthetics is precisely about delaying any reduction to concepts and maintaining a pleasurable energetics of irresolution, then how can we conceive the role of understanding here? This is where the notion of the negative *noumena* becomes relevant. Aesthetic contemplation is thought finding the means to think beyond its own limits, yet not to represent this field substantively so much as negatively - more as a self-reflexive energy than as something known. This raises the issue, once again, of how the aesthetic can be bracketed as a special form of cognition. While the aesthetic certainly characterises a particular form of judgement (informing statements of the kind, 'this apple is beautiful'), it would seem to have more general cognitive relevance. Arguably, aesthetic play – the

ambivalent awareness that it enables – provides the very ground for the division between the phenomenal and *noumenal*. It is what shapes the prospect and non-experience of negatively cast excess. It stages the *noumenal* relation as intrinsic not only to the experience of aesthetic pleasure but to cognition generally.

3. **Limit play**: the sublime, for Kant, describes the intimate relation between the recognition of limits and their capacity for overcoming. Importantly, overcoming is not a consequence of putting an end to limits, but of playing upon and exacerbating them. The gap, for instance, between the *noumenal* and the phenomenal is never literally overcome, but their relation is staged within the context of sublime aesthetic experience in such a way that an infinite prospect is opened up within thought – within thought's own capacity to reflect upon itself, within its own capacity to link collapse to overcoming. The vastness of a huge ocean storm - its terrible chaos - becomes pleasurable inasmuch as it presses us to think beyond number and coherent form. It serves as a metaphor for our own *noumenal* capacity, which is the very energy of thought. Thought is not simply recognition. It is not simply a robotic work of categorisation, of applying models that are already known. It involves an endless play at the limit that has its basis in aesthetic cognition. It is interesting to note that it is precisely in terms of an interruption to this play of limit and overcoming that climate change affects our sense of human possibility. In manifesting the cataclysmic influence of the human (as the Anthropocene), the infinite becomes less pertinent. There is at once no longer the infinite prospect of nature nor the infinitude of 'man'.

4. **Nature and genius**: at one level, Kant associates nature with the field of mechanical determination – with material things blindly interacting with one another. This is distinguished from the realm of human identity and

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freedom. Yet at another level, he represents nature as the very model for the protean dynamic of human thought and being. The notion of Nature as a whole is, of course, a concept. It is something thought, but it also refers to something that structurally exceeds thought. Philosophy has a deictic character. It points. It necessarily employs concepts to point, but this is not to say that everything it points towards is reducible to these constructs. We do not encompass nature with our concept of nature. Our understanding always falls short, is always limited, and is composed in terms of this limit. In its dynamic, excessive, irreducible character, nature provides the traditional model for aesthetic genius. It figures as the active principle in matter – that which animates it. This is not simply as a negatively *noumenal* species of thought, but also as a challenging of thought itself. The notion of nature is both a projection of thought – an invention of thought's external basis - and a means of pointing to a field irreducible to these endless self-reflexive circles. The genius of art is conceived in terms of harbouring the tension of the *noumenal* – finding phenomenal metaphors for this relation, yet less as coherent images than as gestures of indeterminate opening. The Kantian notion of artistic genius charts links between the negative *noumena*, the dynamic irresolution of aesthetic contemplation and the protean purposiveness of nature.

If these various alignments across the features I have listed never quite achieve adequate focus within Kant – if they are to some extent repressed – this is because Kant's overriding concern is to provide a unified account. His critical project involves a double motion of questioning previous models and recommending a new model that enables things to roughly remain in place. Within this context, the aesthetic appears mainly as vehicle of reconciliation. In an Aristotelian manner, it is associated with the logic of catharsis. It belatedly ties together the dimensions of being that the wider philosophical system has so painstakingly delineated.
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Furthermore, while I have emphasised features of aesthetic free play, Kant's notion of aesthetic judgement also summons up the thinking of authority – of court, judge and judicial decision. Any sense of freedom relates to an experience of the authoritative arrangement of the world, which is at once beautifully and properly composed.

Aesthetic judgement not only rescues Kant's overall system but exposes its inherent gaps. It not only manifests limits but insistently plays at them. Its structure is cyclical. It demonstrates a carnival logic in which social transformation occurs within the context of a staged revolution, and the humour and theatricality of any action is constantly informed by its seriousness. While this can be regarded as a paradigm of consolation and immobility, it also works to re-conceive change and social transformation, which no longer appears exclusively in terms of the purity of entirely novel events and deliberate critical actions, but also in terms of the texture and internal play of difference within the existing system. The latter is never so homogenous and integrally coherent as imagined.

We have seen that Kant conceives aesthetic judgement as a form of common sense - a mode of apperception and reflective engagement generally available and demonstrating a common basis for human freedom. What is common in the experience of the beautiful? How can it provide a basis for commonality? How particularly is human commonality to discover a meaningful ground in experience that is cast as disengaged and subjectively constituted? And how does this paradoxically oriented sense relate to wider commonality, to any sense of our integral relation to other people and the wider world of nature and unthinking things? Kant conceives a form of experience that links the interiority of affective, reflective response to an open and curious relation to being. He discovers this experience not as an exotic elsewhere or as a distant and lofty prospect, but as something accessible within the texture of ordinary life. However, the evidence of beauty is hardly simple. It is founded on a dynamic relation to things that renders an uncertain relationship between normally distinct fields

of interiority and exteriority, activity and passivity, sensible and formal cognition, particularity and universality, distinct appearance and the prospect of negation. Kant's common sense is both internally complex as a putative transcendental reflective capacity and socially (externally) complex because it can discover no other means other than a profound turn inward to discover a basis for the social relation. This aesthetic conception of community is, of course, strongly marked by the contradictory conditions of modern society - most famously characterised by Tonnies in his 1887 analysis of the passage from *Gemeinschaft* (traditional organic society) to *Gesellschaft* (modern urban, mediated, alienated society) (1957). Aesthetic judgment appears as a means of discovering an elusive social commonality within historical circumstances in which the social itself is no longer so tangibly manifest - and where, should it become manifest, it appears less as anything reassuring than as an imposition or fearful threat (large armies, swarms of refugees, anonymous urban crowds).

I will not pursue this here, but there is a clear need to think through Kant's conception of aesthetic judgment in less strictly subjective and transcendental terms - to envisage the potential, for instance, for communal forms of aesthetic experience that structure processes of open and participatory reflective engagement. In some ways this seems a relatively straightforward correction to Kant's schema, but I suspect it encounters all kinds of awkward issues of implementation (linked to the influence of deeply entrenched aspects of bourgeois preconception and bias). The other possibility, of course, is to abandon the aesthetic altogether, to search for a basis for community in other terms. I return to this possibility in the final chapter of this book, as I acknowledge - too late no doubt - an awkward level of discrepancy between ethical and aesthetic aspects of value.

Kant's Examples

But enough at the general philosophical level, let's attempt another way of making sense of Kant's conception of aesthetic judgement.

What if we were to approach Kant's theory of the beautiful empirically rather than transcendentally? What if we were to consider his concrete examples rather than his categorical distinctions and logic? This would enable us to recognise the beautiful as a mode of experience, with specific conditions and features. It would also us enable us to consider the notion of the beautiful not simply as an hermetically sealed philosophical concept but also as a heuristic means of indicating aspects of experience that are at once evident and indefinable.

The experience of the beautiful takes shape not only as something integral and composed, but also as a field of uncertainty, of questioning. It both delineates an aspect of experience and emerges in response to the *aporia* of whatever it is that experience represents. It suggests that the experiential field is never absolutely circumscribed by any given social-historically shaped conceptual system. Experience includes a surplus, which enables an interplay of underlying constraints and affordances with particular and constantly changing phenomenal conditions.

Here is a rough list of the specific examples Kant employs in the 'Analytic of the Beautiful':

– Art ('the concert we hear, the poem submitted to our judgement' (p.44), musical 'fantasias (without a theme), and, indeed, all music that is not set to words' (p.60))

– Abstract patterns ('free patterns, lines aimlessly intertwining' (p.39))

– Architecture, furniture and gardens ('building' (p.35) (p.44), 'the palace I see before me' (p.36), 'house' (p.47), 'a building that would immediately please the eye' (p.61), 'a beautiful garden,' (p.63), 'a beautiful suite of furniture', 'a beautiful residence' (p.63), 'in ornamental gardens, in the decoration of rooms, in all kinds of tasteful implements' (p.73))

- Clothing and personal decoration ('the dress that person has on' (p.44), 'dress' (p.47), 'New Zealanders with their tattooing' (p.61))

- Colour ('A mere colour, such as the green of a plot of grass' (p.55), 'all simple colours are regarded as beautiful inasmuch as they are pure' (p.56) but more relevant to taste at the level of 'design' than their immediate 'charm') (p.56))

- General ('a beautiful view' (p.63))

- Nature ('flowers' (p.39), 'the rose at which I am looking' (p.35), 'flower' (p.47), 'If in forest I light upon a plot of grass, round which trees stand in a circle' (p.58), 'Flowers', 'Many birds (the parrot, the hummingbird, the bird of paradise) and a number of crustacea' (p.60), 'beautiful flowers', 'a beautiful tree' (p.63), 'the free beauties of nature', 'nature subject to no constraint of artificial rules, and lavish, as it there Sumatra is, in its luxuriant variety', 'a bird's song' (p.73))

- Ornamentation ('the frames of pictures or the drapery on statues, or the colonnades of palaces', regarded as 'adjuncts', 'but can enter into the composition of the beautiful form', as long as not merely and extraneously charming 'finery' (p.57) – the complexities and paradoxes here are of course the focus of Jacques Derrida's *The Truth in Painting* (1987), 'designs a la *grecque*, foliage for framework or on wall-papers' (p.60))

- Sound ('a mere tone (as distinguished from sound or noise), like that of violin' (p.55) but really only properly subject to the judgement of pure taste at the formal level of 'composition' (p.56))

My organisation of the various examples is not rigorous. If we were attempting a stricter grouping, it may distinguish between those that relate to general features of sensation (vision, colour, sound, abstraction) and those that are more vividly particular

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('Many birds (the parrot, the hummingbird, the bird of paradise) and a number of crustacea'), or that place a greater emphasis on the difference between the naturally encountered and the humanly manufactured. The array of examples traces the inner landscape and exotic boundaries of the European world view. It is oriented variously towards domestically composed aspects of experience, purely articulated features of taste and the exotic field of 'New Zealanders with their tattooing' and Sumatra 'in its luxuriant variety'. The relationship between the domestic, the serenely abstract and the dynamically fecund emerges precisely within the context of European colonial expansion. Aesthetic experience is conceived in terms of the three attractors of the intimate and known field of home, the sublime proximity of (rational) abstraction and the faraway world of exotic nature and peoples. These appear as three vital sources of inspiration.

My aim, however, is less to categorise Kant's examples than to emphasise their wide-ranging character - including everything from art to the everyday, wild nature to ordinary garden flowers and decorative household things. There is, in this sense, alongside its imposing colonial breadth, a democratic quality to Kant's conception. Beauty is not something only available to the wealthy and aesthetically refined. It is generally accessible and everywhere encountered. Nonetheless, it clearly assumes scope for reflection. The experience of the beautiful involves, however briefly, a suspension of ordinary activity - the small luxury of sensitively attending to the world without any aim other than reflective pleasure. In this manner, it inscribes aspects of social difference - between those who have the leisure to observe and take pleasure and those who have no scope to do so. Yet, this can also be regarded as an effort to acknowledge the general possibility of distracted and absorbed experience, even for those not permitted this freedom. Aesthetic experience is less an entirely removed thing only available to the special few than something that crops up in the midst of experience - within and against the grain of ordinary life. Kant sketches a sphere of human freedom that not even slavery or imprisonment can compromise. While this can be

regarded as poor consolation, more positively it represents an alternative basis of general human value with the potential to unsettle the oppressive systems that render wider freedom untenable.

It should be emphasised that Kant does not set out to describe beautiful things as such but rather particular experiences of the beautiful. Beauty, for Kant, is not an intrinsic quality of things (despite the appeal of 'free patterns', 'a birds song' and 'a number of crustacea'). It is something that emerges subjectively and without determination. This lack of determination is a sign of human freedom and highlights the inner terrain of contemplative dynamism. In this respect, almost anything can become the ostensible content of aesthetic experience. Kant provides a range of characteristic examples but does not set strict limits or make any effort to categorise the field of beautiful things. Linked to this, he says nothing about ugliness. He does not describe ugly phenomena or even the experience of ugliness. Rather than representing a positive alternative, ugliness is neglected altogether. In this respect, Kant draws perhaps upon Edmund Burke's aesthetic scheme (2015), which argues that pleasure and displeasure are not a complementary pair. Pleasure, in Burke's view, is not simply the removal of pain, but has its own distinct features. In a similar manner, the experience of the beautiful has no simple opposite. A lack of beauty need not entail ugliness, but rather simply the irrelevance in particular circumstances of the category of the beautiful. Instead of beauty there may be just ordinary categorical cognition or sensibly determined attraction or repulsion. All of this suggests that nothing is specifically excluded from aesthetic engagement. There is no hierarchy of things, with some more beautiful than others, and others regarded as intrinsically ugly and altogether alien to aesthetic response.

What emerges most distinctly from Kant's examples is a specific affective attitude - a lack of motivated attention and intention. It is not as though Kant seeks out the experience of the beautiful or even conceives a straightforward path toward that experience. It is something that inadvertently happens and that almost any aspect

of life can summon. The experience of the beautiful entails a lucid passivity, an open, sensible and formally sensitive relation to things. Beauty suddenly, almost unexpectedly appears. Kant writes of 'the palace I see before me'. There is no account of actively seeking out the palace, of deliberately discovering it, rather the experience of beauty is simply manifest beyond the ordinary exigencies of practical life. The statement particularly de-emphasises any sense of Kant's agency. He does not write, 'I see a palace before me'. Instead he is subject to the palace, although in a relation that entails no determination, that depends at once upon his inner subjectivity and an attentive relation to the world. As though anticipating Heidegger's notion of the 'clearing' (1993, p.177), Kant writes, 'If in a forest I light upon a plot of grass, round which trees stand in a circle'. The beauty of the clearing is intimately linked to it being alighted upon - to it framing no specific demand and involving an unpredictable alignment of inner experience and the natural configuration of things. This congruence can never be precisely coordinated, only ever encountered.

Implications

What are the implications of Kant's conception of aesthetic judgment?

From a positive perspective, aesthetics conceives a means of rendering human existence whole, of reconciling divisions and shaping a felt, subjective basis for integral identity. In its disinterested and universal character, aesthetics also provides the basis for social commonality and community. Aesthetic judgement portrays a receptive mode of being that discovers freedom as an attentive, reflective regard for both the particular and the whole. It approaches the texture and arrangement of the world less as anything determinable than as an open field of engagement. Human freedom is represented not as profitable motion and growth, but rather as involving aspects of contemplation, repetition and play. The aesthetic implies detachment and distance - but less

from the world as such than from aspects of self-interest and preconceived view. Kant's notion of aesthetic judgement coheres not only within the tradition of philosophical efforts to conceive the complex unity of philosophy and lived experience, but also, very evidently, in relation to features of emerging modernity. It indicates a strand of alternative value with urgent relevance for how we approach contemporary dilemmas and opportunities. Aesthetics is ethical inasmuch as it envisages not only a mode of experience but an attitude and practice informing how we live. While it may not describe a practical program for transformative change, it can vitally inform our conception of what this program involves. Aesthetics provides an underlying context of value and a model of open and reflective being and interaction that has wide relevance towards evolving new social and economic conditions.

In illustration, let's imagine an ethics and politics that draws inspiration from Kantian aesthetics. Adopting a simplified language, it may call for an overall adjustment in our attitudes and modes of being. In this manner, the aesthetic can contribute to a critique of contemporary capitalist values and assist in suggesting beneficial alternatives.

Aesthetic Program for Social Transformation

1. Prioritise individual and communal contemplative and creative life rather than economic activity and growth.

2. Emphasise general, reflective and custodial features of individual and collective identity.

3. Think and act ecologically (with a regard for both the particular and the whole).

This is all very well, but the implications of Kant's conception can also be conceived very differently. Regarded negatively, aesthetics appears less a viable alternative to interested and exploitative modes of thought and action than their structural complement and alibi. From this perspective, Kant conceives a limited space of reflective inaction, freedom and holistic identity on the condition

that it never obtain extensive political consequence. Instead, aesthetics represents a bracketed, privatised and privileged realm of consoling value. Furthermore, rather than envisaging the social negotiation of aspects of identity and arrangement, Kant's aesthetic schema describes an asocial basis for commonality and agreement. Commonality is represented via the paradox of a subjectively grounded universal capacity. In this manner, the promise of political implication is predicated upon the absence of anything genuinely political *per se*.

The tradition of critical debate proceeding from Kant's aesthetic philosophy is informed by these competing interpretations, which establish less two schools of opposed thought than an overall attitude of ambivalence. Debate veers between hope and disappointment, often within a single sentence. The next chapter focuses on a few representative, mainly affirmative conceptions of the political and social potential of aesthetics.

5. This or Another Time

I will make no effort to properly survey traditions of debate about the political implications of Kantian aesthetics. Instead, my aim is to consider just a small number of significant examples that emphasise positive implications - while also, at times, incorporating critical suspicion of any simply affirmative notion of disinterested and autonomous aesthetic experience. Schiller, Adorno and Ranciere provide influential political readings of aesthetics, while Heidegger and Dewey offer more idiosyncratic conceptions, suggesting affinities between aesthetics and dimensions of ecological justice.

Intervention from Elsewhere: Schiller

The social and political implications of Kant's aesthetic conception are only latently evident within the *Critique of Judgement*. Kant focuses on the transcendental conditions of human cognition and experience. However, just three years later, Schiller distills very clear social and political implications. In his *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1793), Schiller conceives aesthetic experience as a vehicle for enabling a genuine and emancipated collective social life. Responding to the contemporary barbarism of the French Revolution's Reign of Terror, Schiller argues that society is not ready for the political emancipation that the revolution promises. In his view, the success of any political revolution depends upon something more basic - an interior revolution of sensibility that reconciles our intellectual, ethical and sensible capacities. People must discover their inner subjective harmony before any harmonious collectivity can emerge. The aesthetic education of man promises an internal political transformation: 'it is through Beauty that we arrive at Freedom' (2004, p.27).

Schiller draws striking parallels between aspects of philosophical reconciliation and the political organisation of society. Whereas Kant writes generally of an aesthetic 'common sense', Schiller considers how commonality can transition from the transcendental to the actual, rendering universal features of our disposition as the basis for the modern political state.

> *Every individual man, it may be said, carries in disposition and determination a pure ideal man within himself, with whose unalterable unity it is the great task of his existence, throughout all his vicissitudes, to harmonise. This pure human being, who may be recognised more less distinctly in every person, is represented by the State, the objective and, so to say, canonical form in which the diversity of persons endeavours to unite itself (2004, p.31).*

In a very Platonic style, Schiller demonstrates a confident idealism, insisting that abstract ideality informs the structure of real human identity, social relations and systems. Yet he also acknowledges the difficulty of aligning the ideal and the real, referring to the 'great task', 'vicissitudes' and 'endeavours'. The transposition of the metaphysical conditions to real politics appears both necessary and jarring - manifesting an incompatible gap as much as any potential space of reconciliation.

Schiller's account of aesthetics stems from the experience of a fractured modernity that demands new models of social identity and coherence. Arguing that reason and the existing social-political system are complicit with fragmentation, Schiller conceives a solution in 'Fine Art' (2004, p.51). The latter is envisaged as a vehicle for rendering individual and social life whole, free and meaningful. Whereas Kant describes a general notion of aesthetic experience, extending beyond art and including contemplative engagement with the everyday world (nature, domestic objects, architecture, etc.), Schiller, anticipating Hegel, concentrates on the specific aesthetic agency of art.

Art and aesthetics reveal a complex relation to time. Whereas Kant renders aesthetic experience as a liminal species of time - an

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energised suspension (separate from the practical, mobile time of interested engagement with things) - Schiller conceives the aesthetic as an intervention of the eternal within the historical. It represents an encounter between atemporal ideality and historical being.

Within this context, Schiller addresses a potential objection to his study - that it is 'unseasonable' (2004, p.25). He wonders how he can justify writing about aesthetics 'when the affairs of the moral world provide an interest that is so much keener' (2004, p.25)? While acknowledging the urgent demands of real historical circumstances, Schiller laments the distance of the present from 'the Art of the Ideal'. The contemporary period is regarded as demonstrating a base concern with matter and necessity; in this manner ignoring that 'Art is a daughter of Freedom, and must receive her commission from the needs of spirits, not from the exigency of matter' (2004, p.26). Schiller argues that the intercession of the aesthetic is timely in that it provides an effective critique of contemporary values and demonstrates that the historical concern for political freedom depends precisely upon the intervention of the untimely concern with matters of beauty.

Art is portrayed as an alien agency that intervenes just when needed; distant and incommensurable at the level of *chronos* (measured time), but integrally relevant at the level of *kairos* (decisive time). Another temporality is relevant also. Beyond the realm of historical immediacy and material unfolding, Schiller conceives the spiritual evolution of being from matter to ideality, which is realised through the moral perfection of 'Man'. He describe the awkward relationship between the exigencies of real and ideal time:

> *The great consideration is, therefore, that physical society in time may not cease for an instant while moral society is being formed in idea … When the mechanic has the works of a clock to repair, he lets the wheels run down; but the living clockwork of the State must be repaired while it is in motion (2004, p.29).*

Regarded in these terms, aesthetics makes a double intervention: firstly, in a corrupted present; and, secondly, between one notional point of human spiritual evolution (natural Man) and another that is yet to come (moral Man). This temporal schema is further complicated because Schiller conceives present dilemmas less as a result of natural causes than as a coincidence of the basely human (the 'selfish and violent' (2004, p.30) and a developed rationality that has lost vital contact with any animating primary nature:

> *So we see the spirit of the time fluctuating between perverseness and brutality, between unnaturalness and mere Nature, between superstition and moral unbelief, and it is only the equilibrium of of evil that still occasionally sets bounds to it (2004, p.37).*

A roughly historical narrative is evident, involving a tales of fragmentation, corruption and moral fall. According to Schiller, Ancient Greek society demonstrated an integral and natural relation between different aspects of human being. This naturally harmonious state was, however, unsustainable, gradually breaking down in the face of the increasing specialisation of human faculties. Some portions of society remained residually bound to brute sense ('crude, lawless impulses' (2004, p.35), others became entirely focused on narrow, instrumental goals, others towards rational abstraction, and others again toward indolence and 'depravity' (2004, p.35). Clearly legible in this portrait of the past is a critique also of contemporary society, with its exterior (colonial) horizon of savagery and its internal mass of lower classes, and its emerging bourgeoisie, intellectuals and elites. Schiller's account represents a critical portrait of nascent industrial modernity ('chained to only one single fragment of the whole', (2004, p.40)). His condemnation of the modern fragmentary focus on mechanical tasks appears in stark contrast to Plato's positively framed and obviously pre-industrial conception of social justice as involving all citizens focusing on the performance of their discrete proper roles. Schiller casts the corrupt conditions of modern

human identity and social being as a perversion, as the work of culture rather than nature:

> *It was culture itself that inflicted this wound upon modern humanity. As soon as enlarged experience and more precise speculation made necessary a sharper division of the sciences on the one hand, and on the other, the more intricate machinery of States made necessary a more rigorous dissociation of ranks and occupations, the essential bond of nature was torn apart (2004, p.39)*

Yet, conceived in a wider teleological frame, Schiller argues that this shift away from natural social-dispositional cohesion accords with a larger evolutionary scheme - the moral evolution of Man from an indistinct, holistic state to one of rational, differentiated being, and ultimately to renewed holistic identity. Within this context, contemporary fragmentation has a natural aspect. It appears as a necessary developmental phase. Schiller argues that there is no possibility of returning to the Ancient Greek model. We can only persist through contemporary conditions to discover our properly moral fate - an evolved identity in which differentiated enlightenment and feeling discover a new sense of natural association.

However, Schiller sees no way that reason alone, as the logical mechanism that underlies specialisation and disintegration, can enable this new nature. Without rejecting reason altogether, he laments the scene of elemental conflict that it has unleashed - an 'antagonism of powers' (2004, p.43), as intellect and sense are set at odds, as analytic separation enables exhaustive expertise but circumvents holistic being:

> *Reason had become dismembered among the several relevant subjects, as it were wrenched itself loose from all matter and strengthened its gaze into the Absolute by the most intense abstraction. (2004, p.44)*

This reasonable splitting of human capacities, while aligned with moral evolution, links to a historical process of degradation that is characterised by a dangerous coincidence of culture and nature. Reason facilitates both a suppression of nature (in its turn towards abstraction) and an expression of malevolent forces ('the conflict of blind impulses' (p.46)) that are released through dividing the integral person and the originally organic character of society. In this manner, reason, in its isolated and alienating motion, must be surpassed. This can only happen if reason can itself become nature, can itself become an animating force:

> *If Truth is to gain the victory in the struggle with Force, she must first become herself a force, and find some impulse to champion her in the realm of phenomena; for impulses are the only motive forces in the sensible world. (2004, p.48)*

A higher reason, a higher truth, is required, demanding not greater abstraction, but rather a return into sense and feeling ('the way to the head must lie through the heart' (2004, p.50)). Ordinary goal-directed, practical political action cannot change things. Efforts at profound social and political reform, whether at the level of State policy or popular insurrection, are inevitably affected by aspects of barbarism (instrumental rationality) and savagery (unbridled impulses). For Schiller, only something that lies beyond this degraded system can revive human social identity. 'Fine Art' provides this crucial agency. Schiller argues that art represents a sphere of alien and integral truth. It is 'free from everything that is positive or established by human conventions' (2004, p.51). At a temporal level, this exceptional status is conceived in terms of the eternal truth of 'Fine Art'. At a spatial contextual level, it relates to the sense that 'Fine Art' represents a space apart - a realm of free play.

However, Schiller's notion of 'Fine Art' suggests not only a free play of human capacities, but just as importantly a vital work of moderation (2004, p.72) and limitation (2004, p.65). Aesthetic play, for Schiller, approaches freedom through a work of aligned constitution in which the senses are moderated by reason and *vice*

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versa. Nonetheless, despite its transcendental value, Schiller recognises that the scene of the 'Fine Arts' is regularly associated with periods of cultural decline and corruption (2004, pp.58-59), and can itself succumb to excesses either of moral lassitude or austere formality. Within this context, Schiller acknowledges a gap between the transcendental ideal and the reality of culturally given aesthetic practices. He also hints at a less socially delineated field of aesthetic practice - one that extends beyond the 'Fine Arts' *per se*. He writes, for instance of the aesthetic relevance of traditions of popular sport (2004, p.79) and, more expansively, of the 'still more difficult art of living' (2004, p.80). Still, Schiller positions the 'Fine Arts', for all its flaws, as the preeminent site for the cultural manifestation of human aesthetic capacities. Art provides a model for how life should be constituted if there is any hope for human freedom, moral identity and enlightened political transformation.

I realise that my own conception of aesthetics bears a clear relation to Schiller's paradigm. I too emphasise the need for a transformation of value if we are to develop post-capitalist solutions that are directed towards ecological sustainability and social justice. I too am influenced by Kant's transcendental conception of aesthetic judgement and its relevance towards developing alternative cultural practices, modes of individual and communal being, and systems of social and economic organisation. If I take issue with Schiller, it is less in terms of his overall philosophical vision than in terms of his prioritisation of the cultural agency of art. While Schiller conceives art as having an exemplary and representative function, rather than indicating a clearly articulated social institutional field, there is still an emphasis on the centrality and general cultural influence of a particular, privileged sphere of cultural experience. Schiller's emphasis on art contributes to Hegel's rejection of the relevance of natural beauty (1993) and later debates that focus aesthetics specifically on the theory, institution, practices and experience of art.

Another objection to Schiller's schema applies equally to my own conception of aesthetics. It takes shape as a doubt concerning the political implications of aesthetic experience. Although conceived

as a complex mediation of dimensions of sense, imagination and understanding, aesthetic experience - and the alternative values and truth that it manifests - are still cast in terms that roughly correspond to Plato's allegory of the cave. They involve a process of illumination, of resplendent, contemplative reflection, that even if largely portrayed in negative terms as a making strange of reality, nonetheless assume that a level of truth, with crucial political consequence, is available at the level of the immediate visibility of subjective experience. Arguably, however, the field of politics and ethics requires something more and involves features that are necessarily more individually opaque. The thinking of justice, for instance, is never simply rendered at the subjective level but also involves a vital relation to others. Justice coheres and is elaborated at social level that extends beyond the neat horizon of individual experience. We approach justice not simply as something seen or even thought but through strands of relationship and responsibility that have a trans-individual character. As long as aesthetics is conceived in terms of its distance from the complexity of social relations, the more apparent that it cannot provide an adequate ground for political understanding and action. It can be aligned with it, but hardly regarded as a necessary or adequate precondition.

Contradiction: Adorno

Frankfurt School social scientist, musician and philosopher Theodor Adorno (1997) rethinks the politics of aesthetics within the context of industrialised modernity, in which aesthetic practices cannot escape their incorporation within the seamless totality of capitalist (or State Socialist) relations. While he acknowledges the lingering aesthetic relevance of nature, he focuses mainly on the agonised, endlessly compromised, but still essential and sustaining character of modern art. In Adorno's view, if any resistive hope remains, it is less within the frame of commodified popular culture and everyday experience than in the rarified space of (never truly) autonomous art. In its impossibility,

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in its fragmentation, in its failure to offer the promise of any kind of reconciliation, art serves as a continuing sign of strands of non-identical being and experience that resist complete digestion by the grimly monolithic system.

Unlike Schiller, Adorno does not subscribe to any notion of the neatly redemptive power of art:

> *It is self-evident that nothing concerning art is self-evident anymore, not its inner life, not its relation to the world, not even its right to exist. (1997, p.1)*

If Schiller, like Kant, had recognised in art the possibility of human freedom and self-realisation, Adorno recognises a scene of failed promise. While art still represents a critical ideal, it is profoundly shaped and constrained by the influence of the wider regime of instrumental rationality. He describes a decline in the emancipatory potential of art:

> *For absolute freedom in art, always limited to a particular, comes in contradiction within the perennial unfreedom of the whole. In it the place of art became uncertain. The autonomy it achieved, after having freed itself from cultic function and its images, was nourished by the idea of humanity. As society became ever less a human one, this autonomy was shattered. Drawn from the ideal of humanity, art's constituent elements withered by art's own law of movement. Yet art's autonomy remains irrevocable. All efforts to restore art by giving it a social function - of which art is itself uncertain and by which it expresses its own uncertainty - are doomed. (1997, p.1)*

If art offers any residual critical hope, it is only on the condition that it honestly manifest its failure, incorporating this within the formal texture of the artistic work - and especially avoiding any glib sense that it can directly communicate effective social and political messages. Insisting upon the irresistible force of instrumental forms of thought and social organisation, Adorno argues that 'the marrow of experience has been sucked out; there is

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none, not even that apparently set at a remove from commerce' (p.40). Within this context, art can no longer portray itself as promoting cogent social and political alternatives. All it can do is internalise the contradictions of society, manifesting them as a formal aesthetic agony:

> *Art must turn against itself, in opposition to its own concept, and thus become uncertain of itself right into its innermost fibre. (1997, p.2)*

In summary, Adorno conceives art in terms of a relentless series of paradoxes:

> *Through the irreconcilable renunciation of the semblance of reconciliation, art holds fast to the promise of reconciliation in the midst of the unreconciled. (p.41)*

Adorno's conception is regularly criticised for its elitism and pessimism - its preference for austere modern forms of art and its failure to recognise any scope for resistive cultural action beyond the impasses of autonomous art. Adorno argues that ordinary people are so materially and ideologically imbricated within the oppressive system that they have no means of escaping or resisting. Only the culturally elite, who participate within the fractured, opaque and oblique realm of art, can regard the world in its awful truth - and with a maudlin sense of never sufficiently adequate negation. In the wake of two world wars, Fascism and emerging global capitalism, Adorno's pessimism is hardly surprising. While the incisive criticality of his aesthetics retains its force, there is also the sense that it is self-defeating. Rather than an hermetic totality there is a need to consider interstices within the social as well as vital and open relations to wider non-human systems. Most importantly, there is scope to conceive commonly available aspects of socially transformative aesthetic potential that have their basis within the texture of ordinary life.

Radical Redistribution: Ranciere

In line with currents of contemporary criticism that look beyond the contradictions of autonomous art - exploring instead points of association between art and wider spheres of social action - Ranciere develops a new sense of the political relevance of aesthetics. The aesthetic comes to represent an inherently political form of social intervention. It is helpful to approach Ranciere's aesthetics via his political thought - particularly his conceptions of equality, democracy and dissensus.

Ranciere' commitment to the principle of equality is apparent throughout his writing. Early in his career, for instance, he criticises Althusserian Marxism for assuming that the role of the intelligentsia is to disabuse the masses of their ideological illusions (to educate them about their proper interests). Rejecting this paternalistic attitude, Ranciere argues that ideological critique entrenches the very divisions (the sense of superior and inferior intelligence) that renders resistance at once necessary and futile (2011). Similarly, in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, Ranciere argues that ordinary pedagogy reinforces the gap between those who know and those who do not. He describes the radical pedagogy of 19th century teacher, Joseph Jacotot, who avoids teaching so that students can learn themselves; in this manner instituting equality as the basis for emancipatory education. The principle of equality is also central to Ranciere's conception of politics and democracy. He regards it not as an empty platitude or as an endlessly delayed goal but as an immediate and sensibly legible motivating force.

Ranciere develops a counterintuitive notion of politics. If we ordinarily think of politics as an organised system for societal decision-making and action, Ranciere conceives politics as an immediate and unpredictable expression of equality. He opposes this radical politics to ordinary institutional politics, which he describes as the 'police'. The latter, he argues, aims to maintain the existing, inequitable status quo, reducing any scope for genuine politics to be realised as an essentially and necessarily disruptive social phenomenon.

Ranciere associates the principle of equality with democracy. We recall that Plato rejects democracy for two reasons: firstly, because it asserts an equality that disrupts the natural hierarchical order of things; and secondly, because it is confusing and anarchic, disrupting the justice of everybody performing their proper roles and minding their own business. However, Ranciere reinterprets these putative flaws as integral characteristics of an emancipatory politics. This re-evaluation hinges on a recognition of the empty basis of democracy. Ranciere argues that politics begins with a false equality - or, more properly, political philosophy begins by conceiving a contradictory space of political participation as a means of reasserting and legitimating an existing order of domination. The notion of the people, the *demos*, represents less a positive and integral whole than an empty and negative remainder.

Ranciere develops this conception through a detailed analysis of a passage from Aristotle's *Politics* which considers the basis of politics. Distinguishing between humans and animals, Aristotle explains that whereas animals can only cry out in directly expressive and situated pleasures or pain, humans have the power of speech, lending their expressions a more general and indicative character:

> *Speech, on the other hand, serves to indicate what is useful and what is harmful, and so also what is right and what is wrong. For the real difference between man and other animals is that humans alone have perception of good and evil, right and wrong, just and unjust. And it is the sharing of a common view in these matters that makes a household or a city. (Aristotle, 1972, pp.28-29)*

In these terms, the social institutions of household and city depend upon the human capacity for language, which enables immediate pleasures and pains to obtain a socially inscribed moral dimension. The economy of rights and wrongs establishes the grounds for social commonality and every level of social and political organisation.

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Ranciere focuses particularly on Aristotle's distinction between the useful (*sumpheron*) and the harmful (*blaberon*). He argues that these terms are not direct antinomies in Ancient Greek. Whereas *sumpheron* has an individual focus, indicating the benefit one receives, *blaberon* has as a social focus, indicating the harm one suffers at the hands of another. This demonstrates an asymmetrical relationship between individuated social good and relationally cast social harm. This difference affects how the political relation is conceived: either as a system for the proper benefit of each individual part on the basis of their useful contribution; or as a system for redressing the level of harm caused through the initial hurt that founds politics - the relationship of domination that establishes the *demos* as those who have nothing except their freedom. Ranciere aligns the first conception with Plato's notion of justice, which focuses on dimensions of intrinsic reward and critiques any sense that it involves reciprocal relations of benefit and harm. Justice is removed from the base economy of profits and losses to cohere instead as the virtue of an organic whole in which everybody plays their proper part and receives their due share. This involves a shift from an arithmetic to a geometric evaluation, conceiving not a society of winners and losers but a whole characterised by harmonious and proportional relations.

Ranciere argues that this defence of the status quo by the philosophers - clashes with the fundamental character of politics, which already incorporates the thinking of *blaberon* and an arithmetic calculation of wrongs within itself. He describes how Aristotle delineates three *axia* of the community - that is to say, three principles for how the common may be apportioned: firstly, according to wealth (established inequity); secondly, aligned with Plato's conception of justice, according to the nature and quality of one's contribution, which has its basis in naturally differentiated human capacity (excellence or otherwise); and thirdly, in terms of the freedom of the people, who are constituted less positively than in terms of the harm that is done to them. Ranciere argues that this third *axia* is a negative set. It represents the claims of those who have nothing - neither wealth nor any demonstrable form of

excellence. The notion of the people coheres in terms of a *blaberon* that has no justification and that scandalously represents every *sumpheron* as having an intrinsic dimension of correlative harm. Most importantly, the notion of the people - and of their intrinsic rights - eludes either a properly arithmetic or geometric logic. It represents, as Ranciere puts it, a 'miscount' (1997, p.10). Democracy exposes the fiction of Platonic justice; it signals that the latter is actually an alibi for domination and has no natural justification. It attests to a 'contentious commonality', hinging on the presence and 'nonexistence of those who have "no part in anything"' (1997, p.9).

In partial defence of Plato, while his notion of justice can certainly be aligned with a cosmology of naturalised hierarchy and patriarchal relations, it also aligns with an ethics of ecological perspective, dynamic equilibrium and social-communal realisation. Although the holistic perceptiveness of Plato's philosopher guardians is emblematic of a structural division between superior and inferior capacities, their superiority is less simply a matter of innate capacity than of the social conditions for holistic perception. If the guardians can reflect upon the whole and others cannot, this has its basis less in any aspect of natural disposition than in terms of a system of disciplined education. The guardians, for all their natural gifts - their mythically conceived golden constitutions - must withdraw from ordinary society, give up the comfort of conventional family and possessions, and undertake arduous physical training and study in order to discover the means to recognise justice. While this is an ascetic, meritocratic and elitist conception, it also suggests a resistance to currents of domination that have their basis in self-interest. In its broadly reflective character and its emphasis on the development of latent capacities, the mode of life of the guardians is not altogether oppressive in its implications. Within the context of Plato's overall argument, the guardians appear less simply as a privileged and superior class than as representatives of the human condition generally, which extends outward to include every living human and animal soul. Plato's conception of justice incorporates not only naturalised

domination but also the thinking of complex individual, social and ecological realisation.

Leaving this objection aside, Ranciere's conception of the constitutively contentious character of politics crucially informs his aesthetic philosophy. Politics and aesthetics are conceived in close and complex relation. This involves mobilising two different meanings of aesthetics. The first, adhering to a traditional philosophical etymology, links aesthetics to the field of sensible experience. Here, the term 'sensible' has deliberate ambiguity, representing a relation between features of bodily sense and understanding. Ranciere explains that a 'primary' aesthetics indicates 'the system of *a priori* forms determining what presents itself to sense experience' (2004, p.13). Employing this first definition, Ranciere describes politics as 'aesthetic' in that it involves a sensibly manifest arrangement of time and space, voices and silence, visibility and invisibility (2009, p.25). Most importantly, he argues that the contentious partitioning of the common, which forms the basis of politics, has an intrinsically aesthetic character.

The second definition of aesthetics links to the critical tradition of aesthetic philosophy (Schiller, Hegel, Adorno, etc.). Ranciere portrays aesthetics as bound to the social understanding of modern and contemporary art. Specifically, he regards aesthetics as the discursive space for thinking through the complex and contradictory identity of modern art, which struggles towards either a baseless autonomy or an impossible dissolution into the (revitalised) substance of everyday life.

The interplay of these two different definitions of aesthetics lends the concept its critical relevance and force. This hinges on the aesthetic capacity to intervene within existing sensible relations, manifesting a disruptive dissensus that lends vivid appearance to neglected and excluded social voices. Contemporary art (as a product of the discursive space of aesthetics) is portrayed as scene for the assertion of equality. It disrupts existing sensible relations to realise other, novel possibilities for partitioning the common. At the same time, it never takes shape a a concrete

system of partitioning itself, or it risks losing its radical political energy and becoming another form of institutionalised policing and complacently evident art.

Although portrayed as stepping beyond the disabling contradictions of modernist critical aesthetics, Ranciere's conception ultimately reveals similar limitations. It promises a revitalised political potential for art and yet, similar to Adorno's aesthetics, insists upon an intractable gap between the politics of dissensus and the politics of social transformation. Art is conceived as playing at the limits of delineation. It constantly escapes its own self-image to maintain its uncertain relation to currents of wider life. Its aesthetic and political potential depends upon eluding any fixed form - not only as art but also as a program of political action. Other social voices are made unpredictably and ephemerally manifest but only on the condition nothing more happens. There is no possibility, for instance, of fostering constructive alternatives that are political not only in terms of gestures of resistance and splitting apart, but also in terms of contributing to and shaping on-going circumstances and conditions. Within this context, the emphasis on sensible intervention seems misleading. It promises forms of action that extend beyond conventional aesthetic distance, while maintaining a predictable suspicion of anything bordering on the dullness of literal political efficacy.

Art and Dwelling: Heidegger

While Heidegger may profoundly differ from Kant in his conception of the thingness of things, while he may reject the primary role of *a priori* categories in our experience of the world, he nonetheless focuses attentively on Kant's notion of 'the unknowable thing itself'. This is because it engages the key question of how things are present for us (to be recognised and conceived). Whereas Kant brackets any knowledge of the thing in order to describe the proper nature and limits of understanding, Heidegger highlights a philosophical blindspot - the realm of appearance. Prior to anything we make of it, the thing appears. It

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can never be reduced to whatever conceptual identity is assigned to it (as, for instance, an object with properties, a geometrically defined mass in space, or a material *quanta* with a functionally conceived form). The thing, Heidegger argues, has an inescapable phenomenological character that extends beneath and beyond ordinary dimensions of rational recognition and truth.

While Kant conceives the internal capacities required for things to obtain coherent cognitive shape, Heidegger considers how appearance - the rendering present of things - provides the basis for thought generally. This, however, oversimplifies on both sides. For Kant, any sense of the *a priori* as a settled internal field is disrupted by the pressing force of the negative *noumena* - the recognition of thought's limit, which represents both an internal dynamic and a field of irreducible exteriority. We have seen that a fundamental tension and *aporia* affects cognition generally. Kant suggests that aesthetic experience specifically engages a pre-conceptual relation to the 'manifold of intuition' that works both to dynamically energise and reconcile the relationship between aspects of appearance and cognition. While never literally offering the truth of the 'thing-in-itself', aesthetics mediates between the realms of reality and thought. It represents the intimately alien intersection of the unknowable limit of experience and the human field of sense, imagination and understanding. On Heidegger's side, however much he may emphasise aspects of appearance and rendering present, his phenomenology is not one of simple subjectivity and sense. Instead he argues that our experience of the world is constituted through language and varieties of experiential and conceptual 'enframing', with scientific rationality providing the most significant and determining contemporary frame. Heidegger is very attentive to the many layers of mediation that shape any encounter with the world of things.

Claiming a bit less, we could say that Kant and Heidegger are both concerned with the complexity of experience. This informs their different aesthetic perspectives. Kant conceives the aesthetic as a realm distinctly separate from rational cognition and truth, in which a protean energetic exchange and reconciliation occurs.

Heidegger, on the other hand, positions aesthetics as a particular order of truth that extends beyond ordinary, rationally focused knowledge.

My interest, nonetheless, is less in the epistemological implications of Heidegger's aesthetics than its ethical and political implications. For Heidegger, art establishes a relation to the earth and the world that informs a notion of human identity as a form of dwelling, in which we discover an attentive and custodial relation to things. Art provides a model for an ethically grounded mode of being that is focused on the proper unfolding and preservation of things. In order to approach the theme of dwelling, it is worth reviewing the main features of Heidegger's conception of art. Both as a type of thing and as a specific mode of human activity, art is portrayed as a paradigm for the possibility of enlightened human dwelling.

It is worth noting that Heidegger explicitly dismisses the philosophical field of aesthetics and extant notions of aesthetic experience as crucially imbricated within a rationally analytic and instrumental world view. The tradition of aesthetics is condemned for neglecting the truth of art - for conceiving it in terms of conventional categories such as form and matter and sense and cognition. These conceptual means of engaging with art fail, in his view, to recognise its particular nature and mode of presence. Heidegger focuses on identifying that which is particular to art in terms that avoid ordinary aesthetic conceptions. This entails considering less the general philosophical character of art - as a set of qualitative features - than the 'thingly character' of the artwork (1993, p.151).

For Heidegger, the identity of the artwork hinges on its capacity to engage lucidly with the 'mere' (1992, p.158) thingness of things. Employing the example of a pair of shoes in a painting by Van Gough, Heidegger emphasises that the painting removes the shoes from any meaningful context of use. Precisely through the artwork's suspension of ordinary functional modes of attention and explanation - the shoes obtain a revelatory character ('the toilsome tread of the worker stares forth' (1993, p.159)). Heidegger

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describes the revelation of 'an essential Being of the equipment': 'the equipment itself rises to its resting-within-itself' (1993, p.160). He argues that 'The artwork lets us know what shoes are in truth' (1993, p.161). In this manner, like German Romantic philosopher Friedrich Schelling, Heidegger asserts art's capacity to manifest a truth that cannot be reduced to rational explanation, that involves instead a revealing of things as such.

Heidegger emphasises that the artwork enacts a work of 'unconcealing' - in the process reviving and illuminating a fallen world that has succumbed to many layers of rational-scientific and instrumental obfuscation. If, unlike Kant, Heidegger is inattentive to the common availability of aesthetic experience, its imbrication within everyday life, it is because he conceives, like Adorno, that rational, instrumental conceptions have obtained monolithic force. Only the inspired agency of artist, philosopher or political revolutionary is sufficient to rediscover and manifest genuine strands of being and truth. This not only represents any capacity for resistance in socially exclusive terms, but reinforces a sense of division within aspects of human experience - with instrumental rationality positioned as inimical to aesthetic experience.

Despite his rejection of the tradition of philosophical aesthetics, Heidegger's notion of artistic decontextualisation clearly aligns closely with traditional aesthetic conceptions - most obviously, for instance, with Kant's notion of the disinterested aesthetic gaze. Kant describes a setting aside of sensible and functional-purposive interest as a fundamental condition for the experience of beauty. Although Heidegger's conception of disinterest has a phenomological and epistemological focus that Kan't more strictly aesthetic conception lacks, they both share an emphasis on the suspension of ordinary sensible, practical and conceptual frames.

Heidegger argues that the artwork not only disrupts ordinary contexts of perception and understanding but also has a positive emergent force. He likens the artwork to 'earth' and more particularly 'physis' (nature). He regards art as both an expression of the dynamic originality of nature and as a manifestation of the human life world. Heidegger's describes the example of an Ancient

Greek temple. The temple is portrayed not as an addition to the landscape - a cultural consequence - but rather as something that establishes an entire world:

> *The temple's firm towering makes visible the invisible space of air. The steadfastness of the work contrast with the surge of the surf, and its own repose brings out the raging of the sea. Tree and grass, eagle and bull, snake and cricket first enter into their distinctive shapes and thus come to appear as what they are. (1993, p.168)*

The temple is conceived as the origin of whatever the natural and the human represents. It opens up both the general cosmos and a particular human lifeworld. Heidegger emphasises especially how the temple establishes the conditions of mortal human life:

> *It is the temple-work that first fits together and at the same time gathers around itself the unity of those paths and relations in which birth an death, disaster and blessing, victory and disgrace, endurance and decline acquire the shape of destiny for human being. (1993, p.167)*

In order to think through the allied disruptive and constructive character of the artwork - its capacity to reveal truth and to render life integrally meaningful - Heidegger employs the metaphors of earth and world, arguing that the artwork is composed of these two dimensions of being. Heidegger portrays the relationship as one of dynamic exchange ('a happening and in no sense a repose'). In a similar way to how Kant conceives aesthetic contemplation as a restless internal play of the faculties, Heidegger conceives the tension between the earthly and the worldly features of the artwork as 'an inner concentration of motion, hence supreme agitation' (1993, p173).

   The dynamic system of the artwork involves a complex interplay of aspects of concealing and unconcealing. Heidegger describes it as a 'cleared realm in which every being stands for us and from which it withdraws' (1993, p.177). This is reminiscent of how Kant

describes a telling moment of aesthetic encounter: 'If in forest I light upon a plot of grass, round which trees stand in a circle' (p.58). Kant's example of the clearing precisely captures this conjunction of passivity and activity, emptiness and manifestation that is characteristic of both his and Heidegger's notions of aesthetic experience.

Despite his condemnation of instrumental rationality, Heidegger acknowledges that his conception of art bears a resemblance to a field of human activity that would seem initially alien - the realm of technological production (1993, p.183). Both art and technology are forms of *techne*, which implies not simply aspects of useful making but, for Heidegger, a work of revealing (1993, p.184; see also 1993, 'The Question Concerning Technology'). While Heidegger associates technology with the destructive exploitation of being, it is also cast, like art, as a mode of truth and as a form of 'enframing'. It would seem that technology also brings forth, but in a different way - in a way that harnesses and 'challenges' nature rather than nurturing it within a context of dwelling and custodial care.

While this distinction between two different attitudes of *techne* is incisive and worthwhile, I am less convinced that it indicates a distinction between art and technological craft *per se*. Heidegger's Greek temple provides a good example. The 'truth' of the temple and its world-generative character entails an inextricable combination of aesthetic and useful aspects. Furthermore, there is no need to focus on large and impressive pieces of architecture. Think of something as a small as a drinking bowl or as subtle as the motion of a hand when knitting cloth. Consider all the various useful and beautiful features of domestic life and labour. These are not entirely mute things. These are also constitutive of worlds. They are never simply invisible equipment or processes. They are always integrally also expressions of a mode of life, embodying and shaping particular relations to the natural and social world.

In distinguishing art from craft, Heidegger considers the contribution of the artist. Heidegger argues that craft does not 'create works, not even when we contrast the handmade with the

factory product' (1993, p.183). Heidegger pinpoints the dynamic struggle between revealing and concealing that informs any act of creation. He regards this as a proper dramaturgy of truth, which involve 'strife' (1993, p.186) between earth and world, concealing and clearing. Art is conceived, as we have seen, as a vital field of human truth - alongside other significant fields of truth such as radical political action and original philosophical inquiry ('the thinker's questioning' (1993, p.187)). Heidegger specifically excludes science and narrowly technical processes from any revelation of truth. He argues that 'science is not an original happening of truth, but always the cultivation of domain of truth already opened' (1993, p.187). Here, for Heidegger, it is the aspect of repetition within science, technology and craft that separates it from genuine discourses and practices of truth. Correspondingly, what distinguishes the artwork from more general currents of *techne* is its irruptive originality:

> *The establishing of truth in the work is the bringing forth of a being such as never was before and will never come to be again.* (1993, p.187)

Heidegger's distinction between the repetitive character of craft and the originality of art links closely to the aesthetic tradition and reveals an obvious debt to avant-garde modernism. He employs a conventional avant-garde rhetoric to argue that the nature of art is to 'transport us out of the realm of the ordinary' and to 'restrain all usual doing and prizing, knowing and looking, in order to stay within the truth' (1993, p.191).

I question this exclusive emphasis on originality and the necessity of artistic agency; the artistic intervention of *ostranenie* ('making strange). I would argue that it is just as much through delving into repetition - and the suspension of deliberate novelty - that aesthetic experience obtains purchase and force. Rather than opting exclusively for the new, aesthetic experience is profoundly ambivalent. It includes repetition alongside any orientation towards novelty. The two tendencies are interleaved, not at all neatly distinct.

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Consider, for instance, a potter making a hand made drinking bowl. While the potters activities may not be especially innovative, while they may draw upon existing models, practices and tacit dimensions of knowledge, there is still the potential for a perceptive and attentive engagement with clay and the nature and possibility of drinking containers. Indeed the repetitive, at times unthinking and mechanical aspect of handcraft can deepen aspects of engagement, rather than necessarily compromising creativity. Craft practice, just like art practice, is complex and layered.

Or consider the fine detail and complex patterns of Islamic calligraphy. These link conventional techniques and patterns to regular demonstrations of conceptual design invention. Islamic calligraphy involves no contradiction between aspects of mechanical process and innovation. Its aesthetic quality has an integral basis in the apparent unconsciousness of craft; in the relation it opens up - often precisely through gestures of repetition - to the trans individual and beyond human nature of making.

It is only within the context of artistic modernity, in the process of evolving the particular identity of modern and contemporary art, that we have come to privilege artistic originality above all else. Primarily oral cultures place much greater stress on aspects of cultural maintenance and preservation (Ong, 1982). Repetition is discouraged and disregard, rather than recognised as a performative means of enabling the continuing life of cultural forms. Instead of representing a deathly stasis, repetition aligns with a sense of cosmic and ecological cycles, incorporating aspects of change within the very texture of iteration. Change is not specifically valued, but occurs within processes of cultural performance and reproduction that are constantly repeated but never literally so - that always involve aspects of adaptation, alteration, forgetting, changed circumstance and novelty. Consider how American African musical idioms have evolved from plantation banjo music, to rural blues, gospel music, jazz, urban blues, rock n' roll, R&B and contemporary hip-hop. Along the way, there were no doubt periods of deliberate invention, but the

tradition evolved generally through an interplay of repetition and variation.

Ranciere shares Heidegger's emphasis upon novel moments of radical and unpredictable opening. He is for this reason ambivalent about the staged gestures of resistance in Medieval carnival: "when people do a multiplicity of things: performances, acts or parties whose unruliness undermines the forces of inequality" (2019). Carnival, in his view, is compromised by its institutionally sanctioned and regular, cyclical character:

> *There is a time each year when men or women of the people become kings or queens and subvert the world, turn it around or upside down, but do so in a specific time. And for me that's different from this capacity of people who show up at unexpected moments, without any programme or any schedule. (2019)*

Whereas carnival confirms a regular temporality that is bound by dimensions of inequality, genuinely irruptive cultural moments represent 'the invention of a new temporality'.

I doubt, however, that the work of repetition in carnival can be so neatly opposed to its unruliness. I also suspect that this notion of a pure subversion of the spatio-temporal social fabric is less innocent than it imagines. If it manifests equality, then it equally manifests inequality - the superiority of those who have the capacity to manifest the radically new. Arguably, there is scope to consider carnival repetition differently, less as opposed to motions of opening and renewal than as the necessary moment of recollection, continuity and burial that complements and prepares the way for the new. In this light, the notion of novelty can be re-conceived - as something formal, as something that contains an aspect of repetition. To neglect this complex, indeterminate relation between repetition and renewal in carnivalesque experience is to fail to recognise its genuine, potent relation to temporality and cultural life. To imagine that the new can appear on its own, beyond the play of repetition, is precisely to subscribe to a sense of temporality that obliterates the world, that withdraws from its

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rhythmic perturbations and renders an utterly strange and self-present moment. This space of the profoundly alien new is closely allied with every imposition of inequality in the modern world.

Very importantly, the notion that art involves originality and that craft is merely derivative and repetitive disregards major aspects of commonly available aesthetic experience, Furthermore, it drives a wedge between those who are apparently capable of engaging with a superior truth and those stuck in the darkness of iteration. Curiously, it also aligns with the practices and worldview that Heidegger (and Ranciere) otherwise condemn. What does capitalism stress above all, if not constant growth and change?

Although Heidegger emphasises artistic originality, I prefer to focus on his equally strong emphasis upon the everyday, ordinary life and, most importantly, cultural and ecological preservation. He tellingly describes art as 'the creative preserving of truth in the work' (1993, p.196). So, despite the hard line he draws between repetition and originality, there remains a crucial ambivalence in his conception - very apparent in the conjunction of the terms 'creative' and 'preserving'.

This orientation obtains its clearest delineation in another essay, 'Building, Dwelling, Thinking' (1993), in which he describes a fourfold set of world elements: earth, sky, mortals and gods. Mortals obtain their particular identity through 'dwelling', which he characterises as a form of 'safeguarding': 'Mortals dwell in the way that they safeguard the fourfold in its essential unfolding' (1993, p.352). While this can be regarded as naive (and possibly politically dangerous) effort to re-summon a mythological worldview, it seems more important, particularly within the context of climate change, to recognise it as relevant response to the dilemmas of the contemporary world. Instead of an anthropocentric and analytic-instrumental conception in which the cosmos is positioned as a passive resource for human activity, Heidegger conceives a wider field of constitutive relations. Mortal human beings are embedded within this wider context and their identity and justice has its essential foundation in a work of custodial care.

We have found our way back to the theme of justice. Justice, as I have argued, emerges not in the blindness of any specific focus on discrete aspects of being and function, but rather, at least initially and as an abiding concern, in terms of the ecology of a given whole. This ecology can of course be described analytically, and often there is value in doing so, but it does not appear and have its basis in number and analysis as such. It depends on a more fundamental, commonly available reflective regard for things both at the level of the complex manifestation of particulars and as an overall ecological field. Aesthetics provides a means of signalling this aspect of perception, imagination and thought. If this mode of experience takes coherent shape, it is precisely because so much of what we do and how the world is organised ignores these currents of reflective awareness, pressing them aside in order to adapt to and exacerbate contemporary injustices.

Heidegger describes a more beneficial conception of human endeavour. He envisage a work of building in order to dwell as a coherent context for safeguarding the fourfold set of relations:

> *To preserve the fourfold, to save the earth, to receive the sky, to await the divinities, to initiate mortals - this fourfold preserving is the simple essence of dwelling. (1993, p.360)*

I have indicated the value of this conception, particularly in terms of tying together issues of aesthetics and justice in an overall notion of ecologically sustainable relations. If I have any reservations about this scheme, it links to how it is brought about - specifically the apparent need for exclusive, elite and original forms of intervention (art, philosophy and radical political transformation). I prefer to consider aesthetics and justice as strata of latent valuation. They are already there but neglected. Importantly, they are not neatly separate from other modes of experience and thought. For example, there is not and has never been a single, monolithic, rational, instrumental scientific paradigm, with everywhere the same malevolent implications. The scientific impulse is not intrinsically opposed to aspects of felt encounter and holistic recognition. These have become divided from one another

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in the modern world, and very much within the specific context of capitalism. The point is not to drive a further wedge between the rational and the aesthetic-ethical, the everyday and the disinterested, but rather to seek strategic points of affinity and to question disabling boundaries. It is less a matter of less a matter of bringing a concern with dwelling into the world as some entirely novel thing than of discovering and insisting upon its relevance within our ordinary lives.

Thermodynamic Practice: Dewey

Dewey argues that the current state of art, with its rarefied objects and pleasures, provides a misleading sense of what aesthetic engagement involves. He is critical of museum based art, arguing that it is 'linked to militarism, imperialism and capitalism - and especially to efforts at cultural status/distinction' (2005, p.7). Dewey conceives current dilemmas as unfortunate consequences of a system that is susceptible to correction, and that in its essential identity - in the organic forms of representative democracy - is not intrinsically opposed to whatever the aesthetic represents. For Dewey, the key issue is that the links between art and everyday life have been broken. He argues that aesthetic practices can only be understood in their relation to the texture of ordinary life:

> *In order to understand the aesthetic in its ultimate and approved forms, one must begin with it in the raw; in the events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of man, arousing his interest and affording him enjoyment as he looks and listens: the sights that hold the crowd - the fire-engine rushing by; the machines excavating enormous holes in the earth (2005, p.3)*

Dewey's examples align with legibly modernist (even Futurist) features of aesthetic interest. Dewey is struck by the energetic spectacle of modernity and the immediate pleasures of 'the movie, jazzed music, the comic strip, and, too frequently, newspaper accounts of love-nests, murders, and exploits of bandits' (2005,

p.4). Whereas Adorno regards this as manipulative and debased manifestations of an exploitative system, Dewey recognises the evidence of fundamental, organically based, aesthetic impulses. However, Dewey, is by no means simply absorbed in the modern. He recognises the same aesthetic relevance in the most ordinary features of domestic activity. Referring to someone burning wood on a hearth, he explains:

> *The man who poked the sticks of burning wood would say he did it to make the fire burn better; but he is none the less fascinated by the colourful drama of change enacted before his eyes and imaginatively partakes in it. (2005, p.3)*

The stick burner's instrumental rationale is significant for Dewey. Dewey argues that 'aesthetic perception' is spiritualised and rendered separate in modernity (2005, p.10), which 'deeply affects the practice of living, driving away aesthetic perceptions that are necessary ingredients of happiness, or reducing them to the level of compensating transient pleasurable excitements' (2005, p.9). This leads Dewey to pose a fundamental question, 'if artistic and aesthetic quality is implicit in every normal experience, how shall we explain how and why it so generally fails to become explicit?' (2005, p.11). While Dewey describes the malign influence of militarism, imperialism and capitalism, he remains optimistic that art can be re-conceived and meaningfully reintegrated within ordinary life. Dewey does not assume a fundamental opposition between aesthetic experience and the social conditions of modernity. Dewey looks beyond history to consider the natural bases of aesthetics, which he associates with the underlying features of biological life. He conceives biological life in terms of relationships of environmental exchange:

> *The career and destiny of a living being are bound up with its interchanges with its environment, not externally but in the most intimate way. (2005, p.12)*

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This process of exchange is conceived in dialectical terms as a matter of conflict, renewed equilibrium and further conflict:

> *Life grows when a temporary falling out is a transition to a more extensive balance of the energies of the organism with those of the conditions under which it lives. (2005, p.12)*

Dewey relates this broadly thermodynamic conception of biological life to the nature of art and aesthetics:

> *Form is arrived at whenever a stable, even though moving, equilibrium is reached. Changes interlock and sustain one another. Wherever there is coherence there is endurance. (2005, p.12)*

Art, for Dewey, represents a means of reflecting upon and evoking aspects of lived experience. It specifically renders experience coherent as a set of dynamic relations brought into provisional equilibrium. Whereas Adorno links the formal fissuring of the autonomous artwork to the contractions of the wider social system, Dewey conceives the possibility of an integral coherence that extends upwards from the foundations of biological life to become manifest in the rhythms and compositional integrity of art. This demonstrates an optimistic, organic and growth oriented conception of human life, art and society. The biological world, the sphere of human activity and the contours of the modernity are regarded as broadly aligned and properly future-oriented: 'to the being fully alive, the future is not ominous but a promise; it surrounds the present as a halo (2005, p.17).

For all the shortcomings of Dewey's naturalised conception, it is valuable inasmuch as it resists any ordinary notion of autonomous human identity. However much it may fails to explain aesthetic experience historically - Dewey's thermodynamic aesthetics highlights our ecological imbrication within earthly organic and inorganic systems. In this sense, it engages the thinking of cosmic justice. It recalls Anaximander's vision of universal entropy, as well as Plato's conception of the wider cycle of human and inhuman

souls. More particularly, his aesthetics offers an antidote to the ordinary rhetoric of our impossibly distant relation to the unknowable perceptual world. Instead of bracketing the external world to discover a specifically human space of knowledge, Dewey stresses our inextricable relation to everything that renders distinct identity possible:

> *Experience in the degree in which it is experience is heightened vitality. Instead of signifying being shut up within one's own private feelings and sensations, it signifies active and alert commerce with the world (2005, p.18)*

However, the issue remains, politically, about the nature of this commerce. How do we conceive our ecological identity and 'heightened vitality'? Does it involve a narrative of inevitable dialectical expansion and growth, or allow us to recognise more sustainable prospects of human creative identity? Are we compelled to consider the future in terms of expanding cycles of animating and destructive struggle or can we recognise scope for gentler shifts in the texture of things? And how precisely does any notion of vital commerce affect our conception of aesthetics? What is the relation between aesthetic mediation and the patterns, chaos and uncertain justice of the wider world?

   In relation to the last question, it seems to me less a matter of recognising the influence of nature within aesthetics, or suggesting any sense of their homology, but rather of considering the relationship in ethical terms. Kantian aesthetics conceives a constitutively unresolved reflective attitude that involves attending to aspects of the particular and the whole but with no instrumental goal and no eye to immediate profit. As I have argued, the politics of aesthetics stems from this fundamental attitude. It informs not only modes of thinking but also modes of being and action. While this attitude is politically ambiguous - legible not only as a sphere of resistance, freedom and 'common sense' but also as one of complicity, compromise and elitism - it still registers a difference from ordinary interested and instrumentally oriented thought and action. It is not so much that aesthetic experience directly aligns

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with thermodynamic justice, but rather that it exemplifies more beneficial attitudes of engagement with the natural and social world.

The key thing, of course, is how inaction and reflective distance are conceived. Just possibly, they need not indicate a return to the impasses of avant-garde aesthetics. They need not inevitably veer between an impossible autonomy or an utter dissolution into the pragmatic field. Instead, aesthetics can represent a potential for sensible reflective engagement within the tissue of any activity whatsoever. It can delineate a complex suspension within practice - a slight pause that attends to the justice of circumstances, processes and activities in order to negotiate relations between the existent, imagined and emergent. This involves not only dissolving and inventing things, but, just as importantly, maintaining and preserving them.

6. Closing

I could simply stop, trail off mid-sentence (that would be best for a screed) or attempt some unlikely conclusion. I will aim for the latter and see how things go.

I began by considering scope for an optimistic alternative to capitalism, but quickly recognised that the challenge was less to develop viable proposals for practical change - there are many of those about - than to conceive the underlying collective and subjective conditions necessary for change to occur. Alongside everything that limits scope for collective decision-making and action, there are also underlying obstacles at the level of human identity and value. Within this context, I considered a correspondence between Plato's notion of justice and Kant's conception of aesthetic experience. I argued that they share a common emphasis on reflective forms of being that suspend ordinary action and cognition to encourage an integral regard for both particular things and overall systems. In this respect, despite their ambivalent political implications, Platonic justice and Kantian aesthetics suggest beneficial possibilities for rethinking our relation to the environment, other people and our inner selves.

While at one level, Platonic justice provides a rationale for social inequity, with the guardian rulers positioned as privileged products of a system of social differentiation that leaves most people labouring within the blindness of their expertise, at another level, in rejecting narrowly instrumental and materially focused concerns, and in its inclusive summoning of animate things generally, it has an emancipatory potential. While it mobilises a patriarchal notion of superior rationality, it also describes a disposition of disinterested reflection that can contribute to a critique of contemporary neoliberal values and systems.

Kantian aesthetics has a similar ambivalence. It not only supports an emerging bourgeois self-identity involving features of

subjectively framed identity, abstract universality and protean genius, but also conceives and unsettling of ordinary, practically geared modes of attention and action. While certainly informing a new basis for social distinction, aesthetics also resists destructive regimes of manifest action, disintegrative labour and exploitative consumption. Especially when conceived as generally available, rather than as restricted to the socially exclusive space of art, aesthetic experience coheres as a layer of uncertain experience, responding to intractable tensions and contradictions within contemporary society.

Overall, then, I have emphasised what is best in Platonic justice and Kantian aesthetics, describing features that suggest new dispositions for questioning and altering the destructive trajectory of current systems. That will have to do as a brief summary of my argument. I turn now to offer two final observations on justice and aesthetics, and the nature of their relationship.

The value of thinking generally

While the Platonic effort to delineate an ideal notion of justice may no longer have currency, it is valuable now for a specific reason. It assists in thinking across different, apparently incompatible orders of justice. It provides a means of conceiving both tensions and points of correspondence between aspects of individual, social and cosmic justice. If I have followed Plato's lead to consider justice not simply as a mechanism for fairly redressing social wrongs and distributing social benefits, but as a general ecological principle governing the relationship between parts and whole, this is to highlight our contemporary circumstances. These are characterised by an awkward conjunction of different regulative principles. The human social and moral order now rubs up directly against the system of the natural world. As geophysical time is compressed to human proportions and the future of the biosphere depends increasingly upon human practices, we discover an urgent need to consider novel intertwined contexts of justice.

This has not been the case traditionally. While Plato certainly recognises an alignment between different orders of justice,

modern political philosophy tends to conceive these categories as divergent and misaligned. Hobbes, for instance, describes an inhospitable external (and internal) nature, recommending absolute authority as the only alternative to the '*warre* of every man against every man' (1985, p.188). Similarly, Hume (2007, pp.307-311) represents social justice as an artifice and compromise necessary to secure some modicum of happiness in circumstances where individual desires can overstep reciprocal social relations. While others may conceive a largely benevolent state of nature (Rousseau, 1984), there is still the sense that social justice breaks with the natural order, appearing as a necessary imposition. Social justice is associate with an autonomous sphere of civilised social life that restricts the violence of the cosmic order and any expression of base human impulses. Our contemporary circumstance, however, render this neatly autonomous sphere of human justice increasingly suspect. The notion of the Anthropocene, for instance, conceives the influence of human social systems on dimensions of formerly separate, cosmic order. Similarly, the overall failure of efforts to foster wider social justice, locally within nations as well as globally - indeed, the increasing experience of social disintegration, conflict and injustice - suggests the limits of our just cocoons. The notional autonomy of human justice discovers its other at every turn.

The difference between social and natural justice not only involves an opposition between violence and order, but also, relatedly, between the amoral and the moral, as well as between material determinism and human freedom and agency. It is worth reconsidering these oppositions and, more particularly, thinking each in the other's terms. Anaximander, for instance, considers cosmic justice in terms that evoke human justice, that involve moral excess and punishment. To criticise this as anthropomorphism is to assume precisely the exceptional identity of the human. Furthermore, It overlooks the value of considering blurred relations between these two contexts of order. However incongruous it is to conceive cosmic justice in terms of human freedom and agency, this can provide a vehicle for acknowledging

and even lending legal standing to features of non-human life. Ironic that we are prepared to develop inanimate simulations of human capacities in artificial life but resist conceiving the rights of the non-human world. We are more suspicious of granting legal agency to a river system than with crediting our technology and software with consciousness. The anthropomorphism involved in acknowledging the legal personhood of New Zealand's Whanganui River (2017) represents, in contrast, a creative effort to re-conceive the relationship between natural and human systems of justice. It is not a category error, but a recognition that our current categories are flawed - that we have lost sight of the broader justice that includes both rivers and human beings.

There is also scope to consider human justice in terms of cosmic justice. This has two implications. Firstly, it deflates our assumptions of exclusively human moral identity. Justice obtains an amoral cast. It demonstrates, as the Sophists argue, shifting and relative notions of the good and bad, as well as amoral machinations of superior and inferior power. Secondly, it provide a means of recognising patterns of cosmic justice that can beneficially inform human systems.

Cosmic justice, of the kind Anaximander describes (see p.37), involves a dynamic relation between motions of excess and moderation, genesis and decomposition, manifestation and disappearance. In modern scientific terms, the carbon cycle, patterns of physical entropy and Darwin's 'survival of the fittest' can be regarded as forms of cosmic (or natural) justice. This justice is not restricted, however, to scientific analysis and explanation. As Heidegger argues, the Anaximander fragment, makes no distinction between scientific and philosophical enquiry. It conceives an overall ecology of being, in which the multiplicity of individual things emerge from the boundless and undifferentiated ground of being (*apeiron*), only to pay penalty for their hubris and be drawn back into it. Anaximander's cosmic justice envisages the tragic character of existence, with every existing thing fatally bound to the field of non-existence from which it has sprung, and

cast back into that dark pool due to its injudicious efforts to coherently exist and persist.

Anaximander describes a material ecology and ethics that involves vital paradoxes. The ethical condition of persistent life is to withdraw from life, to not hold on to life too closely. It is to adhere to an aspect of death within life, recognising death as an integral feature of fecund life and life as inextricably bound to death. The withdrawal of the *apeiron* - what Heidegger describes as its 'self-veiling' (1984, p.50) - can be aligned with an ethical attitude of contemplative reserve. The perturbations of industrious, existence-focused being are positioned at a slight distance. An aspect of suspension affects them from within. While the *apeiron* may seem entirely homeostatic - entirely oriented towards moderation and equilibrium, it achieves this only by maintaining a relation to death and non-existence within itself. By resisting holding on to things, by not being especially concerned with their active and persistent existence, it discovers the capacity to persist. Arguably, the contemporary human order neglects this paradoxical ethics. It has a one-sided emphasis on relentless industry and growth. It refuses any inner relation to death, inaction and non-existence. On this basis, its relentless action has a shrill tone. It lacks any vital fecundity and, in consequence, has fundamentally destructive (deathly) implications. For all of its shortcomings, aesthetics conceives modes of experience that partake of the complex justice of the *apeiron* .

Vision and its limits

I should emphasise that I have interpreted aesthetics less as a clearly delineated field of human capacity restricted to the modalities of sense or affect than as an overall disposition involving features of being and identity generally. Aesthetics has an ethical character. It is ethical inasmuch as it relates to an *ethos*, a way of life - and, more particularly, a way of life oriented towards the 'good'. This 'good' is conceived less in conventionally moral terms than in terms of the enhancement of life. It relates to practices of living well. Aesthetic experience coheres in terms of aspects of

attention, perception, feeling, cognition and action. Alongside describing it as a 'disposition', it can be characterised as an 'attitude' - a mode of constituting ourselves and our relation to the world that marks a difference from ordinary attitudes of being. In its focus on openness, reflection, inaction, irresolution and repetition, it resists practical, interested and purposive dispositions that are emphasised within contemporary economic and social relations.

I have suggested that the model of aesthetic experience can assist in discovering lines of association between Plato's notion of the guardians and Heidegger's metaphor of dwelling. The role of the guardians shifts slightly. They continue to protect the city, but with no aim to increase it. No longer engaging in the slaughter and domination of the surrounding world, they work to preserve society through their rejection of interest, property and the narrow sociality of the family. They cohere not as a special class of people, with distinctive attributes, values and activities, but rather as a latent dimension within society generally. Still, I acknowledge that none of this amounts to a scheme for practical social transformation. Rather than designating a public course of action, aesthetic experience represents a marginal field of alternative human value. In circumstances where we lack adequate means of conceiving the just features of disposition necessary to address our social and ecological problems, aesthetic experience - anachronistic, solipsistic and socially divisive - signals crucial features of what's needed.

There remains, however, a crucial problem with the paradigm of aesthetic experience. Kantian aesthetics conceives aesthetic value as emerging within the context of a vividly inner space of reflection. In this respect, if the notion of aesthetic value is mobilised for political and ethical purposes it is arguably because it opens up the utopian prospect of a social relation that does not depend on society as such - that is lucidly manifest at an individual and subjective level. Whereas egalitarian political debate is framed by a constitutive fragmentation and mediation of vision and awareness, aesthetic experience promises something intimately

available and apparent. On this basis, aesthetic politics arguably obscures a central question: how is it that justice takes shape socially without any convenient recourse to singularly and holistically evident vision or truth?

Despite these misgivings, the notion of aesthetic value remains important because we must inevitably search for individual points of comprehension and action. There is no seamless relation between social collectivity and individual lives. However much happens at an elusive trans-subjective level, there is still the need to acknowledge particular contexts of experience and understanding. Society is never entirely integral, just as each individual is never entirely autonomous. Parts and whole are in a relation of complex tension. It is not as though the world is suddenly transformed in each instant of aesthetic engagement, but if any worthwhile transformation is to occur then it will depend upon our capacity to discover alternatives bases of value within the incoherent texture of contemporary circumstances.

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