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Untitled, N.D., by Gideon Parry
Gideon is both an artist and a novelist:
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This issue marks the first under the editorial auspices of Leslie Marsh. Leslie as you well know has, until now, been Managing Editor, the logistical engine behind much of C+T’s activities—the building of its distinctive profile, the organizing of conferences, the shepherding of each issue from submission through to publication, and the updating of C+T’s web presence. It is in the spirit of liberality, the sense in which James Alexander (in this issue) so precisely nails down, that Leslie has cultivated C+T as an emergent order.

Committed to the principles of open access, contributors can be assured that their work will actually be seen by both academics and the wider public. I’d especially like to encourage early career academics to consider submitting articles and review articles. Moreover, if someone cares to make a proposal for a guest edited issue—on a specific theme or a book symposium—C+T offers an excellent opportunity for one, under our watchful eye and with plenty of support, to hone one’s editorial skills and judgments, extremely useful for those making a career as an academic.

*****

In Memoriam: On a very sad note, we wish to pay our respects to the late Corey Abel and his family. Corey, one of our earliest supporters, had an infectious enthusiasm for the project. This was especially significant since Corey is primarily known within Oakeshottian circles. Ever the diplomat, Corey was an honest arbiter negotiating C+T’s various liberal factions—in print, in the conference room, and equally importantly, at the bar. Our overlapping circles have lost a most subtle and cultivated mind, a paragon of liberality.
Abstract: I want to argue that liberalism has an essence. I do not want to do this silently, or by taking it for granted, but by stating it plainly. Liberalism has an essence, even though it emerged contingently and perhaps even unexpectedly out of history: for the reason that once it emerged it was soon understood to be a decisive novelty, not without difficulties and contradictions, but magnificent in the scale of its revision of human possibilities. In particular, I want to assert what is sometimes, though not often, asserted, that liberalism is best understood as—and the crisis of liberalism now best understood as a consequence of—an extension of a pre-political disposition of liberality (liberalitas) into politics, therefore not as a political ideal of liberty or consent. I do this neither by writing pure philosophy nor by writing pure history—since I think the former is a mistake, and the latter is sometimes a bit uncritical—but by writing what historians of eighteenth-century political thought called ‘conjectural history’: a style of imaginative writing which is for a philosophical purpose but which is written as if in historical terms. It is, in fact, a sort of philosophy of history.

I shall begin by distinguishing an ‘ancient order’ from a ‘modern order’.

By ‘ancient order’ I mean the order of orders which can be characterised in different ways—in terms of what I have called imperium, what Kung-chuan Hsaio has called ‘political solipsism’, what R. G. Collingwood called ‘eristic’, what Hugh Nibley called ‘the hierocentric state’.

The key to this order is that each order within that order supposes itself to be the only order, centred on a shrine which marks the exact centre of the universe, defended by an itinerant king, who rules the order which extends as far as it can but possesses a right far in excess of the might it can muster, and generally exhibits an attitude to the outside world which involves the hope that later it will be subsumed within this order. Every king was the king of the four quarters, the de iure if not de facto lord of the world. The outside world, as Carl Schmitt put it in The Nomos of the Earth (2003, p. 51), was either curious, threatening or uninteresting—anxiously, set aside for later conquest, as if might would one day enable the king to assert his right to a world formally his but as yet of not much direct concern. Nibley (1951, p. 234) calls this ‘the common doctrine of the great conquerors’:
It is clear and unequivocal in each case: (1) the monarch rules over all men; (2) it is God who has ordered him to do so and, significantly, none claims authority as originating with himself, but even the proudest claims to be but the humble instrument of heaven; (3) it is thus his sacred duty and mission in the world to extend his dominion over the whole earth, and all his wars are holy wars; and (4) to resist him is a crime and sacrilege deserving no other fate than extermination. The most obvious corollary of this doctrine is that there can be only one true ruler on earth. ‘The eternal command of God is this,’ wrote Mangu Khan to Louis IX, ‘in heaven there is one eternal God; on earth there is no other master than Chingis Khan, the Son of God.’

This is what Kung-chuan Hsiao (1979) calls ‘political solipsism’, since it supposes that only this order exists. The world, then, is a paradox, since it is a world of worlds, in which each subsidiary world denies the right to exist of all the others. (For more on this see Alexander 2019, especially on imperium.)

Since the world is de iure a monad but de facto an indefinite dyad—a world of plurality—it is, in effect, a simple dyad, a world of black and white, good and bad, us and them. As Nibley puts it (1951, p. 244): ‘The world inevitably falls into two parts, the heavenly kingdom and the outer darkness, a world of monsters and abortions.’ The world divides into the faithful and unfaithful: Dar al-Islam and Dar al-Harb. Collingwood’s account of ‘eristic’ in The New Leviathan is interesting here. By ‘eristic’ he meant what he thought Plato meant, which was a type of discussion ‘in which each party tries to prove that he was right and the other wrong’. If ‘eristic’ was one type, the other was ‘dialectic’. ‘In a dialectical discussion you aim at showing that your own view is one with which your opponent really agrees… The essence of dialectical discussion is to discuss in the hope of finding that both parties to the discussion are right. (Collingwood 1943, p. 181). The point here is that the antique order, as I characterise it, was politically eristic, whereas, as I shall show, the modern order, at least in its liberal form, is dialectical.

Collingwood certainly considers that eristic is ineliminable. And Nibley has a good passage about this:

Men seem unable to leave the dream of a hierocentric state alone…. We cannot blame people if they yearn for (1) the grandeur, colour and unity of the great assembly, (2) the lofty and uncompromising certainty of universal kingship, (3) the sense of refuge and well-being in the holy shrine, (4) the high and independent life of a chivalrous aristocracy, (5) the luxury of hating all opposition with a holy hatred, and (6) the sheer authority of the institutions established and maintained by force. These are the strengths of the hierocentric society. Its weakness is that it doesn’t exist. (Nibley 1951, pp. 252-3)

This ‘hierocentric’ or ‘eristic’ order was solipsistic. It was also generally hierocratic, depending on sacral monarchy. The history of the world can be told as the history of monarchy, with some interesting critiques of monarchy in ancient Greek, Jewish and Roman society, but surviving until after the eighteenth century—and even in the twentieth century there being a legacy of monarchy in sovereignty and the state, even when the people is sovereign and the state secular. (For this see Oakley 2006).

We have left a ‘solipsistic’ age, and entered an age of ‘recognition’; we have left an age of ‘eristic’ and entered an age of ‘dialectic’. Yet the solipsistic and eristic elements cannot be eliminated.

II.

What is the first step away from the old order? Koselleck draws attention to the absolutist state, and he is not wrong about this. What broke the ‘hierocentric’ state? As I have explained it, the world order was an order of orders not recognising each other as equivalent. The state—or absolutist state, as Koselleck has it—was important because it was of the essence of the state that every state recognised the right of other states to exist. He speaks in Critique and Crisis (1988, pp. 15-6) of how ‘absolutism’ was the ‘precondition of enlightenment’ but this is only because absolutism made the state possible. The state (separated from church)
was something internally sovereign and subject to no external sovereignty: also, by way of return, the state forfeited its claim to *de jure* title over territories beyond its boundaries. The Reformation, of course, was the rejection of the sovereignty of the Pope and the rejection of the Pope’s *plenitudo potestatis*. The political and religious principle *cuius regio, eius religio* became the foundation of the relations between states. By the twentieth century the principle was that states were—though difficult to define intrinsically—best defined in terms of their relation to each other, in terms of recognition. (See Lauterpacht 1948.) That is to say, the state cannot easily be defined or characterised or theorised (though, as ever, consider Skinner 1989, and perhaps also Alexander 2019): nonetheless, we know what the set of states is, and we can certainly admit that a new state has been added to the set of states when all the other states consent to recognise its right to be a state.

But there is more to be said. The most elegant statement is found in some of J. G. A. Pocock’s recent writings on Gibbon and the Enlightenment. In the first volume of *Barbarism and Religion* (1999, p. 7) Pocock says that Enlightenment ‘may be characterised in two ways’:

first, as the emergence of a system of states, found in civil and commercial society and culture, which might enable Europe to escape from the wars of religion without falling under the hegemony of a single monarchy; second, as a series of programmes for reducing the power of either churches or congregations to disturb the peace of civil society.

So what we have here is the system of states—orders which form a coherent total order because each subsidiary order *does accept* the right to exist of other subsidiary orders to exist—but also a second point about the adjustment of the foundations of each other. No longer shall the basis of an order be religious. It shall be secular. This has to be understood exactly. Here, though perhaps not elsewhere, Enlightenment is not about the successful replacement of a religious society with an unequal but opposite yet similar sort of society, a secular society, which simply supplies *better*, since secular, ideas for the maintenance of public order. Enlightenment is not about the elimination of religion from society. But it is about the elimination of religion from the foundation of that society. Religion will not be eliminated; but it will not be allowed any role in establishing or grounding the order. Instead there will be a secular frame within which religion, indeed, any religion, a plurality of religions, may continue to be practiced. This is a familiar principle: we call it ‘the separation of church and state’. In his second volume (1999b, p. 19), Pocock summarises it as a ‘reduction of philosophy and theology from perception of reality to sociable discourse’. Or, in his pithiest formulation yet, as ‘the will to subject disputatious religion to the imperatives of civil society’ (Pocock 2018, p. 269). The reason this works is that a religion like Christianity, or indeed, any religion of sin or suffering which is not simply the religion of one community is necessarily universal in its reach. It cannot be bounded within one state. Even if it could be bounded within one state it would require coercion of thought. It is only when religion is stripped out of the foundations that one can separate out politics, and make the order a secular frame. So religion becomes one discourse among others.

It is interesting to return to Koselleck because in his book *Critique and Crisis* he makes use of a comparison of Hobbes and Locke. Hobbes was the theorist of the separation of ‘conscience and the needs of the situation’. Hobbes separated out conscience, allowed it to exist privately, but made it of no political significance or value at all. ‘To survive,’ said Hobbes in effect, ‘the subject must submerge his conscience’ (Koselleck 1988, p. 19). So on the one hand one has the *state* and on the other one has the *individual*, and the individual has a negative existence within the state, able to exist, but not able to express anything of political relevance out of his or her individuality. Conscience is alienated from the state and turns into private morality. (*Ibid.*, p. 31.) But there was one thing Hobbes did not understand, and this is where Locke came in. ‘Hobbes did not know that reason has a gravitation of its own.’ (*Ibid.*, p. 34).

Locke, for Koselleck, is the author of the *Essay on Human Understanding*. In Book II, chapter 28 Locke suggested that there are three powers which encourage us to assess and adjust our own behaviour. These are God, the Sovereign, and Public Opinion. It is the third of these—and of course the continued significance of
the first already distinguishes Locke from Hobbes and makes him in some respects more old-fashioned as a theorist—which is significant here, for it was the wholly novel element. Locke speaks of Divine Law, Civil Law and 'The Law of Opinion or Reputation'—or 'the law of God, 'the law of politic societies' and 'the law of fashion or private censure'. It is by the third law that we decide what is virtuous and what is vicious. Moral judgements are not, as they are for Hobbes, a matter of private morality. On the contrary: moral judgements establish what is of value in a society (See Koselleck 1988, pp. 53-5; also Locke 1959, Vol. I, pp. 476-80).

III.

What we have then is a recognition that something fundamental has changed. It is not about substituting modern secular equivalents of the old religious ideas for those old religious ideas. It is about changing the frame. What has been changed is that one has replaced an exclusive unity—one which excludes other subsidiary orders—with a potentially inclusive plurality. Franco Moretti in his book Distance Learning found two magnificent quotations which, for him, and now, for us, may illustrate the shift from the older perspective to the newer one. The older one was religious and unitary. The newer one explicitly recognises the oblivion into which unitary positions have faded. Moretti found quotations which were particular about Europe (since he is interested in the difference between the Chinese novel and the European novel).

First we have a quotation from Novalis’s Christianity, or Europe, written in 1799:

Those were beautiful times, those were splendid times, the time of Christian Europe, when one Christianity inhabited this continent shaped in human form, and one vast, shared design united the farthest provinces of this spiritual kingdom. Free from extended worldly possessions, one supreme ruler held together the great political forces (Novalis quoted in Moretti 2013, p. 3).

As Moretti summarises it, ‘Europe is Christianity, and Christianity is unity’.

The second quotation, or second model, comes from Francois Guizot’s Histoire de la Civilisation en Europe, lectures given in 1828:

In the history of non-European peoples, the simultaneous presence of conflicting principles has been a sort of accident, limited to episodic crises… The opposite is true for the civilisation of modern Europe… varied, confused, stormy from its very inception; all forms, all principles of social organisation coexist here: spiritual and temporal rule, the theocratic, monarchic, aristocratic, democratic element; all classes, all social positions crowd and overlap; there are countless gradations of freedom and wealth and power. Among these forces, a permanent struggle: none of them manages to stifle the others, and to seize the monopoly of social power… In the ideas and feelings of Europe, the same difference, the same struggle. Theocratic, monarchic, aristocratic, popular convictions confront each other and clash… (Guizot quoted in ibid., p. 6, with my italics).

Moretti then compares the two quotations. ‘For Novalis, disparity and conflict poisoned Europe; for Guizot they constitute it.’ Part of Moretti’s genius here is in selection, for these two quotations perfectly exemplify the shift from the ancient order to the modern order. (I refuse to date ‘modern’ exactly. In a sense Machiavelli, who saw the value of conflict, was an early ‘modern’: but then so was Polybius, his antecedent, and arguably some pre-Socratics too. But I think for the sake of argument we can settle the title ‘modern’ in this conjectural history on the late eighteenth century or thereabouts).

In a first stage, freedom has been let in. In a second stage, freedom has not only been tolerated within a system which does not itself exhibit freedom, but comes to saturate the system. This is the shift from Hobbes to Locke, or, in another idiom from Skinner’s ‘liberal’ liberty of Hobbes, the liberty of the Ottomans, as opposed to Skinner’s ‘neo-Roman’ or Pettit’s ‘republican’ liberty of Harrington, the liberty of the citizens of Lucca (See especially Skinner 1998). This shift is a very commonly recognised one in all of the
recent literature on political philosophy. So, for instance, Bernard Williams in his musings on politics after Rawls and Habermas (for which, see Williams 2005) speaks of a ‘basic legitimation demand’—something that can make a political order legitimate—and has a Hobbesian answer for this, before going on to discuss what would make a political order liberally legitimate—for which he has what we could call a Lockean answer.

As Guizot observed, the entrance of freedom, and the entrance of it in the way Koselleck emphasises, whereby we are not only free in our private activity and private opinions but free to impose our sense of what is virtuous and vicious within our society, means that we inevitably also allow the entrance of something Hobbes did not want to admit—and, in fact, something Locke did not really want to admit very much of. This is a plurality or diversity of opinions: the suggestion that no one set of opinions has any greater political status than any other. So we have Guizot’s permanent struggle of conflicting principles, which attempt to achieve a mutual accommodation. What this means in relation to the antique order as described by Niblcy is that the monopoly exhibited by the hierocentric order is shattered. This feature of modernity was noticed by the nineteenth-century historian J. R. Seeley when he attempted to make sense of what even in 1870 he could identify as the ‘revolution of the nineteenth century’. He dated this English revolution to 1829. It was, he claimed, the third revolution in English history. ‘The revolution of the 16th century greatly increased the power of the Crown, and changed the House of Lords from an ecclesiastical to a secular assembly. The second great revolution broke the power of the Crown, and raised the House of Commons to supremacy in the State. But the present age, in which everything is called in question, has introduced no changes of this kind.’ (Seeley 1870, p. 245) So what was this third revolution, the revolution of the nineteenth century? Seeley brilliantly characterised it as an assault on every and any monopoly. It was the ‘Abolition of Monopolies’: including even, ultimately, he anticipated, the monopoly of Crown, Commons, Christianity and even Men (Ibid., pp. 249-50). At first the state had abandoned its own right of creating monopolies. Then it began to break up all established monopolies, or allowed the question to be heard of whether established monopolies should be broken up. (Clearly, even in 2020, the question is still being asked of what should happen to the monopolies of Crown, Commons, Christianity, Men and now also Humans, Whites and Heterosexuals). The cause of all this is the establishment of ‘the absolute sovereignty of public opinion’—something which had been sketched before 1829 but often denied (Ibid., p. 348). Seeley, writing from the vantage of 1870, found no difficulty in seeing all political parties before 1829 as conservative. ‘The name “Conservative” was before equally applicable to both sides, it has now become the name of one side.’ (Ibid., p. 357). He did not say, though he could have said, as we would now say, that the name ‘Conservative’ did not exist before 1829: he would have explained this by saying that a name was not needed for such a thing because of its ubiquity. He did not need to tell his readers that the other side was named ‘Liberal’. Yet Seeley enables us to see the relation between the developments we have already discussed and the emergence of a named Liberalism which divided the political world into two.

A world divided into ‘Liberal’ and ‘Conservative’ is at the very least a transitional world: but a world which has broken decisively with the hierocentric, eristic, solipsistic antique order. It is a world in which the permanent and inconclusive struggle between opposite principles begins. Instead of unity, as found in the Crown, we have the established disunity of party politics. It is not for nothing that the term ‘His Majesty’s Opposition’, initially an ironic remark about the apparent establishment of a party of opposition to the party of government and opposed to ‘His Majesty’s Government,’ was first coined by a friend of Lord Byron in 1826. It is not until the nineteenth century that there was a politics which included a recognition of perpetual and legitimate opposition.

I have already mentioned Collingwood’s distinction of ‘eristic’ and ‘dialectic’. Collingwood supposed that what emerged in the nineteenth century was a properly dialectical politics, as opposed to the eristic politics of all earlier history. He called any order with such dialectical politics—politics in which one seeks to achieve mutual understanding rather than seeks to impose one’s understanding over someone else by force—a ‘civilised’ order. This word ‘civilisation’ and its close cognate ‘civility’ were important words for twentieth century political theorists. In some theorists’ hands, especially in America, the words became
interchangeable with ‘liberal’—as if a ‘civil’ order was also a ‘liberal’ one. But for some others, like Collingwood himself, and Oakeshott—who always spoke of ‘civility’ as a property of an order and of ‘liberalism’ as only the name of one political style within that order—thought that there was a problem in conflating the word for the entire order with the word for one principle in that order. Let us consider Collingwood since we have followed him so far.

Collingwood saw dialectical politics as fundamentally binary, so depending on the existence of at least two and perhaps even especially two—rather than too many more—parties. There were two major parties in England in the era which followed the adjustment to Seeley’s ‘revolution’ after 1829, and which dominated politics even Collingwood’s early life, until the First World War. And Collingwood preferred to see politics in these terms, even though he recognised that what had happened in the last twenty years of his life was that while the Conservative party had survived the other major party, the Liberal party, had been displaced by a Labour party. Collingwood saw civilised politics properly as a dialectic between two parties of the type of the Liberal and Conservative parties of England. The two parties divided not in any absolute sense: both were in favour of liberty. But they disagreed on how far liberty should be introduced into the system. ‘To hasten the percolation of liberty throughout every part of the body politic was the avowed aim of the Liberal party; to retard it was the avowed aim of the Conservative party’. But: ‘The relation between them was fundamentally dialectical. They were not fundamentally in disagreement’ (Collingwood 1943, p. 209).

So what went wrong? In Collingwood’s answer we find a hint about our political condition, not only in England, but elsewhere, since 1918—and perhaps especially since the Liberal university teachers, Liberal novelists and Liberal actors and musicians of the 1960s have grown old, appointed their successors and overseen the permeation of English society by a Liberalism so convinced of its own correctness that it has forgotten that Liberalism might only be an element in a transitional order. Though let us see what Collingwood says in the 1940s, looking mostly backwards. He begins by observing that ‘though the opposition of Liberalism and Conservatism was a dialectical opposition, it is doubtful whether both parties were equally aware of this’ (Ibid., p. 210). ‘In a dialectical system it is essential that the representatives of each opposing view should understand why the other view must be represented.’ If one side fails to understand this ‘it ceases to be a party and becomes a faction, that is, a combatant in an eristical process instead of a partner in a dialectical process.’ Remarkably, the first side to fail was not the side which had entered the transitional stage reluctantly, since it had originally wanted to hold onto the hierocentric order—the conservative side—but the other side, the liberal side. Collingwood explains:

I think they [the Liberals] pictured themselves as dragging the vehicle of progress against the dead weight of human stupidity; and I think they believed Conservatives to be a part of that dead weight. Conservatives understood that there must be a party of progress. Liberals, I think, never understood that there must be a party of reaction. [In short:] Liberals did not understand the dialectic of English politics (Ibid., p. 211).

Whether or not this was correct in Collingwood’s time, events since the 1960s have shown how well Collingwood anticipated the nature of the decline of the order we may call ‘modern’, ‘civil’ or ‘liberal’. The liberals themselves, in believing in the telos to which their activities were directed—the establishment of a fully liberal order, have failed to see that a civil, that is, a dialectical—in a sense, ‘liberal’—order depended on being a transitional order, an order which would never achieve any particular telos, since its proper status was remaining within the dynamic and dialectical exchange in which opposition was legitimate. As soon as liberals began to convict their opponents of being wrong in the sense of absolutely wrong and therefore eliminable—‘cancellable’ to use the contemporary word—they became what we would call ‘eristic liberals’ instead of being ‘dialectical liberals’.

The current ‘culture war’ can be characterised in many ways, and has many elements. But at root, as commentators like Jonathan Haidt and others have noticed, it seems to come down to the existence of a bi-
nary—between liberals and conservatives—in which, at the moment, the liberals are attempting to elimi-
nate conservatives from that binary, and thus threaten to destroy the binary which makes a ‘modern’, ‘civil’,
and even ‘liberal’ order possible (See Haidt 2012).

IV.

At this point, I want to step to one side. I have suggested, following Collingwood, that the contemporary
problem of liberalism is that liberals are, or some liberals are, engaged in subverting the system they some-
times characterise as ‘liberal’. There is, I have argued, properly no telos for liberalism: and liberals come into
crisis whenever they see their own doctrine as a teleological one. But even if there is no telos there is, none-
theless, an aspiration, a sort of ultimate or highest condition—and this is a meaningful one, even though its
achievement would end in its own destruction. This aspiration, or hope, is the one which, I think, enables
us to characterise liberalism as a political doctrine which originally came out of a pre-political disposition.
I consider this disposition to be the essence of liberalism.

So far, in this essay, I have not referred to the ‘essence’ of liberalism. Many commentators have argued
that liberalism has no essence, including one of the most persuasive recent accounts of liberalism, which I
shall consider later, the one by David Corey. Nonetheless, I do want to argue that liberalism has an essence,
a thinkable one, even if I also am willing to admit that, in our history, liberalism was a contingent emer-
gence. Its contingent emergence does not mean that liberalism lacks an extremely deep grounding in a con-
viction of what the good life involves. And I shall call this an ‘essence’. I find this essence not in liberty, as
many, including Corey, do, and nor do I find it in toleration, individualism or any of the other usual candi-
dates. I find it in ‘liberality’.

By appealing to ‘liberality’ I am not being original. But I am contributing to a line of thought which
still has not had many followers. In the eighteenth century there was no word ‘liberalism’. The word ‘lib-
eral’ was not a political word, though it was a polite word. In Johnson’s Dictionary the adjective liberal
meant ‘not mean; not low in birth’ becoming a gentleman; munificent; generous; bountiful’, while ‘liberal-
ity’ meant ‘munificence, bounty, generosity’ (Cited in Craig 2012, p. 477). In other words, it meant the at-
titudes or behaviour of someone civilised, someone who was educated, someone who was, in the eighteenth
century term, conversable—and it meant someone who both exemplified the best of a particular culture but
also through his—it was mostly his, though could sometimes be her—efforts to contribute to the mainte-
nance and extension of that culture. Someone who was ‘liberal’ was someone who had received a ‘liberal’
education, and was generous, not only materially, but spiritually. For Roman writers like Cicero and Seneca
it had made sense to write of not only libertas but also the man who had it, the liber, and the virtues he was
supposed to have, liberalitas. This ‘liberality’ and the adjective ‘liberal’ were common in English and other
languages from the Renaissance onwards, and especially by the eighteenth century were important words
in modern polite and commercial society. That word acquired a political, rather than merely polite, mean-
ing in the late eighteenth century, as the ‘spirit of liberty’ became a principle of a certain brand of politics.
By the 1780s it was possible to speak of ‘a liberal’, and in the 1820s the word ‘liberalism’ was coined. (For
some of these details arranged into a narrative see Rosenblatt 2018). Yet the emergence of the word did not
mean that something fixed had come into existence. The word ‘liberalism’ was a political word to denote the
attempt to turn the politics of liberty, or, I am arguing here, liberality, into a political movement.

If I am right—and I may be, but I also may not be—then the most important correlate of ‘liberalism’ is
not ‘liberty’ (though it is important) but ‘liberality’. Liberalism in this sense involves ‘liberty’ and involves
what Duncan Kelly (in 2011) has called ‘liberty as propriety’ but it involves more than that: it involves ‘lib-
erty as liberality’: that is, using freedom not simply to seem or even to be a certain sort of man, but using
freedom to act in such a way that others are the beneficiaries of one’s liberality. This is what I might call
the imperial aspect of liberalism: that it naturally seeks to extend its sway. This is not a static doctrine, but
a missionary one. It seeks to convert others to liberalism: though it does not do so through ‘conversion’
(which is eristic) but through—significantly, a related term, ‘conversation’ (which is dialectical).
Before I come to the subject of conversation, let me cite some authorities for the idea that liberalism has its roots in liberality. Long ago Guillaume de Bertier de Sauvigny went into the question of the etymology of 'liberalism'. He saw that the novelty of the suffix 'ism' was that it implied something active (Bertier de Sauvigny 1970, p. 149). A 'liberal' would now be actively for a certain object: and, for Bertier de Sauvigny, that object was not 'liberty' but 'liberality'. (To paraphrase Koselleck 1985, p. 287, the old concept of 'liberal', 'which had previously indicated a condition, became a telos, and was at the same time rendered into a concept of movement, by means of the suffix “ism”). And even more explicitly than this, Bertier de Sauvigny suggested that the meaning of liberality was primarily generosity, so that 'liberalism' originally meant 'generosity applied in the field of politics' (p. 152). Bertier de Sauvigny was not alone in having related liberalism to generosity. Rather famously—since Hayek (in 1982, Vol. 2, p. 133) quoted it, John Gray has quoted it, and Matt Sleat has used it as an epigraph for a book—for Ortega y Gasset, liberalism was:

the supreme form of generosity; it is the right which the majority concedes to the minority and hence is the noblest cry that has ever resounded on this planet. It announces the determination to share existence with the enemy; more than that, with an enemy which is weak. It was incredible that the human species should have arrived at so noble an attitude, so paradoxical, so refined, so anti-natural. Hence it is not to be wondered at that this same humanity should soon appear to be anxious to get rid of it. It is a discipline too difficult and complex to take firm root on earth (Ortega y Gasset 1923, p. xviii).

Bertier de Sauvigny had a short story about the use of the term after Napoleon’s use of it in 1799: Chateaubriand in 1802, the Cortes in Spain in 1812, Tories using it to name advanced Whigs in 1816. This story has been expanded by Helena Rosenblatt in her recent Lost History of Liberalism. What is remarkable about her book—as has been noticed by reviewers (see, for instance, Collins 2019, though he goes too far in dismissing essentialism)—is that she constructs her history in terms of ‘liberality’ not ‘liberty’. She traces the use of liberalitas back to Cicero, brings it forward right through to Dr. Johnson, noticing that ‘liberal’ was first used to mean ‘free from bias’ or ‘tolerant’ in 1772, and, more interestingly from a historical point of view suggesting that commentators at the time were aware that the political use of the term ‘liberal’ in the nineteenth century (in relation to ‘liberalism’) was twisting its meaning from what ‘liberal’ had meant in the eighteenth century (in relation to ‘liberality’). Certainly, ‘liberal’ had always been a noble or aristocratic virtue, so of course figures like Bonald thought that any use of the term in an ignoble or democratic sense was a trick. (Rosenblatt 2018, p. 69). Now, I of course find much to admire in Rosenblatt’s account, in its emphasis on ‘liberality’ rather than ‘liberty’. But there is no question that the centrality of the ‘liberality’ tradition is asserted rather than argued, and Rosenblatt herself does not explain how (non-political) ‘liberality’ did or did not flow into (political) ‘liberalism’. Collins (2019, p. 686) has noticed that she ignores writers like Hegel, who declared that liberalism was ‘the atomistic principle which insists on the sway of individual wills; maintaining that all government should emanate from their express power and have their express sanction’—a very important suggestion—and, even more important for my purposes, Kant, saying that ‘he did not deploy the term “liberal” in any politically significant context’.

The other only historian who has observed the obvious difference between the meaning of ‘liberal’ in the age of liberality (Dr Johnson) and the meaning of ‘liberal’ in the age of liberalism (Lord Byron), David Craig, has argued (in Craig 2012) that there was no relation between the old noble meaning and the new meaning, or, at least, a sufficient hiatus to make any suggestion of a continuous tradition objectionable. This is not something that can be historically established: it is, I think, a matter of philosophical preference. And my preference—like Rosenblatt’s—is for continuity. I would like to maintain, then, that ‘liberality’ became ‘liberalism’ as it crossed over from a non-political context to a political context. But this needs to be explained.
What I am arguing is _before there was a liberal politics_ there was the cultural emergence of a sort of liberal sensibility, which we may as well associate with the word ‘liberality’ (since the word ‘liberalism’ did not exist in the eighteenth century). The ‘liberal’ person was one who was a _liber_ and had received the education appropriate for someone who was a _liber_, and, in addition—since the meaning of ‘liberal’ is generous—was also able and willing to bestow this education and its concomitant sensibility on others, perhaps by educating them, but also by behaving with them in a particularly ‘liberal’ way. In other words, ‘liberalism’, _contra_ Hegel, was not only about individual will or sanction but about individual interest and care. (It is always a pleasure to convict Hegel of one-sidedness.)

I have not yet reached what I think is the particular essence of liberalism. It was discovered just before the word ‘liberal’ made the transition from a pre-political ‘liberality’ to a political ‘liberalism’. If the essence of liberalism is liberalism as liberality—not liberalism as liberty—then liberalism as liberality may be exactly identified as _the disposition to think oneself into the position of others_. It might be too much to say that it is to think oneself into the _thoughts_ of others, but I think that this takes us further than thinking oneself into the _feelings_ of others. Yet the two are obviously related. (History is a tragedy for the man who feels, and a comedy for the man who thinks, said Walpole.)

Adam Smith dealt with this in _The Theory of Moral Sentiments_, or, rather, dealt with a subject close to the one that concerns me. He was concerned with _sympathy_ for emotions, passions, sentiments whereas I am concerned with _understanding_ of arguments, opinions, positions. But there was one paragraph in which he referred to ‘opinions’ rather than ‘sentiments’. The paragraph began: ‘To approve of another man’s opinions is to adopt those opinions, and to adopt them is to approve of them…’ (Smith 2002, p. 21). He seemed to treat opinions as something fixed, not as something one would try to understand or even adopt. But he likened ‘opinions’ to ‘sentiments’—the latter, let it be repeated, was his real subject—and in subsequent pages he did raise the possibility that one might try to _extend_ sympathy to someone else, that one might have to make some sort of effort to do so. ‘In all such cases, that there may be some correspondence of sentiment between the spectator and the person principally concerned, the spectator must, first of all, endeavour, as much as he can, to put himself in the situation of the other.’ But, again, his subject was ‘sentiment’, not ‘opinion’, so this very sentence continued: ‘and to bring home to himself every little circumstance of distress which can possibly occur to the sufferer’ (Ibid., p. 26). So it was about _feelings not thoughts_. But the result, if the spectator did succeed in putting himself or herself in the position of the sufferer, would be ‘concord’. Interestingly, he also went on to say that what was required was a ‘sensibility’ which he said was ‘much beyond what is possessed by the rude and vulgar of mankind’ (Ibid., p. 30).

Smith is relevant to my subject, but much less pertinent, I would argue, than Kant. In his lectures on _anthropology_—lectures he delivered between the 1770s and the 1790s and published in 1798—Kant discussed the several maxims we have to adopt in order to achieve wisdom. He declared that it is important to do all three of the following:

1. To think _for oneself_.
2. To think oneself (in communication with human beings) into the place of every _other person_.
3. Always to think _consistently_ with oneself (Kant 2006, p. 124).

Kant says that the second of these is ‘the principle of _liberals_ who adapt to the principles of others’. It is perhaps amusing to reflect for a moment that ‘to think for oneself’ is not liberal, and that ‘to think consistently with oneself’ is not liberal. Be that as it may. But ‘to think oneself into the place of every other person’ _is_ liberal. And I want to claim that it is the origin and the highest aspiration of what we now call liberalism.

The first thing to say about this is that it is difficult to do. A second thing to say is that this difficulty seems to be the highest aspiration not only of what later became political liberalism but also of the literary activity which arose in the eighteenth century, flourished in the nineteenth and proliferated in the twentieth.
The novel, when written in this subjective style—not 'objective', because not writing about what is on the surface—is nothing less than the highest art of liberalism in the sense of the aspiration to think ourselves into the position of others. James, Lawrence, Joyce, Woolf: the highest art of liberalism.

I said earlier that I would bring in the subject of conversation in order to show its relation to civility and liberality. Thinking oneself into the position of another takes different forms. It can take the form of studying others, reading about them, or reading their literature; or it can take the form of interacting with them. It extends from reading about or in ancient lost cultures, to reading about or in contemporary foreign cultures, to reading about or in cultures in one's own society. It involves the use of imagination: one is learning about something outside one's own culture or knowledge. But it achieves its most perfect form in the conversation.

By 'conversation' I mean something specific. A conversation is a form of intercourse in which both interlocutors have an interest in thinking themselves into the position of the other. We can distinguish three sorts of dialogue: between two dogmatists, between a dogmatist and someone 'liberal', and between two 'liberals'—where by 'liberal' I mean concerned to do more than display their convictions and, perhaps, successfully impose those convictions on their interlocutor. Here is where it is useful to distinguish conversion and conversation. These two words have the same root. Conversion is from the Latin convertere, turn about, from vertere, to turn, while conversation is from conversari, the frequentative past participle form of con-verte, meaning associate with, or literally, to turn about again and again. So, etymologically, a conversation is in effect a repeated conversion, while a conversion is a conversation which ends abruptly and therefore is not properly a conversation at all. Someone from the antique order, hierocentric, solipsistic and so on, wants to convert someone who disagrees with them to their opinion. But someone from the modern order, 'liberal' or 'civil', wants to converse with someone who disagrees with them so that some sort of agreement or understanding can be reached. Here we have the obvious correlate, at an interpersonal level, of the difference between the antique or eristic order and the modern or dialectical order.

The liberal disposition to think oneself into the position of others, then, is an important element in conversation and in 'liberal' education. A liberal education is an education in which one is encouraged to think oneself into the position of others, not only through conversation in medias res but also, through study, to think oneself into the position of others distant or dead—and even the less privileged. At one extreme it is the aspiration of Henry James. But at the other extreme, it is an encouragement to think of the situation and the convictions of those who lack privileges, including especially the privilege of a liberal education.

There is something else to be added. Thinking oneself into the position of another is also, at a further extreme, to think oneself further into the position of oneself. This has been a philosophical imperative since the Delphic ‘Know thyself’, right through to Lawrence’s suggestion (in 1936, p. 761) that one had to restore the wholeness which had been lost as soon as we distinguished ‘subjective and objective reality’, and to Freud’s apparent opening of the hidden unconscious. This may seem irrelevant since there is no intersubjectivity, no difficulty of encountering an obvious other, here, but as soon as we admit either that people may be divided against themselves in some pathological way, or even more eirenically but profoundly, that
the stability of the solitary self is a myth, and that we are all a flux, then we have to admit that even the encounter with the self might be understood best as a conversation of sorts.

It is probably best to leave the nature of the ‘individual’ and ‘personality’ to one side, while noting that part of the conundrum of ‘modernity’ is that such things have seemed to be very important. But I do want to deal with ‘liberty’ because liberalism is so often retrospectively reconstructed out of liberty rather than out of liberal—despite Ortega y Gasset, Bertier de Sauvigny, Rosenblatt and a few others. Take the recent very interesting suggestion by David Corey (in Corey 2020)—the most interesting suggestion made about liberalism, as far as I can see, in the twenty-first century, though it is an adjustment of the late twentieth-century consensus as found in writings by figures like John Gray and many others (See Gray 2000). The twentieth century consensus was that liberalism was plural, contradictory and had at least ‘two faces’, as Gray put it. The twos are often different, but they are almost always two. Sometimes these are called ‘classical’ and ‘new’ liberalism, sometimes ‘perfectionist’ and ‘political’ liberalism, sometimes the politics of ‘indifference’ and the politics of ‘recognition’, sometimes, simply, ‘liberalism’ and ‘pluralism’. David Corey has rather brilliantly attempted to improve this common view by suggesting that the history of liberalism—and here he is clearly engaged in something similar to what I am engaged in here—a conjectural history rather than history proper (where history proper, is, as Oakeshott put it (in Oakeshott 1999, p. 70), ‘an uneventful circumstantial confluence of vicissitudes’) is best understood as a sequence of liberties. One difference is that he argues that liberalism has no essence. Another difference is that he conjugates liberalism in terms of liberty. Distinctively, he lists nine successive liberties, though the list could be lengthened or shortened. These are freedom from 1. religious domination, 2. foreign domination, 3. religious civil war, 4. arbitrary rule, 5. government interference in the economy, 6. rule by another, 7. economic exploitation by privileged groups, 8. discrimination on the basis of moral prejudices of privileged groups, and 9. biological inequality. He argues that nineteenth century liberalism was mostly about the fourth and fifth, but that liberals did not stand still in some mid-nineteenth century consensus but moved on, not only in Collingwood’s sense of advancing the spread of liberty through the order (increasing the quantity of liberty) but also in altering its quality, by introducing new sorts of freedoms. These new sorts of freedoms involve a twist, since they introduced the possibility, and later necessity, of using the state to achieve those liberties. Corey pithily suggests that the ‘new’ liberals arguably ‘usurped’ the name ‘liberalism’. This enables him to make one of the most interesting definitional claims about liberalism which has been made in recent years:

Liberalism today has three distinct significations. It may refer (1) to the theory and practice of social organization that prioritizes the first five liberties on the list above. Or (2) it may refer to the effort in theory and practice to advance newer freedoms either singly or in combination. (In this case, defense of the first five freedoms appears ‘conservative.’) Or it may refer (3) to the overarching character of regimes that have been and still are living on this historical trajectory (Corey 2020, p. 129).

What is interesting about this is that it does something which I think others have done and which ought to be done. It enables Corey to say that liberalism is one thing (‘the whole trajectory’) and yet at one and the same time a thing divided against itself. If one makes sense of liberalism in terms of liberty the division occurs with the state. Older liberalism was against the state, and newer liberalism makes use of the state. I agree with the division though I prefer to see it not in terms of newer liberties but in terms of the extension of the meaning of liberal so it shifted from being the disposition of a privileged class of individuals to being the deserts of every class, every group and every individual.

Liberalism is usually construed backwards from liberty or from something similarly political. The two most decisive definitions I have seen from the last fifty years can be characterised this way, though they are very different. Judith Shklar, who is very famous now for her phrase ‘the liberalism of fear’, declared that the ‘overriding aim’ of liberalism is ‘to secure the political conditions that are necessary for the exercise of personal freedom’ (Shklar 1998, p. 3). This is obviously Hobbesian. I myself do not think this is distinctively
liberal, though I think it clears a path for liberalism. I sometimes think that liberals who espouse some version of the liberalism of fear are in fact liberals who do not want to argue for anything more liberal than what one gets in Hobbes though they would like, without argument, to be sure of a lot more than what they get in Hobbes. This is what we could call a fear or loathing of Locke and everything that has followed. There is a lot of this about: one sees it in historical undermennings of Locke in the writings of Cambridgish historians (see, for instance, Pocock 1980, Bell 2014 and Stanton 2018) since the 1970s. (Incidentally, Duncan Bell’s influential and interesting article ‘What is Liberalism?’ should be recognised as the exact antitype of what I am attempting here, because it uses history to collect rather than divide—to use the words Plato used in Phaedrus. The best way of stating the problem is to say that Bell engages in a nominalism so thorough it prevents him from answering his own question). The second decisive definition, that of Jeremy Waldron, is not about liberty but about consent. In other words, it is not about freedom from but freedom to: and, in particular, the freedom to sanction the existing order. The fundamental principle of liberalism is that ‘all aspects of the social should either be made acceptable or be capable of being made acceptable to every last individual’ (Waldron 1987, p. 128). He adds that any political order is illegitimate ‘unless it is rooted in the consent of all those who have to live under it’ (Ibid., p. 140). It is a theory of consent rather than a theory of liberty. It is apparently a theory of hope rather than theory of fear.

There are problems with both theories, no doubt. But my objection to them—instructive and interesting as they are—is that neither of them indicates why anyone would want to be liberal. They both seem negative, obsessed with slavery, with not being a slave, a lowborn creature, rather than with being something better than a slave, a highborn creature. Yes, one does not want to lose liberty. One would like to sanction the entire order. But the former is very abstract, and the latter is very ideal, yet still negative, since it is about fear of being dominated: the former seems only barely liberal, if liberal at all, while the latter seems more democratic or republican in its aspiration. One is a minimum, one a maximum of sorts. Both presuppose that liberalism is something everyone wants: everyone suffers from fear of losing liberty, everyone hopes to have control over their life. But both define liberalism as something political. The problem with both is that they begin with a reduction of the meaning of liberalism within the political frame, whereas if liberalism is to be reduced to anything it should be reduced to something substantive and positive which preceded its political framing. The significance of studying the origins of liberalism is that we can see how something pre-political entered the political frame and attempted to subdue the entire frame within itself. This, again, is liberality.

Everyone now—especially now, though this has been the case since the 1960s (consider James Burnham (1964) in America or Maurice Cowling (1963) in England)—wants to be able to explain the current ‘culture war’, the apparent hardening of the arteries of both left and right (of ‘liberals’ and ‘conservatives’, to use the American idiom, though, as we have seen, it was the older English idiom in the nineteenth century). Collingwood speculated that the hardening of arteries had taken place on the left, with the liberals, and not on the right. This was a surprise, and required explanation. Collingwood did not have an explanation. But one explanation is in the twist which everyone has observed, the twist in the meaning of liberalism which I interpret as a twist in the meaning of liberal as a doctrine about liberality.

First, liberality meant that a privileged elite of those who could call themselves liberals would seek to understand each other, and then understand—put themselves in the position of—all those in their society, and, later, in other societies.

Second, liberality—because of the universalising and equalising and inclusive nature of liberality—meant that everyone counted, everyone had to be thought into the position of (the English language creaks as I try to express this): everyone deserved to be a recipient of liberality, or, politically, of liberalism.

It was not about freedom, except in so far as the liberaly of the original liberals was considered to be an aspect of their being free, of being liber, and of exhibiting liberalitas. ‘Freedom’ was a word, a currency—like other words (rights, democracy, inclusivity, etc.) which enabled those on whom liberaly was bestowed to become members of what was now called ‘a liberal order’. Liberalism, having originally been the characteristic of the actors who perpetuated it, the liberals, was now the name for the society in which this charac-
teristic was exhibited, and hence the name for everyone in that society, including all of those who were not themselves liberal, in the sense that they did not exhibit liberality, and were not 'free' in the old humanistic sense.

The major cleavage in metropolitan high culture is not any disagreement between believers and unbelievers: it is a cleavage within liberal culture, between liberals who identify themselves with the old liberalism of bestowing liberality (the partial, universalising, active, elite liberalism) and the liberals who identify themselves with the new liberalism of receiving liberality (the universal, particularising, passive, subaltern liberalism).

VI.

In conclusion, I want to repeat my major claims.

Liberalism is best understood as the consequence of a tradition of liberality. Liberality was a pre-political disposition: in particular, the disposition to think oneself into the position of others, a disposition which involved the suspension of one's own dogmas, the encouragement of others to suspend their dogmas, which, in politics, became a willingness to allow one's dogmas to co-exist in an order which would not be constituted in terms of any of those dogmas. The idea was that instead of conversion everyone would come together in conversation.

This pre-political disposition, for various historical reasons, and out of a thousand contingencies, became first a political idea and then a justification for political practice in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The idea was that an order would exist which could accept opposition within that order.

This involved a complete break with all the assumptions of all ancient thought (and some of the other assumptions of modern thought). Let me simplify and state a rule bluntly, without noting obvious exceptions to the rule. The fundamental assumption of all antiquity was that harmony could only be established through the destruction or elimination of disharmony, that there was political truth and falsehood. The fundamental assumption of modernity, in so far as modernity is 'civil' or 'liberal', is that harmony does not come out of the destruction or elimination of harmony but depends on disharmony, comes out of disharmony, and can never involve the elimination of that very necessary disharmony.

Why did a prepolitical liberality become a political liberalism? Primarily it was because it appeared to solve the major problem of the antique or eristic order, which was its solipsism. In short, liberalism separated religion from politics without eliminating religion. It removed religious dispute from the roots of politics by subjecting religion to the 'imperatives of civil society', to use Pocock's words. It could do this because liberalism did not involve the replacement of religious truths with secular truths—it is very different from Israel's radical enlightenment, which does exactly this (see Alexander 2020)—but the reframing of religious truths within an order of civility which was accepted a certain irresolution in terms of telos, by allowing there to be continual contumacy, a recognition of a permanent right of justified opposition, and a concomitant distrust of all finality, universality and truth in politics. Liberalism, we have seen, arose with the absolutist state, though liberalism is not itself absolutist: it arose with it because the state allowed a step to be taken away from the antique tendency to consider one's political order to be final, universal and true. The antique order was imperial, solipsistic and eristic: it was a 'hierocentric state'. But the modern order is political, recognitional and dialectical: it is a 'liberal state'. It is liberal not because the state is intrinsically liberal: Hobbes's state was not liberal. But the state, as Locke and others saw, turned out to be importantly liberal in its development, when conscience, initially hypothesised as being only a private matter, was turned outwards and found to be a public matter.

The arrival of a modern, liberal order generated an obvious contradiction. This contradiction is that for the first time in history there was an ideal—the telos of a society in which everyone would think themselves into the position of all others (and with all the political consequences that should follow from that)—which, if it were achieved, would destroy its own foundations, since it would involve a reversion to the antique
principle of harmony destroying disharmony and an abandonment of the modern principle of harmony coming out of disharmony.

The modern culture war, found everywhere in universities, newspapers, television, podcasts, is in fact a result of the deep contradiction within liberalism. Liberalism is divided. Originally a pre-political elite disposition, liberalility, once it was conveyed into politics as liberalism, became a party doctrine which sought to transform all of society, and then the question arose of whether ‘liberalism’ was truly the property of those who were liberal, hence exhibiting liberalility, those actors who would defend liberalism, or it was truly the property of all of those who were in receipt of liberal benefits, including the passive and even the illiberal, who were not willing to defend liberalism. The division is not about the sort of liberty as such, or about consent. The division is about whether one sides with the liberals who exhibit liberalility and who value liberalism as a disposition and a culture—in conversation and education—or whether one only values liberalism in terms of the benefits it can supply us with—whoever we are.

VII.

A last word. It is perhaps relevant to say that I am not a theoretical liberal. However, I am a practical liberal: probably a lot more liberal than I would ever want to admit. I do not think much of modern defences of liberalism—though almost every book or article on liberalism (and there are many more published every year) offers some sort of novelty or reminds us of points which do, I think, deserve some sort of systematisation or at least mnemonicisation—some way of remembering them, so they do not have been to rediscovered every time a new lecturer encounters the subject for the first time. I have a higher opinion of the criticisms of liberalism, some of which achieve a level of clarity of coruscation which at times approaches profundity—take Milbank 2016, Geuss 2005 and of course Schmitt 1996, for instance—but I think almost all the critics of liberalism have entirely failed to notice the grandeur of liberalism. In the current culture war, for instance, though I am far from being a theoretical liberal, I am almost entirely pro the defenders of high or benevolent liberalism and contra the defenders of low or recipient liberalism, even though I would, in the end, prefer to impose my own dogma—the one that is protected by the low or recipient side of liberalism—on high liberals. In the end, that is, I would want to impose my doctrine eristically on others. But until we reach that glorious end of historical time it seems wiser to dismount from the high horse of eristicism, solipsism and hierocentrism and forge a high-minded alliance with the high liberals. That is the problem for liberals: they are never high enough for everyone. But they are the highest we can get together—it seems. And that is the grandeur of liberalism. It has not the grandeur of the Torah or Caritas or Nirvana or Islam but it has a grandeur all of its own, a human grandeur, a contradictory grandeur, like an Escher tower, which no one can build. And even those of us who are not liberals have to recognise the grandeur of this conception. It is civilised. Though, of course, to see things this way is to become to some extent a high or elite or active liberal, willing to defend liberal society against its enemies—i.e. against all of its other enemies (but perhaps not, in the end, my enmity). I hope the humour, satire and cynicism in this is evident. But I am also in earnest. One can see why Ortega y Gasset said that liberalism was ‘the noblest cry that has ever resounded on this planet’. And I think even the critics of liberalism have to recognise this, and recognise that, no matter what one believes, something marvellous was contingently engineered a few centuries ago.

NOTES

1. I found this remarkable quotation in Lodge 2018, p. 50, but Lodge said he had lost the reference. I have found it, courtesy of Google Books, in James 1971, p. 174. It comes from a piece called ‘Autobiography in Fiction’, originally published in 1865.
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Abstract: Complex human societies are best understood as ecologies whose members exist in the realm of culture, broadly considered. When this connection is made, concepts fundamental to biological ecological science will be seen to have equivalents in human societies. However, there is a challenging disconnection between the two, because cultural ecologies change more rapidly than biological ecologies, but depend on them for their survival. This permanent issue within human, and some animal, societies is made more intractable by capitalism. Addressing it requires that market interactions with natural ecologies subordinate profit to sustainability. This paper closes with examples of such institutions.

Keywords: Alaska permanent fund, civil society, corporations, ecology, ecosystem, keystone species, land trusts, market, property rights, sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Jane Jacobs wrote “human beings exist wholly within nature as part of natural order in every respect.” (Jacobs 2000, forward) This essay takes her statement literally, and argues that much of the social sciences can be considered as a subset of ecological science, with many of its key concepts gaining depth when explored within an ecological framework. Perhaps nowhere is this more true than in those traditions exploring self-organization and spontaneous order in the market and elsewhere.

If I and others are right about the systemic identities between markets and biological ecologies, each field might benefit from examining concepts developed in the other to see whether analogous processes have been discovered and, whether knowing what happens in one might give us unexplored insights into the other. This paper does so, applying ecological concepts to human societies, particularly to markets.

Ecosystems are complex adaptive systems where the interaction of many individual life processes form self-organizing patterns across different scales of time and space. Ecological science studies these nonlinear relationships between organisms and their environment. Many economists and scientists have long noted the systemic similarities between biological ecologies and the market process. Previously, in this journal, I developed these observations to argue all emergent social processes, from markets, to science
to language, to democracy, share these common similarities (diZerega 2018). While biological ecologies are the best known such systems, in social ecologies, ideas, customs, and rules shape and are shaped by human and a few other organisms in their social as well as physical environment.

**ORGANISMS IN BIOLOGY AND CULTURE**

Biological ecologies are characterized by a diversity of plants, animals, and other life, all enmeshed within networks of mutual influence but each also enjoying a degree of individuality. In such networks no ecology can be reduced to the activity of a single organism, no matter how important. If markets are ecologies, the same observation will hold true. Their patterns cannot be reduced to unpacking the implications of human action alone.

In previous essays appearing at this journal I have discussed several "species" of organisms in market ecologies. Of course, individual human beings are one crucial group, without whom no such ecology would exist. But our social life is immersed in other semi-independent relationships, just as is our biological one.

Organizations are composed of human beings, but within them people tend to redefine their identities and their values. They act differently than they do outside of organizations with which they identify, defining their interests to being in harmony with and often subordinate to those of the organization. This phenomenon is why whistleblowers are so rare. Over time, organizations also tend to redefine the reasons they exist from purely instrumental, serving their creators' intentions, to subordinating these reasons to their own survival, As they do their members tend to harmonize with this new perspective as well (diZerega 2015).

Memes are a second nonhuman organism in a social ecology. The human mind, Hayek wrote, “can exist only as part of another independently existing distinct structure or order, though that order persists and can develop only because millions of minds constantly absorb and modify parts of it” (Hayek 1979, p. 157). He argued our rationality emerged from societies where successful habits had become customs. When different customs came into conflict, people had to evaluate the conflict and which took priority, leading to rational thought. From a complementary perspective, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann explored the advantages of abandoning the old dichotomy of holism or individualism, emphasizing that society can only be understood if it also has an objective reality (Berger 1967). Paul Lewis explained what they described was an emergent process that could not be reduced to any of its parts, and so could not be reduced to methodological individualism (Lewis 2010). Many involved in exploring neuroscience have come to similar conclusions (Noë 2009, pp. 117-21).

Coming from the field of biology, Geerat Vermeij’s discussed different professions as kinds of economic species. He wrote “in human society, occupations have phenotypes that allow us to identify and classify individuals economically” (Vermeij 2004, p. 45). Professions are major constituents of many organizations, and as automation demonstrates, their roles within an organization need not be performed only by human beings. Professions constitute a final organism within a social ecology.

Hayek famously emphasized market competition was a “discovery procedure” (Hayek 1978). He could easily have endorsed Vermeij when he wrote “Adaptation in general is the formation, and continual testing, of hypotheses about the environment” (Vermeij 2004, p. 26). Like organisms in a biological ecology, a market economy is a network of cultural organisms mutually influencing one another (diZerega 2018). If my argument is valid, ‘methodological individualism’ is incapable of providing a deep understanding of markets or any other complex human association.

In an ecology, the networks of interlocking influences between organisms are called a system. The nature of a particular ecology arises out of the conditions within which the system arises and maintains itself. Consequently, the system both defines what counts as systemic success and, over time, shapes the characteristics organisms need to succeed. This means certain values are embedded within each ecological process, and organisms most responsive to those values will succeed in systemic terms. Survival and reproduction are such values in biological ecologies, and the same is true for organisms in social ecologies.
Dust from parts of the Sahara play an important role in sustaining the ecologies of the Caribbean as well as the Amazonian forest (Yu, et al. 2015, NASA 2015). Evidence is accumulating that plant distributions in one hemisphere might shape rainfall patterns a hemisphere away (Milius 2019). But for many questions, an ecosystem nestled within larger ones can be treated as distinct in itself. An ecosystem is defined by the questions asked and what needs understanding to answer them.

In exploring this complexity, ecological scientists have developed a number of concepts facilitating increasingly fine-grained understanding not only of what ecologies share in common, but also how they sometimes differ profoundly from one another. What follows are some key concepts enabling this fine tuning of our ecological understanding. *Exactly the same differentiation can be found in social ecologies arising out of freely chosen cooperation among their members.*

**Community ecology** studies the interactions between species that inhabit the same geographical area. Organisms in such a community are linked to the physical and biological components of the environment to which they are adapted in intricate networks of mutual feedback. A market economy is a community of interacting people and organizations inhabiting a dimension of social life. Science is another such community ecology, one emerging from people pursuing different projects than they would within a market (diZerega 2013).

**Biodiversity** refers to the diversity of life in an ecology, up to every level of biological organization. Within an ecology, its focus is on diversity in genes, species, and ecosystems. Biodiversity is regarded as a strength because it increases ecological adaptability in the face of change.

One social ecological equivalent of biodiversity is reflected in a community’s economy. For example, a town whose economic base consists of varied businesses will be more resilient when encountering external shocks than will a company town or one dependent on a single industry. A varied neighborhood of small businesses and walkable blocks will be more attractive for its residents than a city characterized by homogeneous large blocks (Jacobs 1961). Such neighborhoods provide *niches* for businesses that might not succeed in other environments. James C. Scott concludes his *Seeing Like a State* emphasizing the similar advantages of ecological biodiversity and its equivalent in the human world (Scott 1998, pp. 353-54). A *niche* is a specific ecological environment within which a species is found that has adequate resources and not enough predators to prevent its survival. In turn, a species can also modify its niche, either maintaining conditions conducive to it that might otherwise degrade, or gradually create conditions providing a new niche for another species, perhaps one that will displace it. Beavers are an example of the first. Lodgepole pines are an example of the second. By providing shade which discourages younger pines, shade tolerant spruce can gradually displace them. Big cities provide economic niches lacking in smaller towns and, as Jacobs demonstrated, blocks facilitating foot traffic have more such niches than blocks that do not (Jacobs 1961, pp.178-86).

**Keystone species** are organisms disproportionately connected to other species in a food web. They are important to maintaining the pattern of species within an ecosystem out of proportion to their biomass. A famous example is the changes initiated in the Yellowstone ecosystem with the arrival of a small number of wolves, and another is the disproportionate impact of the presence or absence of sea otters on the kelp forests of the California coast, and the communities of life they support. The modern joint stock corporation is a *keystone species* in a capitalist economy, as chattel slavery was a keystone species in the antebellum Southern market economy. In both cases their existence impacted patterns of land use, customs in civil society, the functioning of other social ecological processes such as science and democracy, and even language. In the case of slavery, despite having been abolished over 150 years ago, its social impact continues to distinguish the former Confederacy from most of the rest of the United States (Philips 2007).

Ecologies, whether biological or social, provide the context within which organisms become increasingly adapted to their environment, or fail to do so, as *evolutionary theory* explains. One important dimen-
sion of this connection is called coevolution, wherein two or more species evolve in ways where they mutually influence one another’s evolution, as have many flowering plants and insects. Coevolution involves symbiotic relationships of reciprocal influence, which take three broad and sometimes overlapping forms: mutualism, commensalism, and parasitism.

Mutualism in its pure sense describes relationships where both parties benefit, such as the mycorrhizal associations existing between roots of higher plants and a fungus, between bees and flowering plants, and between grazing animals and the birds accompanying them that feed on ticks and other parasites. Such relationships can be dynamic, transforming both over time, as with some ants that grow fungus for their sustenance. Today neither ant nor fungus can exist without the other. Mutualism in markets is common, as with businesses serving other businesses, so that both benefit. Subcontracting is a obvious example, as are supply chains between producers of raw materials and the manufacturers that use them.

Commensal relationships, describe when an organism benefits from another it neither helps nor hurts. Orchids growing on tree branches, lichens growing on tree bark and hermit crabs inhabiting the shells of dead snails are all examples. Automotive detailing shops are examples of commensal relationships. Car sales are probably unaffected by whether detailing shops exist, but these depend on the auto industry for their survival.

Parasitism occurs when an organism benefits from its host at the host’s expense, usually without directly killing it. Normally parasites weaken their hosts, rendering them more vulnerable to death, but sometimes the host’s death is needed for the parasite to reproduce. The fungi that infect ants, turning them into ‘zombies,’ are such an example (Harmon 2009). Parasitism is easily applied to market ecologies, from malingerers of productive organizations to fraud and corruption that increase the costs of doing business without adding any final value to the outcome. One particularly interesting example is the lack of correlation between much CEO pay and their company’s performance, perhaps analogous to those parasites that take over the behavior of their hosts to their own benefit (Bebchuk 2006; see also Scott 2017, p. 117).

These categories are not rigid. Over different timescales, a lineage of biological symbionts may make the transition from parasitism to mutualism, and then back again to parasitism. This may occur over evolutionary timescales, or within the lifetime of the symbiont itself (Leung 2008, p. 111). The same can hold true in social ecologies, as when an organization created to perform a task, redefines its task in terms of what is good for the organization, even at the expense of its original reason to exist, as with the Red Cross and its self-interested handling of a devastating earthquake in Haiti (Sullivan 2016; Elliott 2015).

Finally, the habitat is the physical environment within which an ecology develops, as organisms become better adapted to it, and perhaps in turn alter some of its physical characteristics. The presence and abundance of water, types of rock, the climate, and fire regimes are all factors included in an habitat that shapes the resulting ecosystem. For example, wind is an important element in ecosystems such as many Caribbean islands, while the frequency of fire shapes chaparral ecosystems. What defines the habitat for one organism might be very different from that which defines the habitat of another, even if they overlap in their distribution. The habitat of redwoods is defined by a different mix of features than that of Douglas fir, even though Douglas fir probably grow in all redwood habitats as well as many places redwoods do not.

Habitat shapes a social ecology as much as a biological one, but for social ecologies it takes both physical and ideational forms. In the case of markets, trading cities are particularly likely to arise around flood plains with easy water transportation …. (Scott 2017, p. 125). Jared Diamond’s study of the differences in how societies arose along the Mediterranean, where cereal crops and trade both existed in large contiguous areas whereas similar climates elsewhere were only small portions of a continent constitutes another such example (Diamond 2017).

But in social ecologies, habitat refers to more than a community’s physical characteristics. Social ecologies are rooted in ideas. For example, laws of contract, dispute settlement, bankruptcy, and property rights are all needed for complex markets to thrive, with the physical environment being secondary. Like the physical environment, the details of such laws can vary widely, and these differences will generate very dif-
ferent kinds of market systems. The most abstract patterns will be common to all, but as we increase the level of concrete analysis, the details will diverge, often radically.

The United States once had a robust market economy in which human beings were bought and sold, very much as cattle are bought and sold today. While most enslaved people toiled in slave labor camps, called plantations, other such camps existed to breed them for sale. Shortly before the Civil War, and based on the economic value of enslaved people, the Mississippi valley had more millionaires per capita than anywhere else in the country. The most recent research of which I am aware indicates there was no strong economic case against slavery. As Robert Fogel and Stanley Engerman wrote, slavery was “generally a highly profitable investment which yielded rates of return that compared favourably with the most outstanding investment opportunities in manufacturing. . . . as the Civil War approached, slavery as an economic system was never stronger and the trend was toward even further entrenchment” (Fogel 1974, pp. 4-6). Subsequent debate by historians have attacked elements of their conclusion, but have not undermined this basic thesis (Weiss 2001). Sophisticated methods of economic calculation were employed that would later be used in cotton mills and railroads. Parasitism can pay.

The laws needed to protect and enforce property rights in persons, as well as the values they incorporated, removed large realms of activity from civil society. As the slave-based culture became more and more devoted to protecting and enhancing slavery, the principles of equality under the law for all citizens increasingly shrank as well (Sinha 2000). While slavery lasted, it shaped the ways in which the U.S. grew politically, shaped the political system itself, and the wars it fought.

After the Civil War the US still had a robust market economy, one even larger than before, despite what had recently been the nation’s greatest single accumulation of private wealth and property no longer being a part of it. This postwar market ecology’s habitat differed profoundly from its predecessor due to the absence of property rights in other human beings, even though the basic processes of price formation and interpretation remained the same. By weakening the economic power of owning people, this change also reordered many values other basic to the society, setting the stage for reform movements that further enlarged civil society by ever more inclusively expanding equality of status.

THE PROBLEM OF FIT

Ultimately, social ecologies are embedded within and dependent on biological ecologies. This embeddedness creates a problem. Biological ecologies adapt to changes with the speed of reproduction by the organisms within them. Social ecologies adapt with the speed of thought by the people whose actions generate them. Because social ecologies develop so much more rapidly than the biological ones on which they depend, they risk undermining the slower biological processes that support them over the long run. This risk holds even for the tiny social ecologies of some animal species.

Long tailed macaques living on islands off Thailand’s coast are one of four nonhuman primates known to use tools. Today, they regularly use stones to crack open shellfish. This knowledge is culturally transmitted. Because it enables more intense predation of shellfish, as a result shellfish size and abundance are decreasing where the monkeys are abundant. That shellfish populations and size are decreasing is evidence their discovery is of relatively recent acquisition. Because macaques lack a means to preserve knowledge across generations either verbally or symbolically, this skill would die out once its usefulness vanished should shellfish become too scarce.

“Tool use, a socially learned behaviour, has always been viewed as this positive thing that opens up resources,” researcher Lydia Lunz says. “But by over-harvesting they’re putting their technology knowledge at risk” (Woodward 2017). For these monkeys the ultimate domination of the biological ecology over their minimal social ecology prevents them from doing serious damage to their environment, for when their enhance power proves unsustainable, they lack the means to preserve that knowledge. This problem is more serious for human societies.
Mesopotamian city states apparently bequeathed humanity many important creations, including the axel and yoke, sailboats, animal drawn plows, and writing. However, many of the extensive irrigation channels they also created led to eventual soil salinization that persists to this day, thousands of years later. This damage was exacerbated by farmers’ ability to continue irrigation through incorporating more salt resistant crops, switching from wheat to barley. Eventually the land became too degraded for barley (Eisenberg 1998, pp. 122-25). In some cases this salinization also apparently had profound political effects (Scott 2017, p. 121). Salinization is not just a problem for ancient civilizations, for it is a growing threat to agriculture relying on irrigation even in modern nations such as the United States and Australia (Zielinski 2014).

In their oral histories the Greeks in Plato’s time still remember what the land around Athens had once been, and was no more. As Plato put it (Plato, 360 B.C.E.)

… in those days the country was fair as now and yielded far more abundant produce. [Since then heavy rains have eroded the soil and] the earth has fallen away all round and sunk out of sight. The consequence is [there remains] only the bones of the wasted body . . . the richer and softer parts of the soil having fallen away, and the mere skeleton of the land being left. . . . some of the mountains now only afford sustenance to bees [who get food from wildflowers on deforested slopes, but], not so very long ago there were still to be seen roofs of timber cut from trees growing there, which were of a size sufficient to cover the largest houses; and there were many other high trees, cultivated by man and bearing abundance of food for cattle. Moreover, the land reaped the benefit of the annual rainfall, not as now losing the water which flows off the bare earth into the sea . . .

Rome ultimately degraded so much of Italy’s soil fertility that it became dependent on North African wheat. In a study of the ancient world’s often self-destructive interaction with the natural world on which it depended, J. Donald Hughes concluded “the very technological achievements of the Romans that moderns admire most in retrospect are those that show most clearly their ability to alter and control nature in ways that were sometimes productive but often destructive” (Hughes 1994, p. 197).

Other cultures were more successful. In Northern California and the Pacific Northwest, Native Americans had both the means and the motive to overfish their salmon stocks, because dried salmon was a valuable trade item. They did not, in part at least, because salmon harvesting was embedded within a larger value framework shaping what was considered appropriate behavior (Taylor 1999, pp. 13-38; Lichatowich 1999, pp. 24-41; House 1999, pp. 54-64). Rice growing in India persisted for thousands of years in part because, over centuries and millennia farmers had gradually developed many different strains of rice that were particularly well suited to their micro environment (Deb 2019). Local communities in India and elsewhere are successfully preserving forest land near them, and even rehabilitating lands destroyed by commercial forestry and government corruption because they remain motivated by ethical and religious values suppressed by capitalism (Gadgil 2018). Today the Menominee Indians of Wisconsin preserve the healthiest (and most productive) forest in Wisconsin, but do so because they subordinate logging to other cultural values (Davis 2000).

Culturally and ecologically sustainable societies can be disrupted when new technologies enter into them, undermining established value systems as well as more tangible ways of life. For example, the Plains tribes who adopted the horse became among the best horsemen in the world. Along the way, long established customs were rapidly abandoned due to the greater power horses made possible. Shortly after acquiring the horse, hunting traditions extending back many thousands of years were abandoned in favor of hunting from horseback. Changes within the tribes own internal structure were as profound. Unless they then developed more sustainable customs, had these tribes and the buffalo on which they depended not been largely exterminated by EuroAmericans, their new power would have led them into an ecological disaster of their own creation (West 1998, pp. 84-91).
Long-term sustainability was possible when human power was limited and modified in appropriate ways. But such adaptations were not guaranteed, and may have been learned the hard way. When not learned, the result was serious ecological degradation.

With this background describing a challenge to all human societies, let us turn our gaze to capitalism and the environment.

PROPERTY RIGHTS

Entities within a market ecosystem must adapt to how property rights are defined. Because they define what can or cannot be exchanged, with parties to the exchange protected by a legal structure, property rights are the single most important element characterizing its habitat. Thinking clearly about them is essential if any clear understanding of markets and sustainability is to ever be gained. In the west, property was long treated as a unitary ‘thing’ or ‘object’ which was ‘owned.’ This view of property incorporated two seemingly contradictory concepts: individualism and despotism.

Consider Sir William Blackstone’s description: “There is nothing which so generally strikes the imagination and engages the affections of mankind as the right of property; or that sole and despotic dominion which one man claims and exercises over the external things of the world, to the total exclusion of the right of any other individual in the universe” (Blackstone 1765-7, 2-2; Steinberg 1995, pp. 13-14; Michaelson 1995, p. 64). Power over property is total, and how it is exercised is the prerogative of the individual owner, considered in complete isolation from all other factors “in the universe.”

John Locke offered a more insightful defense of private property, and today, those arguing for its moral legitimacy often employ Lockean style reasoning. According to Locke, something became my property when I mixed my labor with it, at least so long as “enough and as good left in common for others” (Locke 1965, 27, p. 329). Unlike Blackstone’s despotic argument, legitimate use required that others’ circumstances not be injured by its becoming privately owned.

Locke correctly saw that property existed in a context of ethical relationships. Justice, not power, was its foundation. A property right’s primary social value is to promote cooperation, not exclusion. The right of exclusion is important but derivative, for it’s easier to elicit cooperation, among people not well known to one another if we possess the right of exclusion.

Locke’s formula limited legitimate ownership to leaving “enough and as good” for others, but he thought of land simply as a resource for human use, given to humanity in common by God (35, p. 334). As such it could only be removed from the common fund if no one was thereby injured, and what was not put to human use was “waste.” Since farming was more productive per acre in meeting human needs than virgin land, Locke was unconcerned about the extent of ownership, emphasizing an Indian king “feeds, lodges, and is clad worse” than “a day Labourer in England” (41, p. 339).

Locke was wrong empirically. So many English settlers preferred Native American ways of life that those ruling colonies had to outlaw it (Axtell 1975). By his criteria the Indians actually used their land more productively and legitimately than did the colonists, since few if any Indians sought to live among them whereas many colonists sought to leave for a better life with a nearby tribe.

Setting aside the historical inaccuracy of Locke’s claim about Indians, he was even more wrong ecologically. Today we know treating land as a resource most of whose value comes from our labor transforming it is not true. There can no longer be absolute property rights to act in ways that undermine the ecological vitality of forests, oceans, rivers, lakes, farmland, and the atmosphere (Sagoff 1990, pp. 158-79).

However, Locke’s insights were rooted in an accurate perception that Blackstone’s lacked. For Locke, property was linked to appropriate relationships with others. Far from being despotic in nature, ownership was rooted in an ethical universe. Underneath Locke’s apparently individualistic theory of property was a more subtle insight rooting it, and its uses, in appropriate relationships.

Much later, the economist Harold Demsetz emphasized what we call ‘property’ is not a discrete thing, but rather a bundle of divisible rights that can vary from bundle to bundle (Demsetz 1967). Each element
of the bundle defined a legal relationship into which the owner could enter, either with another or with the property itself. When I rent a house, the landlord gives up some rights associated with home ownership so long as the rental contract exists. To give another example, if I live out in the country, I will have more rights to make noise than if I live in an apartment complex, such as the right to play loud music late at night. In both cases I own ‘land,’ but what I actually own are somewhat different bundles of rights with respect to it. When a right in one bundle appears to trespass the rights held within another, a legal system is required to adjudicate the dispute. I do not own land or a car or an animal, but rather a number of rights and corresponding obligations with respect to it. Property rights are inextricably connected to moral and ethical issues: what kinds of relationships are appropriate for people to engage in?

Property rights define a field of appropriate relationships into which their owners can enter. At one time, in America, owning human beings was an acceptable property relationship. Today it is not. That property right no longer exists. Few miss it today, though at one time hundreds of thousands fought and died in its defense. Most people would say this change marked an important moral advance over previous millennia when enslaving others was rarely questioned.

PROPERTY AND HABITAT

The nature and divisibility of the bundles of rights contained within “private property” create the habitat within which a market ecology can manifest. It is not alone, of course. Laws of contract, dispute settlement, and bankruptcy also have a powerful impact. But, as the issue of slavery demonstrated, property rights shape not only the market ecology, they also influence every other element of the social ecology that requires resources in any sense to be used. They are the market’s equivalent of the kinds of land, water, and climate that provide a biological ecology’s foundation.

The constraints and incentives from a particular habitat give some organisms an advantage over others. The same is true within social ecological habitats. The current legal system provides big advantages to publicly held corporations (the only ones that concern me on this issue). As with their 17th century ancestors, most people invest in them entirely for income in one form or other. CEOs rise or fall based on how well or ill their company’s shares do, for if a corporate raider of some sort believes shares are undervalued, he or she can seek to take it over, and realize more profit for himself by managing it differently. Many economists praise this as a way of keeping corporations ‘efficient.’ It certainly keeps CEOs focused on only the bottom line. Those that do not so focus, risk being ousted.

Milton Friedman became famous in conservative and libertarian circles in part by arguing a CEO who sacrifices share value for any other value is stealing from shareholders by not pursuing his fiduciary duty to them (Friedman 1962, pp. 133-36). It is likely that this organizational form is why when a privately held business considers “going public” its financial value often increases significantly as it will be focused more narrowly on maximizing profit. Working Assets was a privately held money market fund focused on making socially responsible investments. They once considered going public with an initial public stock offering. A founder, Peter Barnes, writes “Our investment banker informed us that, simply by going public, we’d increase the value of our stock by 30 percent. He called this magic liquidity premium. . . . The extra value would not come from anything we did, but from the socially created bonus of liquidity.” Working Assets ended up not going public because “we didn’t want to be subjected to Wall Street’s calculus” (Barnes 2006, pp. 67-68).

IRRATIONAL RATIONALITY

From a sustainability perspective, a problem arises here. As a system, capitalism reduces the complexity of social life into purely economic terms. Everything is treated as a commodity valued for the price it commands. Economic theory abstracts the world and human beings into land, labor, and capital. All are valued by their capacity to be transformed into profitable consumer goods.
But, as Karl Polanyi observed, “labor, land, and money are obviously not commodities. . . . Labor is only another name for human activity . . . land is only another name for nature . . .” (Polanyi 1944, p. 72). This abstraction facilitates a theoretical blindness that makes it difficult to distinguish capitalism’s systemic logic from human action, and therefore subordinates civil society and nature alike to the logic of the market alone.

In their book *Free Market Environmentalism*, Terry Anderson and Donald Leal describe the core market logic for using resources: “the long-run prevailing interest rate serves as a guide for determining the rate at which . . . resources should be harvested…” (Anderson and Leal 2001, p. 41). This is so regardless of the personal values of the people involved. It is also so, regardless of the impact on ecological sustainability. They emphasize how market values should override all other considerations when determining whether and how much to use resources. Corporations are organized so that they will subordinate as much as a human created institution can sustainable action to maximizing profits. When not subordinated to ethically rooted limitations on bundles of property rights, this thinking leads to disaster.

Anderson and Leal argued cutting down forests is economically justified even if they never regrow, so long as the profit from doing so is greater than that obtained from preserving them. This approach is disastrous for any society in the long run. Recent discoveries have shown most rain on land arises not from evaporation from the oceans and other bodies of water, but from transpiration from forests. In a rainforest, an average tree can release over 130 gallons of water into the atmosphere a day. In addition, it releases other chemicals playing a role in creating rain clouds (Pearce 2019a, p. 22). This phenomenon is worldwide. China’s rainfall mostly arises from water as it falls on and repeatedly reemerges from Siberian forests, not from the country’s bordering ocean.

Today, Brazil’s rainforest is being ‘harvested’ because that is the most profitable use for it, given prevailing property rights. As it is, the rain cycle for the entire nation is being undermined because soybean fields do not come anywhere close to replacing the forest’s impact on rainfall. Additionally, the water that is needed to grow soybeans depends on the continued health of the forest to continue falling as rain. This issue impacts more than the Amazon. In Borneo more than a 15% loss in forest cover has been found to lead to more than a 15% reduction in rainfall. In Brazil, were the forest to be reduced past a certain point, many scientists fear the result will be the creation of a desert where neither trees nor soybeans can grow (Pearce 2019b).

Apparently this has happened before, and on a continental scale. Central Australia was forested with many permanent lakes when human beings first arrived there, perhaps 45,000 years ago. These early inhabitants made wide use of fire to convert forest land into grasslands, where hunting was easier, and later aborigines continued and perfected the practice (Gammage 2012). The cumulative impact was to so alter the vegetation of Northwestern Australia that the pre-monsoon climate experienced decreases in precipitation, higher surface and ground temperatures emerged, along with enhanced atmospheric stability (Nutaro 2011). Thousands of years of replacing forests in Australia with fire managed grasslands appear to be a major reason interior Australia is now arid. The much more rapid destruction of Amazonian forests would likely have a similar impact (Pearce 2019b).

Fishermen prefer taking larger fish to smaller ones. Removed from all other considerations, as Anderson and Leal advocate, this priority is economically rational and a well-run capitalist enterprise will act accordingly. In *Conservation in Practice*, Natasha Loder described a hypothetical farmer, who “from year to year, grew seeds only from the smallest, weakest plants in the field. He would hardly be surprised to find his crops growing successively smaller and feebleer as the years went on” (Loder 2005, p. 30). This is how fishing is done today. While cod in the NE Arctic averaged 95 cm in the 1940s, they average 65 cm, today. They mature more rapidly, and at a smaller size, as selective pressure favors those who can produce eggs at a younger age.

In 2002, *Science* published an experiment done using Atlantic Silversides, a common Atlantic fish. In one test population 90% of the smallest were culled. In another, 90% of the largest. In a third, similar culling was random. Within four generations the average size of the population where larger fish were taken
had become smaller and less fertile whereas when the smaller fish were taken, by the fourth generation fish were nearly double the size of the fish in the first group. In addition, over time the population where smaller fish were taken had a higher yield, partly because larger fish reproduced more successfully, and partly because removing smaller ones selected for rapid growth (Conover 2002, pp. 94-96; Loder 2005).

A final example will cover the collapse of Canada’s cod fisheries. In 1976 the Canadian government decided that fisheries management was to be guided “in the interest of the people who depend on the fishing industry” rather than “biological factors” in the interest of the fish. Sixteen years later there was a complete collapse of cod populations. Scientists discovered the species was only 1% of its previous levels of biomass, and fishing for cod was banned. An industry that had existed for 500 years came to an end, with a layoff of over 45,000 jobs (Jacobs 2000, pp. 166-67; Rose 2008). Fishermen switched to shrimp, and today, between being caught by fishermen and being consumed by rebounding cod, shrimp stocks are in serious decline (Beswick 2017). One is reminded of Mesopotamian farmers shifting from wheat to barley.

But the pressures of capitalism are greater than even the needs of those ancient farmers. With the moratorium, stocks of cod had started recovering at an average rate of 30% a year. But in 2016, with declining shrimp catches, the government again allowed a rapid increase in cod fishing while the population was still far from its former numbers. The annual increase has dramatically slowed, if not reversed, and critics are again calling for the industry to prioritize sustainability—of both cod and the small communities that have fished for centuries—over a high-volume fishery designed to maximize profits for shareholders (Leed er 2017).

What Anderson and Leal described and advocated in impersonal academic terms, and many scientists have criticized in biological ones, John Steinbeck captured at the human level. In Grapes of Wrath he described tenant farmers being dispossessed by banks during the Great Depression: (Steinbeck 1939, chapter 5):

Some of the owner men were kind because they hated what they had to do, and some of them were angry because they hated to be cruel, and some of them were cold because they had long ago found that one could not be an owner unless one were cold. And all of them were caught up in something larger than themselves. Some of them hated the mathematics that drove them, and some were afraid, and some worshiped the mathematics because it provided a refuge from thought and from feeling. If a bank or finance company owned the land, the owner man said, The Bank—or the Company—needs—wants—insists—must have—as though the Bank or the Company were a monster, with thought and feeling, which had ensnared them. These last would take no responsibility for the banks or the companies because they were men and slaves, while the banks were machines and masters all at the same time. . .

And at last the owner men came to the point. The tenant system won’t work any more. One man on a tractor can take the place of twelve or fourteen families. Pay him a wage and take all the crop. We have to do it. We don’t like to do it. But the monster’s sick. . .

But you’ll kill the land with cotton.

We know. We’ve got to take cotton quick before the land dies. Then we’ll sell the land. Lots of families in the East would like to own a piece of land.

Destroying land, degrading fish populations, and any other unsustainable practice is acceptable if it is profitable, according to Anderson and Leal. Steinbeck’s “monster” is an organism in a social ecology. The lack of attention paid by government and industry alike to addressing global warming is not an outlier. It is completely within the spirit of capitalism.
THE CORPORATE ORGANISM

Capitalism’s keystone species is the joint stock corporation. In a capitalist economy, other economic ‘organisms’ survive and even prosper, especially in small niches. My own small enterprise sold to corporate national park concessionaires for years. But in general, such enterprises are the mammals to corporate dinosaurs, and corporate values dominate the market and its legal framework. However, despite their present prominence, corporations are not simply the outgrowth of a market economy. Their roots are elsewhere.

Joint stock corporations arose in the 17th Century as a tool by which oligarchs and aristocrats could engage in profit-seeking activities when the costs were so large and risks so great none felt able wisely to engage in them on their own. From their beginnings these organizations depended on access to powers and privileges denied most people. They were ‘market’ institutions only in the limited sense that to make a profit they had to have willing customers. How they got their products to willing consumers was irrelevant.

The Dutch East India Company, British East India Company, and the Hudson’s Bay Company were created to lead European colonial ventures. This partnership between corporations and government was close, mutually profitable, and far removed from the principles of a liberal society. These corporations possessed state-granted monopolies, wielded military forces, exploited and sometimes slaughtered those over whom they had power, and often ruled the regions they controlled despotically. The only truly market element was when they sold the products obtained in this way to willing customers (diZerega 2019).

The need is not to replace markets but to modify the legal habitat in which they develop. If the environment changes, the mix of organisms populating it will change. This is as true for economies as it is for biological ecosystems. Changing property rights so as to limit corporations only to activities where the argument for limited liability makes sense is an important, probably necessary, step if modern society is to develop sustainable practices over the long term.

Slavery was once crucial to the American economy since Southern cotton fueled Northern textiles. When, with the abolition of enslaved labor, the economic habitat changed, the economy did not collapse. A new market ecology emerged, one universally considered morally better as one form of social parasitism ended.

Corporations were initially advantageous for projects that dwarfed the capacity of individuals or partnerships to pursue safely by spreading out the risks and sharing the profits while limiting ‘owners’ exposure to liability. They have grown well beyond these limits, to increasingly replace other businesses. Corporations are not needed for farming, logging, fishing, mining, hotels, rental housing, medicine, restaurants, and many other economic areas in which they currently engage. Such activities long preceded them and, in many cases, alternative institutions still provide these services in ecological niches. In these fields and more, other values are often more important than money profit, and nowhere is this observation truer than regarding the intersection of social with biological ecologies.

Neither markets alone nor governmental planning have, in themselves, addressed problems of environmental sustainability. Governmental planning’s record in Leninist states has been truly awful (Feshbach 1992; Shapiro 2001). However, private businesses have done no better. Successful advocacy and often implementation of environmentally sustainable policies within liberal orders have arisen from within civil society in the more inclusive sense, and not science or the market. Both private individuals and established environmental organizations have been the spark plugs for such measures, and not organizations rooted in either the market or government (Fox 1985). More than any other institution, corporations complicate the vital task of integrating markets and social ecologies in general into sustainable relations with the biological ecosystems that support us all.

If modern society is to become sustainable, economic activities in which environmental sustainability conflicts with immediate gains must be handled by people and organizations that, at least in principle, can subordinate money profit to sustainable actions. Because public corporations are designed to respond only to market signals, their sphere of action should be limited to those activities most completely in harmony with purely instrumental values. Doing so requires limiting the activities in which they can engage. The re-
The remainder of this paper describes institutions than can take their place. Many have long existed right in front of us.

**LAND AND CONSERVATION TRUSTS**

Trusts are a time-honored means by which a person or institution is charged with protecting and managing the property of another, “in trust.” Today trusts are increasingly important in private conservation efforts. Among many other uses, land trusts have successfully preserved ranch land in Colorado, urban gardens in New York, affordable neighborhoods in Boston, small farms in California, and wilderness and near wilderness in Maine (Forbes 2001; Brewer 2003; Barnes 2006, pp. 85, 136). In 2010 there were at least 1,723 land trusts from local and state to national scale organizations. State and local land trusts more than doubled their funding for stewardship, monitoring and legal defense and almost tripled their operating endowments from 2005 to 2010. In 2010, collectively they employed 12,361 staff and contractors, reported 347,028 volunteers, and were supported by nearly 5 million members: 4,986,093 (Forbes 2001).

As discussed above, when we “own land,” what we actually own is a bundle of transferable rights. To conserve ecological and cultural values, land trusts do not have to buy all the rights to a piece of property, only some of them. What they buy are called “conservation easements.”

An easement is a right to certain uses of the land. Conservation easements (which restrict land development and subdivision) can be purchased by the trust or donated to it. The original owner continues to possess all other rights to the land in ways harmonious with the terms of the easement, including selling those rights to a second party. The new owner, in turn, is subject to the constraints of existing conservation easements. By modifying the bundle of rights, the result is the open-ended protection of the land from uses not in keeping with conservation values which take precedence over market values.

By buying these rights, and not using them, land trusts reduce the market value of the rest of the bundle, facilitating alternative uses serving values other than maximizing profit. With the power of the market subordinated to long term concern for the land’s well-being, the property can be managed—“steward”—on behalf of future generations (Banighan 1990; 1997). This is why such trusts are often called land stewardship trusts. Because the market alone cannot reliably value sustainable practices, land trusts reduce the bundle of rights engaged in market transactions to those in harmony with these values.

Land stewardship trusts are traditionally non-governmental, non-profit organizations created to preserve the ecological, historical, agricultural, or wilderness value of the land. They allow practices compatible with these values, such as sustainable forestry and agriculture, protecting wildlife habitat, and recreation. Because key property rights to the land are removed from the market “in perpetuity,” or for an extended period, the market value of rights remaining available for use or sale is smaller, decreasing the land’s market value and the need for it to generate maximum profits.

If a farmer’s descendants no longer wish to farm the land, another farmer will be able to afford to buy the rights to do so, because there will be no competing demands from developers. Conservation easements offer substantial financial advantages to for existing owners who wish to live on their land and continue to farm or ranch it because, by lowering market values, they help keep property taxes low. Easements also enable owners to will their land to heirs without it being subject to high estate taxes, keeping the land in the family across generations. In both cases, the land’s value is calculated on its legal uses (which are restricted by easement) rather than a more financially profitable market-driven use if the property rights bundle had never been divided.

A firewall is erected between the land and domination by short sighted market forces. The price system continues to guide and signal, but can no longer command. The more complex social ecology of civil society is strengthened and, with it, biological ecological health.

If the trust does not own the land outright, its operating funds must come from other sources, such as fees, membership dues, and donations. Nor can the land’s unencumbered economic value be used as collateral for obtaining loans, because that value no longer exists. Dependent neither on taxes nor maximiz-
ing profits, land trusts are particularly clear examples of institutions rooted in civil society in the full sense rather than government or the market.

One example of which I have personal knowledge is the Sonoma Land Trust. Founded in 1976, the trust now protects almost 5% (75 square miles) of California’s Sonoma County, a place under intense developmental pressure for expanding cities and corporate vineyards. In addition to protecting land from harmful future development the Sonoma Land Trust also engages in extensive rehabilitation of degraded lands of potentially great ecological significance but little recreational value, such as coastal marshes. This latter would never have been done by a for profit institution.

Marin County lies immediately to the south of Sonoma County, its Southern terminus being the Golden Gate Bridge. Development pressures are intense, and the East side of the county is largely built up. West Marin, however, is rural, with farms producing milk, vegetables, wines and cheeses, some of national reputation. Combined with state and national recreation lands West Marin is largely un- or minimally developed, a gem continually visited by Bay Area residents as well as tourists worldwide. The Marin Agricultural Land Trust protects nearly half the county’s agricultural land (Marin Agricultural Land Trust).

These successes, and others in California and elsewhere, demonstrate the vitality of the land trust idea, and its role in arranging sensitive adjustments between alternative land uses and environmental health (Press 2002; Brewer 2003). In 2010 American land trusts protected about 73,471 acres, an area about the size of the state of Washington and twice the size of all national parks in the 48 contiguous states. This is nearly double the amount of land trusts protected in 2000 (Chang 2011, p. 5). In addition they have an impressive record of working with local, state, and national governmental agencies that often do a better job collectively of preserving important values than purely governmental ones, as the contrasting examples of Yosemite Valley and Big Sur demonstrate (Brooks 2017, pp. 171-73).

A LONG RECORD OF SUCCESS

The history of American land trusts is brief, most are small, and few are internally democratic. These limitations give reasonable pause to anyone trying to adapt land trusts to the care and protection of our national forests or other public lands. But there is an extraordinarily impressive example that satisfies these worries: The National Trust of England, Wales and Northern Ireland (National Trust).

The National Trust of England, Wales and Northern Ireland is slightly older than the US Forest Service, having celebrated its centenary in 1995. After the Crown, the National Trust is the largest landowner in the UK. Its properties now include 618,000 acres (about 1000 square miles), including nearly 775 miles of coastline, about 18% of England, Wales, and Northern Ireland’s coastlines. If the UK were the size of the 48 contiguous states, its holdings would add up to the size of South Carolina.

The Trust is very popular, with over 4.5 million members, and unlike the US Forest Service, is very popular. A similar trust also exists in Scotland (National Trust for Scotland). Over 20 million people visit Trust properties requiring an entrance fee, and over 100 million visit areas that do not charge.

Anyone can join The National Trust and obtain voting rights. As of 2005, The National Trust has a Council consisting of 52 members, 26 elected by its membership, with another 26 appointed by outside bodies. Direct management of the National Trust is through a Executive Committee, under which are a number of decentralized Regional Committees. Far from lacking political debate, the National Trust is frequently the site of vigorous campaigns by members seeking changes in policies regarding hunting, recreational use, and similar issues (Dwyer 1996, p. 84). The National Trust demonstrates an impressive ability to incorporate ecological as well as historical values and continues to successfully acquire new land even in densely settled regions.
DEMOCRATIC LAND TRUSTS

The National Trust proves the viability of situating oversight of important natural areas within civil society, independently of traditional government and economic institutions alike. The idea can be easily adapted to this country, most immediately for our national forests, but in principle for much else as well. With respect to public lands, a democratic land trust offers practical solution to the control of public land by extractive industries ‘ overseen’ by politicians with other interests (Hess 1993). Let me use our national forests as an example.

Legislation could enable creation of National Forest Trusts. Ideally, such trusts would be formed from the bottom-up. Local initiative is vital because, like a natural ecology, human communities are too complex for any one-size-fits-all or top-down approach to control (Blomquist 1992). Organizational details would be up to the membership and its Governing Board in keeping with enabling legislation. Experience has demonstrated the process of organizing a self-governing body to oversee a resource helps to create the trust, skills, and infusion of local knowledge that enables it to succeed (Ostrom 1990; Tang 1992, pp. 32-33).

Because there would be many trusts, each with responsibility for only one forest, members would focused on the needs of particular forests. With engaged local members determining policy options and value choices, local knowledge would be as accessible as more general and abstract principles of forestry and ecosystem stewardship. A variety of trusts with committed members would enhance the spread of useful practices and knowledge. In this respect forest trusts would be more oriented towards the ethos of a gift economy than a capitalist one, more like science with its collaborative openness than privatization’s incentive to keep knowledge proprietary (diZerega 2006; Ostrom 1991, pp. 223-44).

Environmental thinkers otherwise as different as bioregionalist Gary Snyder and free market economist Randal O'Toole independently arrived at the conclusion that the commons model, where land is governed by a small number of people personally concerned with it, is superior to both traditional private property and traditional government management (Snyder 1990; O’Toole 1995). Land trusts are such institutions, and offer a practical framework buttressed by over one hundred years of experience in England, suggesting that modern westerners can practice wise and sustainable approaches to the land.

REMOVING PROPERTY RIGHTS FROM BIOLOGICAL PROCESSES

Monsanto created monopolies of control over seeds in agriculture, and sought to enforce it through methods such as creating plants unable to reproduce and genetic engineering that gradually undermined methods for controlling pests not under Monsanto’s control. Complex ecologies are subordinated to corporate profit.

Our current grains are annuals. After harvest, the soil is left largely barren during long periods, as well as requiring plowing that breaks up and degrades the soil’s below ground structure. If grains were perennials rather than annuals, their extensive root systems could preserve and enrich topsoil much as the old prairies did. But our inherited grains are annuals, and as Monsanto demonstrates, there is no economic reason to shift away from them because perennials would lower corporate profits.

But this problem is being solved by very different kinds of institutions in civil society, in and out of academia. For example, a philanthropic organization, the Land Institute, near Salina, Kansas. (Land Institute) has invested years in developing perennial grains able in time to return much land to the ecological well-being it enjoyed as unplowed prairie. Their efforts are increasingly successful.

The picture below depicts the contrasting root structures of annual wheat and ‘kernza,’ a perennial grain developed by the Institute, now increasingly being planted commercially. (Land Institute, kernza) Wheat is on the left, kernza on the right. Kernza roots can go as deep as ten feet, sprouting year after year, preserving and enhancing the soil, all the while adding CO2 taken from the atmosphere to the soil. Such crops also preserve or restore water quality by reducing erosion.
Kernza is one of only a few grains to have been developed for human use in the last two thousand years. I have also seen perennial sorghum developed at the Institute, a crop that could revolutionize African agriculture, where sorghum is an important food crop and the soils tend to be poor. The Institute does not work alone, and carries on active research programs with major universities and research institutes across the world, seeking to develop other crops able to enhance prairie ecologies while producing abundantly for human needs.

Unlike a corporation such as Monsanto, the Land Institute makes its discoveries available to all who wish to use them. It has trademarked the name 'kernza' to ensure accuracy in description, but unlike capitalist companies not seeking to limit distribution only to those who pay for access. Because of their success, General Mills is now planning to introduce kernza-derived products.

The Land Institute seeks the maximum use of kernza and similar crops, rather than maximum profit by limiting use only to those who pay for it. Even worse for capitalist values, but better for ecological ones, when perennials replacing annuals there is no longer an annual market for seed to replace what died during the winter. Nor does the land need to be continually cultivated, which undermines soil structures that can take lifetimes to duplicate. The Land Institute is an example of how institutions embedded in civil society might solve a serious problem that has brought many a previous culture to economic and demographic collapse.

If property rights in seeds and other biological processes were banned, research in these fields would flow naturally from corporations to universities and organizations such as the Land Institute. We, nature, and the long run flourishing of human beings would all come out ahead.

Liberating Co-Owned Economic Wealth

Economists generally distinguish between land, labor, and capital as factors of production. In market economies they assume the capital is privately owned. But it is not obvious that even in markets all capital is
most reasonably considered private property, especially today when nearly all human created capital is the inheritance of past generations and natural capital is not a human creation except for new ways to employ it.

An alternative perspective began with Thomas Paine, whose *Common Sense* played a pivotal role encouraging British colonists to begin thinking of themselves as an independent and self-governing people rather than subjects of a king. But Paine was more than a powerful catalyst encouraging people to throw off domination by kings, nobles, and priests. He also gave considerable thought as to how people could live free from the grinding poverty that afflicted so many.

In 1797 Paine wrote *Agrarian Justice*. In keeping with John Locke’s observation that originally all resources were open to everyone, Paine claimed “Every individual is born with legitimate claims on natural property or its equivalent.” The unimproved earth was properly the property of all who lived on it. Paine agreed with Locke that human creativity could make natural property more valuable. However, he advanced beyond Locke in recognizing useful land had two different kinds of value, that based on the fact everyone needed land on which to live, and the value of human improvements. Both kinds of value were usually lumped together, and jointly owned by the landowners. The result, Paine held, was “the condition of millions, in every country in Europe, is far worse than if they had been born before civilization began, or had been born among the Indians of North America at the present day” (Paine 1795-6). Landowners benefited from appropriating value they had done nothing to create. Ecologically speaking, to the extent they did, they were parasites.

Paine came to this insight while in France. In the U.S. its implications were at first hidden by the abundance of cheap land seized from the Indians for Euro-American use. No such violently created conditions ameliorated conditions in long-settled France.

Paine’s solution was to distribute the value of land, beyond what owners earned by improving it, equally to the population as a whole. Peter Barnes writes that were it in contemporary money, Paine’s distribution would have amounted to $17,500 annually for seventeen year-olds until they reached fifty-five, after which it would fall to $11,667 (Barnes 2014, p. 9). This distribution was not a hand out, but a right.

Paine identified a problem others came to see as well. David Ricardo, an important early economist, also recognized problems with the traditional view. Ricardo considered income from “that portion of the produce of the earth which is paid to the landlord for the use of the original and indestructible powers of the soil” as unearned, and indefensible on economic grounds (EsL 2015). Ricardo’s inconvenient insight was ignored then, as it generally is today.

Later, Henry George developed a similar insight. In *Progress and Poverty* George pointed out landholders grew rich not just from improvements they made, but also from the others’ demand for space to live upon. For example, landowners received unearned income from access to good transportation, as well as proximity to their customers, suppliers, amenities, and other businesses. George believed people legitimately owned value they created, but socially created value rightfully belonged to individuals as members of a community. Not just to land owners (George 1997).

George is traditionally understood as wanting socially created wealth to replace taxes rather than, as with Paine, to go to individuals. He proposed a “single tax” on the value of land unconnected to the owner’s improvements to capture this wealth. George believed other taxes, such as those on labor or selling income, penalized productive activity and a single tax enabled them to be ended. George’s and Paine’s analyses of the core problems and the lack of a legitimate claim on this wealth by a small minority were identical, even if they differed on policy implications.

Today many might think such ideas utopian. But they would be wrong. A version of them is applied effectively on a small but revealing scale in the United States today.
THE ALASKAN PERMANENT FUND

Upon becoming a state, Alaska received land that had once been federally owned, including oil fields between the Brooks Range and the Arctic Ocean (Barnes 2006, p. 46). Rather than privatizing them, the state leased them out. A far-sighted governor, Jay Hammond, established the Alaska Permanent Fund in 1976. It required at least 25% of oil revenue from leasing state land be put into a dedicated fund investing the proceeds for future generations, when the oil might be gone (Alaska Permanent Fund Corp. 1). The Fund manages its assets for prudent returns rather than serving as a source for in-state development, which protects it from political pressures that would rapidly deplete it.

Hammond’s vision sheltered Alaskans from a problem facing any region dependent for its prosperity on an industry extracting non-renewable resources. Such industries are not good long-term foundations for prosperity, producing a boom and bust cycle depending on a resource’s availability and price. The American West is filled with ‘ghost towns’ testifying to this truth. Hammond’s Permanent Fund sought to prevent this fatal dynamic from crippling Alaska in the future.

Starting with an initial investment of $734,000 in 1977, the Permanent Fund has grown to around $53.7 billion in 2015 (Alaska Permanent Fund Corp., 2). Its operating expenses are less than .3% of assets, which is very low (Barnes 2014, p. 128). The Permanent Fund Dividend provides a basic income guarantee for all Alaskans, the most firmly established existing anywhere in the world today.

For many years now, every citizen of the state has received an equal portion of these returns. Eligibility depends on currently living in Alaska. It is tied to citizenship, not ownership. The annual dividend fluctuates based on investment returns, not on the price of oil. The highest amount returned to Alaskans was $3269 in 2008 (including a $1200 supplement from that year’s state budget surplus), or slightly more that $13,000 for a family of four. More often the dividend amounts to between $1000 and $1500 per person, or $4000 and $6000 for a family of four. The money reduces poverty, boosts local economies, and not surprisingly, is popular with a broad spectrum of Alaskans. Jay Hammond was a Republican, and while governor, Sarah Palin was one of its biggest boosters.

Peter Barnes has perhaps done more than anyone else to bring Thomas Paine’s idea into the modern era. In With Liberty and Dividends for All, Barnes emphasizes the prosperity of today’s middle class and a sustainable environment are linked, and the solution for both is based on ideas inherent to the Alaskan Permanent Fund (Barnes 2014). Barnes urges applying the Alaskan example to all natural wealth, and for the nation as a whole. Wealth not created by individual actions and so not appropriately privately owned, includes natural resources like oceanic fisheries, oil, water, sinks for industrial waste, especially the atmosphere, the electro-magnetic spectrum, and also systemically created social wealth, like our monetary infrastructure. None of these values are created by living individuals, none can be appreciably expanded by individual action, and all are used such that the profits from doing so are entirely appropriated by business, even though their value is not the result of anything that business did.

Once an acceptable level of use for a resource is determined, the right to use it up to that level would be auctioned off. The market would determine the most efficient uses, subject to working within sustainable limitations. For example, Barnes suggests addressing the global warming issue with “cap and dividend.” Once scientists determine the maximum amount of CO2 that can be introduced to the atmosphere every year, permits to emit CO2 within that cap would be auctioned off to the highest bidders, with every American receiving their proportionate share. Science determines what is safe and the market determines how what is safe will be used, applying the same logic towards creating carbon that Alaskans apply to pumping oil.

The total amount allowed would decrease annually until a sustainable level of CO2 production is reached, and as the amount allowed decreases, those for whom emission is most vital and least replaceable will pay more for the right to do so. Throughout this process the economic value of substitutes will increase in a way providers can count on, and the more valuable substitutes become the more creativity will be de-
voted to creating ever better forms of them. Our ability to discover substitutes, which today encourages environmental destruction, would come to support environmental sustainability.

Viewing non-created resources as the joint patrimony of a society can be extended in nonecological directions. For example, the value of the electro-magnetic spectrum has been appropriated for a song by the television, radio, cell phone, and data transmission industries. They should bid for access, again, with the money returned to every American proportionately. This helps prune corporate wealth to that realm in which perhaps its privileges are justified and the harm it does minimal.

Barnes estimates the total that can be expected to go to American citizens from incorporating all these resources into an American Permanent Fund to be around $4000 to $5000 per person per year, or $16,000 to $20,000 annually for a family of 4. This money, he emphasizes, is not “redistribution.” Rather it is all Americans benefitting from values made possible only by American society as a whole.

**THE ‘CITIZENS’ DIVIDEND**

This way of viewing society’s relationship to the natural ecology that supports it supports measures such as Barnes’ “citizens’ share” and Dwight Murphey’s “shared market economy” (Murphey 2009). The logic behind these proposals is to transform market ecologies in more sustainable ways, both biologically and socially, by reforming the structure of property rights while enabling market processes to continue as they have.

Murphey suggests a new public agency that would take the place of the Federal Reserve for introducing new money into the economy. Such newly introduced money would go to buying shares rather than enriching banks. Murphey (2009, chapter 18), argues:

>This could put the same amount of new money into the business system as before, providing capital to business in general and having the same effect on the price level. The money would simply enter the system at a different place. The result would be that the enterprises forming the economy would receive their billions of extra dollars, while at the same time the independent agency would come into ownership of billions of dollars a year of index mutual fund shares—all without a penny being taken from anyone through taxation or otherwise.

Murphey’s recommendations dovetail with Barnes’ revival of the principles Paine and George. For example,

>Our financial infrastructure is a large part of what makes bankers and their executives so rich, and banks and other corporations enjoy privileges unavailable to human beings. Fees should be charged for those trading in it, distributing some of that socially created wealth to us all. When new money is needed to enter the economy, rather than enabling banks to issue it and pocket an unearned profit, it would be supplied as dividends to every American equally, as Murphey recommends. It would enter the economy through consumer spending, not loans creating unearned profit for the already wealthy.

Legal privileges such as limited liability that are provided to corporations should also be paid for. Barnes suggests an annual fee of 1% of profits for ten years contributed to an account generating dividends for all Americans. Under this proposal, ultimately Americans would own 10% of all corporate wealth, and receive dividends accordingly (Barnes, 2006). Murphey would push the ideal to above 10% (Murphey 2009).

None of these and other proposals developed by Murphey and Barnes compromises market processes. None of them tax creativity or hard work. None fund political programs and bureaucracies. *All of them are essentially like inheritances: unearned income arriving not because of what you did but because of who you are.* The difference is that currently all of this unearned wealth goes to a very small proportion of Americans while the rest of the population is excluded while the biological ecology that supports human life on earth is undermined.
THE PRIMACY OF ETHICS

I have argued that a sustainable relationship of social to biological ecologies requires them being rooted in ethical values. Otherwise their greater short-term power combined with the inability of most biological processes to adapt as quickly as social ecologies do creates a fatal disconnect that manifests even in nonhuman organisms that have developed a simple tool using culture. The domination of economies by corporations exacerbates a problem that would be serious in any event.

If we examine societies that have maintained sustainable relations with their natural environment even when they had the technological power and economic motives to act differently, we find they are rooted in ethical values that trump narrowly economic ones. When they did not subordinate their actions to their values, their impact was also destructive, although on a smaller scale than the modern world.

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Abstract: These notes overview the superior power of negative rules of constraint in domains of essential complexity (as defined by von Neumann’s conjecture that in complex systems the simplest adequate model of something is the thing itself, and any attempt at constructing simplifying models does not aid in understanding). Negative rules define such areas by imposing constraints upon potential outcomes a complex system can produce rather than by specifying an infinitude of particulars (responses, behaviors, or actions) that must be achieved. This is how the economy of knowledge characteristic of psychological and social cosmic orders arises and “does so much with so little,” as well as how the selfless arises from the selfish behaviors of individuals. Examples of these negative constraints are traced from the evolution of life through the functioning of the human CNS and processes such as language and thought, into the hybrid taxis-cosmos domain of scientific practice, and then into economics and the genesis of social cosmic structures. We conclude by overviewing the complementary duality of “subjective” and “objective” in the scientific study of complex phenomena and the context of constraint that inescapable duality imposes on functional psychological and economic domains. We end by noting methodological consequences: since psychology and economics are functionally and not physically specified, and do not have measurement as found in the physical sciences, they can never be experimental, remaining empirical only. And there is no hope of successfully retreating to an a priori realm, such as proposed by praxeology.

Keywords: negative rules, economy of knowledge, subjectivism, spontaneous complex orders.

Spontaneously ordered complex phenomena constitute the vast majority of processes studied by the biological, psychological, and economic domains. Theoretical understanding of such phenomena is quite different from the theory construction in domains that are simple (i.e., do not involve such essential complexity). One fundamental difference is the centrality of negative rules of order in the creation and operation (and hence in our understanding) of these complex processes. This article overviews how and why negative rules of order are indispensable in the domains of essential complexity. For brevity, discussion is limited to the origin of living systems and examples within the psychological subject and the social order.
Elsewhere I have provided a precise but non-quantifiable definition of complexity (Weimer 1987). Following von Neumann (1966), we see that essential complexity occurs when the least complex (most concise) rigorous model of a system is at least as complex as the system itself. As an example, von Neumann discussed the human visual system as being in fact the simplest adequate model of itself—any other adequate model would be more complex than the visual system itself. According to von Neumann’s conjecture, for simple phenomena we can build (at least conceptually) a model of the particulars involved that is explanatory and aids our understanding because it is less complex than the process itself. For high complexity the reverse occurs—an adequate model is more complex, and does not simplify our understanding. We cannot specify all the particulars involved in complex processes, and consequently our understanding is limited, as Hayek (1978) noted, to specification of abstract rules of determination of the classes of particulars that could constitute its domain. Thus we can never specify or predict the occurrence of any given particulars per se. Our understanding is limited to the principles through which the interactions of the system’s parts can produce the kinds of outcomes observed.

Our examples explore how negative rules of order function (as explanations of the principle) in a vast range of phenomena and data domains beyond the social and economic areas in which Hayek’s work is well known. We shall see the same principles of organization applying in topics ranging from the origin of life itself through to the functioning of the CNS and into the domains of human action, not only in economics and social order but also into the nature of scientific inquiry itself.

What is involved in the origin of life? Life arose with the folding transformation somehow occurring during the boundary conditions obtaining on this planet more than 1 billion years ago (see Pattee 2012). With the origin of life the semiotic realm that had not been present before simultaneously emerged. The folding transformation was simultaneously the first record-keeping operation, and likewise became the first measurement operation. When life was localized into the first cellular structure the issue of agency, or the most primitive delimitation of the self, also occurred. These and similar distinctions force the symbol-matter duality upon us as a brute fact (Pattee 2012; Barbieri 2009). Semantic and pragmatic domains henceforth were literally part of life, along with the “purely” physical.

Life, records, measurement, and self are all semantic or functional concepts. They are not, and never can be, purely physical concepts (see Weimer 1984, Pattee 2012; Abel 2010). Aspects of meaning and how things function can never be explained by physical laws. Recognition of this has led to the emergence of biosemiotics as a separate discipline (this fascinating field should be more followed by readers of this Journal, since its problems mirror many of those found in psychology and economics).

COMPLEX LIVING SYSTEMS AND PROBLEMS OF KNOWLEDGE AND CONTROL

One of the most astounding “facts of life” with respect to organisms and groups of organisms is that they can do so much with so little self-knowledge or explicit control. This economy of knowledge is invariably brought about by negative rules of order. An example is the market order of society, which requires no control structure beyond the local knowledge and intention of its individual participants.

Let us show that this is characteristic of all living complex phenomena. Consider ourselves as examples of the biological evolution of complexity.

The lives of your cells. Lewis Thomas’s (1974) essays in The Lives of a Cell show that organismic evolution involves the cooperation of cellular components in the genesis of classes or types of cells, and a similar cooperative banding together of types of cells to form what have become organs that specialize in a particular function, such as the liver or heart or stomach. While the linguistic description sounds teleological, attributing a “purpose” prior to that organization actually taking place, the historical perspective is not at all teleological. Over an enormous period of time accidental concatenations of events (typically called chance) occurred which, when viewed from our later perspective, have created results that, had we or some agent caused them, would be purposive. Evolutionary history, whether physical or biological or cognitive, consists
almost entirely of frozen accidents. They are “accidents” in their initial occurrence, and once in existence they are “frozen” into their constraint upon subsequent events. Once creatures with separate cells and subsequently organs developed, their greater efficiency allowed them to thrive and leapfrog over those with one cell or a relatively small number of less differentiated cells. Once frozen into place these changes provide a context of constraints that limits and guides further changes. This is the context in which evolutionary blind variation, occurring within a prior context of constraint, is never actually random. And the result of this continuous context of constraint is not stifling constriction of future change but rather the opening up of novel possibilities for the direction of future evolution. The conditions (literally the constraints) of prior development have allowed greater and greater degrees of freedom for future development. Biological selection via evolved constraints has produced organisms that incorporate better and better theories of their environment and, in our case, even theories of themselves. What others, initially following Leibniz, have called preestablished harmony is merely the result of the particular history of frozen accidents in this region of the universe.

This is how Thomas put the fact that we are frozen accidents that have resulted from distant past blind variations and selective retentions:

A good case can be made for our nonexistence as entities. We are not made up, as we had always supposed, of successively enriched packets of our own parts. We are shared, rented, occupied. At the interior of cells, driving them, providing the oxidative energy that sends us out for the improvement of each shining day, are the mitochondria, and in a strict sense they are not ours. They turn out to be little separate creatures, the colonial posterity of migrant prokaryocytes, probably primitive bacteria that swam into ancestral precursors of our eukaryotic cells and stayed there. Ever since, they have maintained themselves and their ways, replicating in their own fashion, privately, with their own DNA and RNA quite different from ours. They are as much symbionts as the rhizobial bacteria in the roots of beans. Without them, we would not move a muscle, drum a finger, think a thought (Thomas 1974, pp. 3-4).

All advanced organisms consist of a congeries of earlier, more primitive components, that at one time existed independently on their own. As a result of their own individual and selfish behavior they have become part of a larger structure or structures as a result of their actions but not as a result of any design. These earlier, initially separate components have come together to function as the parts of the body. And then these bodies have, in their own turn, evolved. It is the evolution of bodies that leads to speciation. In our almost exclusive focus upon the evolution of species we have tended to forget the earlier evolution that Thomas emphasized. From the standpoint of epistemology we cannot afford to do so.

The selfless arises from the selfish. Here we find a direct parallel to Adam Smith’s invisible hand. It is crucial to emphasize that the behavior of the “parts” of the wholes we have been discussing is always selfish in the sense that no consideration is ever given to the resultant whole. Indeed it is usually the case that the whole has arisen from competition rather than any form of planned cooperation. The mitochondria Thomas discusses were initially competing to survive in a livable but harsh econiche. The result of that competition is that they survived (and survived very well) as components within a larger cell. And as a result of their output within the cell it in turn was enabled to do things that it could not have done “on its own.” But it was never the case that the mitochondria formed something resembling a “committee,” and somehow decided to cooperate. Cooperation was the result, the unintended consequence, of their action rather than the cause of it. It is only with the advantage of hindsight that the outcome of such a “frozen accident” ever appears to be purposive. In the case of cellular or other primitive biological phenomena it is clear that no possible cognitive apparatus could have existed to do any selecting in the first place.

An analogous situation holds for the genesis of seemingly teleological or “final cause” behavior. It is never the case that any disembodied and abstract “force” in the future specifies or controls the development
of events in the past or present. Teleological concepts are employed only in perfect hindsight to situations by agents who were themselves conceptually outside the systems of events in question. With perfect hindsight we can ascribe teleological descriptions to behaviors that arose from the unintended consequences of events that were “caused” by nothing except the then current prior states of those behaving systems. The seemingly teleological arises from nothing but an outside perspective on the “logical” (or better, the “merely” physical or behavioral).

Animal behaviorists have been careful to note this fact when studying the behavior of so-called “social” insects such as ants, termites, and bees. In such species it is obvious that there is not enough brain power available to the individuals for them to behave in a purposive fashion. But after their descriptions of the fascinating capabilities of cooperative behaviors these species exhibit, most investigators are at pains to insinuate that such behaviors are merely “precursors” to human behavior. It seems to be against the sensibilities of our “privileged position” at the top of the knowledge chain to consider that these cooperative behaviors could result from the same principles governing our consciously cooperative behavior. Surely our conscious and explicit rationality is vastly different from such primitive mechanisms.

Against this constructivist tradition stands the factual and theoretical basis of evolution. From the standpoint of evolution everything results from the incorporation of frozen accidents that has resulted from blind variation and selective retention due to the winnowing effects of the econiche. Even when evolution has become Lamarckian (stemming from individual learning history), or exosomatic (recorded outside the organism in physical records) in the social realm, it is blind variation and selective retention that provides its ongoing mechanism. There is no designer or purposive agency behind the development of complex social orders. No one ever designed organisms such as horses or chickens or cows (recall the old chestnut that a camel is a horse that was designed by a committee). No one ever designed human languages. No one ever designed our cognitive capacities. No one ever designed the abstract ideals or regulatory rules of conduct that guide human behavior. All such organized complexity is the result of human action but not human design. Even our highest and most “noble” goals and aspirations have resulted from the interplay of many minds in an order that is vastly greater than any individual (or group of individuals) could consciously produce. Our highest and most abstract behavior, our morality, has arisen from following rules of conduct that no one ever designed and most individuals have never comprehended or been able to articulate. The selfless has evolved from the selfish. The task of evolutionary theory and evolutionary epistemology is to explain how and why this is so.

THE ECONOMY OF KNOWLEDGE AND CONTROL IN EVOLUTION

Life was able to arise on this planet because variability in environmental conditions was relatively limited for a sufficient period of time, and when variation did occur it was at a relatively slow rate. The length of the day-night cycle is relatively constant, and has not changed except seasonally. Climate change, although ranging over what we today would regard as extremes, is actually quite small. Even the sea level has been relatively constant, and it appears that fairly warm, shallow seas have always been found somewhere. Thus the task of survival, the adaptation of an organism to an econiche, was one of distinguishing change from relative constancy in a repetitive environment that fits a Goldilocks scenario of not too much nor too little variability. The task of the first nervous systems was to detect two classes of changes: those that were productive of continued well-being for the organism, and those that were productive of harm. The great step in the premammalian nervous system was the orienting response—the detection of change or novelty with regard to the background stimulation. Then learning (or adaptation) had to occur as a result of the consequences to the organism of that response to change. The nervous system learns to match to a standard (by not responding) and to detect change from the standard (by responding). The consequences of behavior reinforce behavior. If the result is beneficial it leads to increased probability of the response. If the result is deleterious to the organism the response probability will decrease, and other responses will be more likely to take its place.
**What is learned.** That overview distills into a nutshell the theory of learning as a result of reinforcement (or consequences) of behavior. Chordate and mammalian nervous systems in organisms with motor or effector output that allows movement permit what we recognize as learning to occur. We learn to seek “good” or beneficial or desired consequences from behavior and to avoid “bad” or harmful ones. But what exactly is learned in such situations? What knowledge does an organism get from the learning situation?

With this question we encounter the famous asymmetry between *modus ponens* and *modus tollens* brought to the fore in methodology discussions by Popper in 1934/1959 in *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (especially section 15). The import of his discussion is that we can never learn that a theory is true from *modus ponens* reasoning (1,000,001 “confirming” *modus ponens* instances could always be followed by a “refuting” instance according to *modus tollens*), whereas a single falsifying instance (via *modus tollens*) suffices to show that an hypothesis (in conjunctions with its supporting background assumptions) cannot be correct. The process of learning in an organism is exactly analogous: 1,000,001 confirming or positive reinforcements does not mean that the organism’s “theory” is correct or “true.” Just ask that turkey who on a crisp November morning expected food to always be forthcoming when the farmer entered the pen. The turkey’s theory did not include information about a holiday called Thanksgiving.

Organisms learn something *new* only when an expectation, a theoretical hypothesis which it has adopted, is falsified. This is why so-called inductive confirmation cannot exist, whether conceived as knowing “for certain” or merely knowing “probabilistically.” This methodological point has been argued extensively by Bartley (1982) and Weimer (1979). What organisms learn is not what is correct or “true,” but rather what mistakes to avoid making again. We learn what does not work. And in this respect there is no difference between a scientist’s most esoteric conjecture, a rat’s deciding to try a new maze alley, or the simplest organism with a nervous system trying to find nourishment. So in an unpredictable world with unforeseen consequences resulting from our behavior it is possible to learn new things about situations when an hypothesis is shown to be falsified, i.e., to not lead to the expected result. But it is not possible to learn more than that the hypothesis is thus far compatible with our expectation (in the event of a positive or confirming instance). What we learn is what mistakes not to make, not that we are “right” or that the hypothesis is “true” or “justified.” A similar situation obtains in the interactions of individuals in the social cosmos.

**Negative rules of order constrain the social cosmos.** This is because positive rules that specify particular actions or results to achieve cannot deal with the indefinite welter of events in the cosmos. Novelty cannot be addressed by positive prescriptions. All successful theorizing in domains of essential complexity utilizes a context of constraint consisting of three overarching regulative principles to capture the regularity of what are in essence dynamic equilibrating systems. These systems can exist and evolve only as a delicate balance of essential tensions. Three sets of principles regulate change in every spontaneous order I am aware of. The first principle is *creativity* or *productivity*. Such systems exhibit fundamental novelty, change (at the level of particulars) that is inherently unpredictable. The second principle is *rhythm*, and its progressive differentiation over time. All change is rate dependent (patterned) and should be subject to dynamical laws rather than being rate independent. The third principle is regulation by *opponent processes*. Development fluctuates between extremes that constrain possible changes. A clear example is provided by the nature of cybernetic steering or control: an autopilot helmsman steers a boat by small deliberate swings around a central tendency, thus constraining the deviations from an expectation of direction into as close an approximation of a straight path along the specified course as is physically realizable. Interaction of these three principles creates an essential tension, literally a context of constraint, between the previous form of organization, the present state, and future changes. This essential tension between tradition and innovation, stability and change, is a dynamic equilibrating tendency common to all essential complexity. It is a manifestation of the superior power of forces of disequilibrium over equilibrium in such structures. It is as Lachmann said of the economic order:
If, with Mises, we reject the notion of general equilibrium, but, on the other hand, do not deny the operation of equilibrating forces in markets and between markets, we naturally have to account for those disequilibrating forces which prevent equilibrium from being reached. In other words, to explain the continuous nature of the market process is the same thing as to explain the superior strength of the forces of disequilibrium (Lachmann 1971, p. 48).

We see this power first manifest itself in the orienting response to novel stimulation in the CNS. Against a dynamic ongoing pattern of neural activity as a background (as close to an equilibrium state as one can ever achieve in a living system) the occurrence of novel stimulation disequilibrates the ongoing pattern and begins an ongoing process toward re-equilibration. This is a dynamic process which tends toward equilibrium but which, due to the ever-present occurrence of new stimulation, can never attain it.

Let me emphasize: these explanatory or regulatory principles are strikingly different from the "positive" principles that prescribe particulars in simple domains—these regulatory principles are essentially negative or prohibitory. The context of constraint manifests its power by prohibiting the occurrence of particular (classes of) events. Creativity and complexity can neither be explained nor brought about by the positive prescription of particulars (e.g., commands such as you must do this X in situation Y). Successful theory is negative: it must specify its domain in terms of constraints that its phenomena cannot violate. Consider the difference between two types of directives. First, the “simple” prescription of a positive particular: Sit up straight in your chair. This is algorithmic (computable), and we can all decide whether or not the subject has completed the task. In contrast consider the directive: Lead a just life. This is abstract, indeterminate, and not computable, or capable of fulfillment by specification of positive particular actions. It is a never-ending task whose precise character can never be specified in advance (it would take specification of an infinite number of particulars). Another way of saying this is that it is not a computable function—and thus the computation metaphor of mind so popular now is quite obviously false. The only way this command can be approached is negatively, as a directive prohibiting all forms of injustice. The taboos and "don't dos" are the only type of rules that regulate conduct in the spontaneous cosmos. Even when they are given “positive” verbal formulations the mores and conventions we follow are negatives in their import. They can tell us what mistakes to avoid without attempting to delimit in advance what class of particulars must be achieved. They allow novel behavior rather than restricting us to what is already known (the “merely” probable or the predictable). The practice of falsification in scientific praxis is an example. Since all theories worth exploring are productive, i.e., have an infinitude of particulars as their logical consequences, it follows that confirming results (no matter how many) can never show that a theory is true. All we can do is show that a theory is false (which is to say inconsistent with the combination of theory plus background assumptions) if even one of its predicted results fails to obtain. We know that we cannot retain both the theory and those assumptions. We have no more information available than this bare minimum.

*The power of the catallactic order.* Switch gears for a moment. Consider the tremendous power of the impersonal order of human interaction—the market order, or as Hayek called it when applied to all social phenomena, the game of catallaxy—that has created the extended order of civilization in which we live. The human mind is not the creator of that social order, it is instead the product of that order. We are the result of group selection according to abstract rules that we are only beginning to understand. These rules coordinate an individual’s actions, and those actions exert selection pressure on group reproduction. Evolutionary epistemology has to tell us how this has come about.

*Genesis of the order.* Modern society is the result of two evolutionary forces that exist at the social level. The first, long emphasized by economists, is the division of labor. The second, almost universally ignored, is the division of knowledge that inevitably accompanies the division of labor. These are mechanisms of social evolution because they have enabled those who employ them to supplant those who did not. These divisions decentralize control (away from the father figure or mother or tribal leader or ruling council or committees)
and (with the concept of property, freedom of contract, law, and other factors of voluntary cooperation) allow a spontaneous order of action to take the place of consciously directed commands to bring about particular aims. The market order is a means that serves infinitely different ends for indefinitely different individuals, and allows each individual who participates to take advantage of resources (especially knowledge but also their own labor) that vastly exceed the capabilities of any single individual (or tribe). Competition, the mechanism of the market order, is a discovery procedure for the production of new “goods” (whether knowledge, matériel, wealth, or whatever). And competition is also the most effective cooperative procedure when the benefit of all who participate is considered: by competing, individuals are made to cooperate with unknown others to the benefit of all. From the selfish the selfless arises. Modern society is abstract and impersonal: we no longer know all the members of our tribe or identity group affiliation, nor do we interact with them directly in the production of goods, or even the conduct of our daily lives. But by participating in this order we bring about benefits to ourselves and to unknown numbers of others that greatly exceed what we could have produced in a face to face or tribal grouping.

The catallactic order arose without planning when small groups stumbled upon the fact that individuals can benefit to different degrees from the same goods. To repeat, this was not consciously known to the groups at first. It is rather that groups exhibiting this behavior came to displace those who did not. When different individuals have different uses for the same goods, barter arises as a means by which both parties could benefit in return for providing the other with what they desired. When this procedure is extended to unknown individuals united only by rules which prescribe property ownership and transfer by consent, the market order arises. What is crucial is the open-endedness or productive power of the market order: with the decentralized information processing capacity of the spontaneous order humanity has created all the benefits and drawbacks of our abstract society. This order has unleashed the most powerful force in this region of the galaxy, and it’s open-endedness has brought us all our wealth and material goods, all the knowledge of science and power of technology, and all the culture that we possess. The market order allows us to reap the benefits of knowledge possessed by others (without having to learn all that knowledge ourselves), and is thus the means by which our capabilities for knowing and acting are extended beyond the limits of any single individual. Thus we no longer have to fend for ourselves for everything—in order to utilize a computer or watch a movie or TV program we need not know how to make it ourselves. The market order allows unknown and divergent (often conflicting) ends to be achieved by a common means. It is the tremendous advantage of the market order that it is “merely” means connected and thus remains open, i.e., requires no agreement whatever on ends for individuals to possess in order for them to participate. The price mechanism provides the signal or information that gives the market its superior efficiency for the achievement of any end. This totally impersonal factor is crucial: all any market participant needs to know is some local knowledge—what goods or services are available at what price. The current price of goods or services is always a signal that indicates what should be procured (or what is too expensive) to realize an individual’s given end at a given time. Thus a gain to one’s self, purchasing at the lowest available price what one needs, also serves the needs of unknown others. As Hayek (1976) said:

Each is made by the visible gain to himself to serve needs which to him are invisible, and in order to do so to avail himself of to him unknown particular circumstances which put him in the position to satisfy these needs at as small a cost as possible in terms of other things which it is possible to produce instead (Hayek, p. 116).

This is what underlies Adam Smith’s invisible hand: the efficiency of an impersonal order based upon negative feedback controls that arose spontaneously as a result of a context of constraints. Individuals learn what they are able do in the market order of events in terms of what courses of action they cannot afford to engage in. This economy of knowledge transmission (this is too expensive) is the key to the superior power of the order. It is why the (social) selfless arises out of the (individually) selfish.
The indispensability of our ignorance. We can never satisfy expectations in advance in an order that has no common ends—we can only aim at providing the best basis for eliminating unnecessary uncertainty, and thus to secure continual adaptation to what could not have been known before. Justice and fairness require only that everyone be allowed to play the game of catallaxy—without the rules being broken to favor anyone. This is the basis of the idea that justice is blind to the particular. Uncertainty and ignorance are indispensable to the game—their elimination would destroy the spontaneous order by turning the social cosmos into what Hayek called a taxis. Adaptation to a cosmos is a never-ending task of trial and error, and it must involve constant risk and disappointment of some of the expectations of all, including those who achieve their ends and come into great rewards. No one can correctly anticipate the particulars of the market order—not even those whom the order rewards. Market participants must remain ignorant in two respects: first, who else (which individuals) are order participants; and what constitutes their local knowledge; second, how the order actually works in any given instance. We should not know the individuals involved because our “tribal” emotions would cause us to overcompensate those we regard as disadvantaged (or shun participating with those we dislike), and thus distort the efficiency of the order. And if we knew the specific workings we would attempt, like the oligarchs and lords of more tribally oriented societies, to rig the outcome for our benefit, and thus replace the spontaneous order with a command structure. We can survive only by strictly adhering to negative rules of order (our social, moral, and occupational taboos). This situation creates a tremendous problem not only in our ordinary day to day activities in society, but also as a factor in the rarefied research communities of science.

Science is a social cosmos constrained by negative rules of order. Science contains taxis and tribal components that are constrained by being embedded in a wider cosmic order. History of science shows these opposing forces of tribalism and infinite ignorance of particulars. The methodology of research tries to reconcile these factors. Kuhn’s conception of normal science as paradigm based puzzle solving according to inculcated traditions that arise within the history of the research community is a pioneering account of science as a tribal and not yet market or catallactic order. The power of tradition in the unverbalized but undergone initiation into rules of “scientific methodology” is what an apprentice researcher gradually learns from being around more established practitioners. Beginners just “soak up” the rules of practice from exposure to the behavior of more senior practitioners. This is a tacit dimension of research praxis which cannot be captured in explicit methodological prescriptions (as Polanyi 1958 emphasized). The only successful and enduring methodological rules are negative prohibitions—e.g., “do not fabricate data,” “do not cook the results.” C. S. Peirce (in 1898) put it beautifully in his “supreme Maxim” of philosophy over a century ago:

Upon this first, and in one sense this sole, rule of reason, that in order to learn, and in so doing desiring not to be satisfied with what you already inclined to think, there follows one corollary which deserves to be inscribed upon every wall of the city of philosophy: Do not block the way of inquiry. (Peirce 1992, p. 178)

Paradoxically, what Kuhn described as normal science puzzle solving, even though it employs essential negatives of abstract order in its methodology, is the attempt by a research community to circumvent the market order or cosmos of ignorance in defense of what one tribe of researchers—the practitioners within that given normal research group—would delimit as acceptable for the entire field. Thus normal science praxis is taxis based, and based in the main on prescriptions of particulars to be achieved. The research community believes that we are at point A and our task is to achieve point B, which although presently unknown will be recognized by all researchers when it is found. The task of normal science puzzle solving is to ingeniously find a way from A to the anticipated but as yet unavailable B. Revolutions occur sooner or later because the inevitability of our ignorance exposes the limits of the taxis approach when the cosmos intrudes at the fringes. But normal science attempts to block out certain avenues of inquiry as beyond acceptability, while accepting only sanctioned others. The history of research in science is the interplay of these
opponent processes. The history of scientific domains is a history of alternating periods of attempts at normal science taxis practice and the intrusion of the spontaneous cosmos at the fringe, which shows the inevitable limits in which that praxis must be embedded. Like the stars at night, revolutions make the cosmic fringe surrounding praxis visible, while the daylight attempts of normal science show only the sun as the center of the enshrined puzzle solving tradition.

Aspects of the essential negatives of abstract order. Spontaneously arisen complex orders cannot be regulated by commands to perform particulars (to achieve particular individual goals). Instead they allow the performance of (potentially infinitely many) unforeseen particulars because they are governed by deep structural abstract rules of determination. The context of constraint provided by such abstract rules is negative in several senses. The first negative sense is that the rules of order are negative or prohibitory injunctions against certain classes of actions. The Scottish moralists knew this better than our generation: “The fundamental law of morality, in its first applications to the actions of men, is prohibitory and forbids the commission of wrong” (Ferguson 1785, p. 189). This is why the regulatory ideals of social conduct are all taboos. Justice, freedom, peace, no less that truth and similar concepts in science and philosophy, are specified in terms of the elimination of their opposites, not in any positive specification of particulars that must be achieved. The second negative sense concerns the predictive or anticipatory power provided by an explicit knowledge of the rules. Here all that is available is explanation of the principle and pattern prediction, and this shows why explanatory theories of complex phenomena can never predict the occurrence of particular events. We can never achieve that infinitely precise specification in complex domains. A third sense concerns the indispensability of our ignorance when acting as agents in complex orders. The tacit dimension of behavior is not conscious and explicit, and in that sense it must remain forever unknown to us while it is guiding our actions. All we can hope to achieve is an understanding of regulatory principles that govern certain classes of occurrences, but we can never understand what is controlling our behavior while it is doing so.

Examples of essential negatives can be extended indefinitely once one realizes their centrality to complex orders. Then it becomes obvious that many prescriptions with positive specifications of particulars our conduct must achieve are actually creating taxis situations that have no applicability at all in complex orders unless they can be “translated” into negative formulations. The “taboo mentality” of catallactic orders is far from the throwback to ignorant ways that rationalist constructivist thinkers assume—instead it is an indispensable aspect of the creativity of cosmic structures.

The founder of modern psychology, Wilhelm Wundt, knew this better than most practitioners of the field today. Wundt defined what he called the law of heterogony of ends as a foundation of morality:

> While it (the law) teaches that every state is the necessary preparation for that which follows, it flatly forbids the setting of bounds to the course of future events for reasons drawn simply from our present outlook over the universe. Reality is always fuller and richer than theory. Hence the most that is allowed to us is to anticipate the general outline of the course that will be taken by the immediate future. Here, then, the law warns us with no uncertain voice that we may not regulate the ends of morality at large to the narrow circle of our personal hopes and wishes. The particular thing must be regarded sub specie aeternatatis. At the same time, we may not, with the philosopher who coined this phrase, look upon the infinity as something given and hence directly apprehensible by our idea: we must rather consider it as becoming, as an infinite problem, parts of which we come to know by solving them (1902, p. 331).

The greatest freedom and creativity results neither from positive prescriptions of particulars to achieve nor “anything goes” anarchism, but rather from strict adherence to general rules. It is as Hayek said:

> Since our whole life consists in facing ever new and unforeseeable circumstances, we cannot make it orderly by deciding in advance all the particular actions we shall take. The only manner in which
we can in fact give our lives some order is to adopt certain abstract rules or principles for guidance, and then strictly adhere to the rules we have adopted in dealing with the new situations as they arise. Our actions form a coherent and rational pattern, not because they have been decided upon as part of a single plan thought out beforehand, but because in each successive decision we limit our range of choice by the same abstract rules (1967, p. 90).

This point was put beautifully by a physicist who studies the biology of the origin of life. This is how he noted that all creativity is rule governed behavior within a context of constraint formulated by negative rules:

What we call novelty, freedom and imagination at all levels of creative activity are, therefore, not to be equated only with escape from objectivity and determinism. Inherent in all innovative visions are the complementary constraints that execute these visions. Many scientists who have been trained only in the classical paradigm of objective theory may find this complementarity difficult to accept, but it is an old idea to the philosopher and artist. I can think of no clearer summary of this creative evolutionary principle, that extends all the way from molecules to the mind, than a quotation from Igor Stravinsky in the Poetics of Music: “The more constraints one imposes, the more one frees one’s self of the chains that shackle the spirit...and the arbitrariness of the constraint serves only to obtain precision of execution (Pattee 1981, pp.126-27).

The abstract social cosmos is tacit rather than explicit. Consider some consequences of what has been developed so far. The selection of rules of conduct regulating our behavior occurs unconsciously, through the viability of the social order as a whole that results from such rules. If the resultant order is stable and productive, the rules will be selected for survival, and will become part and parcel of the background assumptions that regulate our behavior without our having consciously learned them. We are like the “primitive” studied by anthropologists, who has no idea about the reasons underlying an incest taboo (to use a well-known example) but follows the taboo nonetheless. At each stage the overall prevailing order determines what effect, if any, changes in an individual’s conduct will produce. Thus we are stuck in the position of consciously attempting to judge and modify our conduct only within a framework which, although the product of evolution, must remain for us a relatively fixed result of evolution. This framework becomes, literally, an abstract context of constraints that regulates our conduct. So long as the system remain spontaneous, regulated only by abstract prohibitions that do not specify particulars to be achieved, it can be creative. In such cases we venture out into and often succeed in coping with the unknown and the unforeseen.

Biological adaptation requires no delimitation of particulars. The concept of adaptation (to an econiche) is the parallel to learning in psychology. But unlike psychology, where learning occurs within a given organism, adaptation is a matter of group selection within a population. It does not matter that one organism has a mutation (or perhaps a random quantum anomaly) and has its structure slightly altered. What matters is the selection pressure in the econiche which in purely negative fashion weeds out what does not contribute to survival worthiness in the population as a whole. This is why species change takes considerable time to occur. There is no selection for individual “hopeful monsters”: Frankenstein does not spawn a group of superior monsters, because his mutation is only one precondition for speciation. The second necessary condition is spreading it through a population.

As Fitch (2010, pp. 48-49) summarized:

It is difficult to over-emphasize the importance of population-level thinking in the neo-Darwinian synthesis. For naturalists, ecologists, and population biologists this perspective seemed to come quite naturally, but geneticists, systematists, and developmental biologists before the modern synthesis often saw species as “ideal types”—Platonic perfect forms—and the variation seen in real life as simply error or noise. For such typological thinkers, the essence of speciation was the birth
of a new individual, possessing a “macromutation.” In contrast, the architects of the modern synthesis recognized the generation of a mutant was only one precondition for the origin of a new species. That variant then had to spread through the population, until the population was different enough from some sister population that they could not, or would not, interbreed, and only then could a new species be said to have been born. Thus population level change in allele frequencies was the key factor underlying speciation (Mayr 1982; Gould 2002).

The fate of the novel allele will be to mix with other genetic backgrounds. Many novel instances will simply disappear with no discernible phenotypic expression. But if that mutation possesses a survival advantage, its descendants may gradually help form a new species. Negative winnowing is all that is involved in that gradual selection process. And exactly the same situation holds in the social realm, where group selection, not individual prowess or competence, determines acceptance of new “ideas” and patterns of behavior through a gradual winnowing of patterns that can only be regarded as having “survived” with the aid of hindsight.

This slow growth of novelty or new ideas is also characteristic of both science and change in the market order. This is intrinsic to situations in which populations rather than individuals are central. There are all manner of things that impede the introduction of new ideas and work against the continuing framework of an ongoing order. Individuals attempt to block the output of other individuals or groups with whom they disagree, or whose position would put them at economic disadvantage. In science this is obvious in the extent to which revolutionary thinkers’ views are resisted and sabotaged by the practitioners of the “old guard.” Scientific revolutions take considerable time, effort, and often just plain luck. There are “power grabs” by the entrenched that attempt to deny sources of funding, research facilities, and opportunities for publication to those whose positions and results oppose what their normal science paradigm regards as the only acceptable conduct. In the social cosmos entrenched political views attempt to stifle those of any competitors. Patents and other restrictions upon free access to new ideas or products are characteristic of modern economic order. But such factors, while they affect the speed and extent to which views and positions are held, and products are brought to market, have nothing to do with the one and only mechanism that accounts for change in the overall order. The same negative winnowing process that is involved in the gradual change from one species to another, the method of trial and error elimination, is involved. In the economic marketplace products are winnowed out by the choices of consumers. In the intellectual marketplace products are winnowed out by the selection pressure of the views of competing researchers. And in both cases the functioning of the evolutionary order of choice can be destroyed by political factors, cataclysmic events in the environment, the destruction of populations by plague and other bacterial or viral infestations, and myriad other apocalyptic situations. We must never forget the fragility and the perilous nature of our position, and be thankful that we have been presented with the opportunity to study these complex phenomena in the first place.

Psychological organization depends upon inhibitory constraints. Above we noted instances of how psychology is based on negative rules of constraint. Let me elaborate only one aspect of that. Consider not our “in the head” cognition but the more mundane problem of how you move and “do things” in the world. We are not Leibnizian monads passively and unmovingly sitting around resonating to the environment—we act within it and on it. This is how the complexity of the market order and social cosmos has come about—by our active movements and “doings.” What controls or regulates our voluntary movement? While we may initiate, in cerebral activity, our thought about what to do and how to do it, it falls to the cerebellum to regulate the more mundane task of how that is realized in muscle movement through the environment. The cerebellum controls the shape of all movement and skilled behavior. It accomplishes this by purely inhibitory control—the output of the cerebellum consists entirely of negative prohibitions to extremes of cerebrally initiated abstract commands. Like the cybernetic helmsman, it steers movement into precise patterns of skilled behavior by stopping “wild” swings (too far in one or another direction) down into economical re-
alizations of the general and nonspecific directions the cerebrum specifies. This is been known for decades. What we must realize is its significance for understanding complex orders.

Cerebellar control results in skilled movement in a manner that is very similar to the overall pattern of the market order. Just as the individual market participant need not know anything more than a small amount of restricted local knowledge, the cerebrum need not do more (in initiating behavior) than issue a very abstract and undifferentiated directive. The cerebrum leaves all the messy details to cerebellar fine-tuning. The individual market participant leaves all the messy details of how the price or service he or she is interested in arises entirely to the fine-tuning functioning of the market order. The net effect in both situations is the tremendous economy of knowledge required to bring about very abstract and complicated things. This is another example of the indispensability of our ignorance when confronted with complexity. If we had to consciously worry about all those “messy details” and thus had to specify positive particular responses to be achieved, in either the workings of the market or the workings of the mind, we would never be able to do even the simplest physical tasks, and the market order could never have come into existence.

SUBJECT AND OBJECT: THE INESCAPABILITY OF “SUBJECTIVISM” IN SCIENCE

At the beginning I noted that the problem of agency arises with the effective separation of the first cells from an extracellular environment, and directed attention to the relatively new field of biosemiotics. Agency begins with life. Subject and object arise in unison when an organism is localized in space (and of course, in time). You cannot conceive of one except in opposition to the other. The subject of cognition is an inevitable compliment to the object of inquiry. The complementarity of subject and object is an inescapable dualism in epistemology. The role of the subject is central to any “objective” approach to psychological, economic or other social domains (exactly as the physicists have discovered in facing the “measurement problem” in the quantum domain). Let us overview this and tie it in to the essential negatives of our prior themes.

Subject and object. Whenever an object comes into existence it is within the conception of some sapient subject-of-conceptual-activity. The universe “out there” has neither subjects nor objects: it just “is.” The epistemic judgment that an object exists is the ascription by a subject of meaning to an aspect of the phenomenal flux. Subjects and objects come into existence together, with neither temporal nor conceptual priority assignable to either. Subjects cannot stand outside the objective order—they are part and parcel of its creation. As creators of that order they are inextricably linked into it. Separation of subject and object is prior to all cognition and all judgmental attribution. Thus when we try to ascertain what they are independently of each other, we are stymied—study of the subject requires objectifying it. Study of an object presupposes a studying subject. Thus subjects and objects, though they arise in unison in conceptual thought, are inherently ambiguous and under-determined in both intension and reference. Selfhood is a problem precisely because of the relational equivalence of selves in objectivity or ontology. The problem arises at this point because the “objective approach” and its entailed ontology creates an intolerable ambiguity for epistemology: “I” and “thou” can never be the same in the orders of knowing (or meaning) and being.

The usual conception of objectivity is backwards. This issue traditionally concerns avoiding the specter of solipsism. The picture presented is that of each individual as an island separated from everything “else” by an impossibly vast epistemic sea that can never be crossed. Scientists are not immune to this interpretation of subjective isolation. Here is a clear example:

Like all children I began with a naïve realist outlook and never thought about how our senses, our brains, and our language affect what we tacitly accept as “out there” in the world. Years later I read the essay by the physicist Max Born (1969), Symbols and Reality, and I recalled that while reading Pearson’s Grammar I had experienced the same shock that Born describes in his essay: “Thus it dawned upon me that fundamentally everything is subjective, everything without exception. That was a shock.” Born went on to point out that: “symbols are the carriers of communication between
individuals and thus decisive for the possibility of objective knowledge”. The physicist’s concept of “objective knowledge” means only that knowledge that appears the same for all conceivable observers, as tested by the invariance and symmetries of the symbolic expression of laws (Pattee 2012, p. 6).

But are we in fact these subjective “islands in the sun” (to recall Hemingway) or does that view depend on mischaracterizing the nature of both subject and object? What can we say about the subjective versus objective dualism? From the standpoint of epistemology when we move beyond the mere having of acquaintance (which is in fact totally tenseless and not localizable as either subjective or objective) to the language of description—which is always the case in any natural human language and the language of science—in which we characterize that subjective realm, we have inevitably abandoned subjectivity for intersubjectivity. This must be so because language is inevitably social. There are no private languages. Any attempt to construct a private (i.e., totally uniquely subjective and available to one individual alone) language results in a code—like braille—rather than an actual language. Codes transform or “encode” an already existing linguistic system. They do not constitute a new or unique language.

All our knowledge by description of the subjective is actually intersubjective. Intersubjectivity is the essential feature of objectivity. Thus subjective experience is actually objective and abstract rather than particular and concrete. Human conception never touches raw experience. As Körner (1966) put it, the disconnection between theory and experience is total and complete. Experience is linked to theory only by postulation. That postulation requires the construction of abstract idealizations to substitute for the actually unique, unrepeatable and the totally subjective elements which no longer appear in it. The subjective realm can be described (and thus can become known to be such) only by being objectified. All objectification is conceptual, and thus transcends its alleged basis in the subjective and the unique.10

Max Born was right about the intersubjective nature of scientific knowledge, and when it is understood that the only subjectivity in the universe is the raw acquaintance we undergo, it is obvious that our individual models of reality, despite their location only in our heads, are as objective as the “external” realm they attempt to portray.

So the subjective is intrinsically objective. How can this be so? Because there is no such thing as a private language or a private symbol, and the symbols of our thought are cast intrinsically in the language of description. There are no symbols that can have meaning for only one subject and can never be communicated to anyone else. Any language can and must convey knowledge by description. Any description always presupposes thing-kind identification and idealization from momentary particulars, and this is always objective. Those identifications are trans situational and trans temporal due to the evolution of our nervous systems. This is one of the most important lessons to be learned from Hayek’s The Sensory Order.11

The meanings of our concepts become more and more determinate as they become more idealized and trans empirical, which is to say, more objective. Cassirer and Körner made this point quite obvious and I presuppose their in-depth discussion at this point. As Cassirer said in 1910:

The problem is not how we go from the “subjective” to the “objective,” but how we go from “objective” to the “subjective.” … The “subjective” is not the self-evident, given starting-point out of which the world of objects is constructed by a speculative synthesis; but it is the result of an analysis and presupposes the permanence of experience and hence the validity of fixed relations between contents in general (1923, pp. 278-79).

In sum:

The conditions and presuppositions of “objective” experience cannot be added as a supplement, after the subjective world of presentations has been completed, but they are already implied in its construction…. Without logical principles, which go beyond the content of given impressions,
there is as little a consciousness of the ego as there is a consciousness of the object. … The thought of the ego is in no way more original and logically immediate than the thought of the object, since both arise together and can only develop in constant reciprocal relation. No content can be known and experienced as “subjective,” without being contrasted with another content which appears as objective (ibid., p. 295).

There is simply no point in assigning primacy to subjectivity or to objectivity in any either-or fashion. There is only one correct perspective: both-and. This is a duality that comes into existence as such: subjects and objects arise in unison and cannot be understood as independently specifiable singularities. But all knowledge, cast in the objective language of description, counts as objective when it comes to the tasks of scientific analysis.

Economics can be both an empirical science and a subjective one. It is perfectly possible to have an empirical science in the psychological and social—economic domains. But there are two things that such accounts can never be: experimental, or a priori. Neither the positivistic “social physics” model nor the attempt at a priori axiomatization of human action will ever succeed. There are negative constraints upon complex human and social phenomena that prevent the achievement of true experimentation, and axiomatization as a procedure in natural science has been abandoned since it was realized that only the timeless or rate independent realm of purely syntactic mathematics and logic can be successfully axiomatized. No dynamical or rate dependent theory of semantic content in any scientific domain can be axiomatized except after the fact of full development by prior empirical means (and then only provisionally).

The quickest way to understand why neither psychology nor economics can be experimental is to note that experimentation requires measurement, and not just the mere assignment of numbers to records of events. An experiment is the construction of a “repeatable” situation by an experimenter with the use of artifacts (the experimental apparatus and a constraint situation in which the apparatus is employed) in order to eliminate sources of “error” due to two classes of events—first, fortuitous changes in boundary or initial conditions (usually called “chance” factors); and second, systematic factors in the subject matter (which can then become the focus of subsequent inquiry). The intent of experimentation is to determine lawful regularity in dynamical variability by factoring out of consideration all but the lawful relations. This requires measurement of the essential variables or factors under consideration. Measurement requires that conditions of quantity be satisfied (see Stevens 1951, Nagel 1960, Michell 1997, Trendler 2009). A quantity is a kind of property possessed by empirical objects (in physics, length, width, height, mass, temperature, etc.) which admit variation in terms of magnitudes (specific levels or amounts). We interpret experimental relations in terms of relations of magnitudes of a quantity (e.g., relations such as equality, order, additivity (see Nagel 1960, for one generally accepted list of axioms or “conditions” of quantity). Now consider this: It must be stressed that “the hypothesis that some attribute is quantitative is a quite specific hypothesis, one never logically necessary” (Michell 1999, p. 67). That is, quantitative structure can be ascribed to an attribute only if it empirically satisfies the conditions of quantity. The scientific task therefore always implies testing empirical hypotheses. The first and therefore most basic condition of quantity structure demands that “any two magnitudes of the same quantity are either identical or different.” (Trendler 2009, p. 582).

What happens if we try to test even this first condition of quantity in the social realms? Clearly, if we cannot achieve this “easy” one, none of the others will be obtainable either. We can cut to the end of the chase:

Psychological phenomena are not sufficiently manageable. That is, they are neither manipulable nor are they controllable to the extent necessary for empirically meaningful application of measurement theory. Hence they are not measurable… Contrary to physical phenomena, psychological phenomena cannot be made to depend on a small set of manageable conditions. In other words, the very effective method used in physics of manipulating and controlling phenomena through apparatus
construction is not applicable in psychology. This difference explains in my view the success of quantification in physics since Galileo and conversely the failure of similar attempts in psychology since Fechner, and this is also the reason why I believe that the Galilean revolution never happened in psychology (ibid., p. 592).

And it is quite obvious that if this is the situation for the individual in psychology it must be the same when inquiry moves to the economic realm with the simplest situation of barter between two people and the potential extension to the indefinite number of individuals in the market order. This means that we must reinterpret studies in economics that purport to be genuinely “experimental,” such as those of Vernon Smith (1962, 1982, 1991, 2000). Their true status is as demonstration studies, as we must now note. Noting this does not diminish their value, but it does relocate how they should be interpreted.

Social science is just fine with demonstration studies. So where is the field without the equivalent of natural laws and physical science measurements? Where we have always been. We are good at keeping records, and when we assign numbers to records we will continue, albeit quite misleadingly, to call them measurements. But we must realize that the field is empirical and demonstrational rather than being experimental. What we do in psychological research is set up demonstration situations (call them demonstration “experiments” if you will) in which we look for happy accidents, i.e., “clear cases” that make manifest, with minimal constraint imposed by our apparatus and research situations, what the regularities or rules seem to be. The seemingly more advanced field of economics does exactly the same thing. Empirical research in economics looks at differences in results that have arisen as a result of different initial conditions. The “testing” of an economic hypothesis is thus always after the fact. Even in cases of looking at the differences between “command” or directed economies and more “market oriented” situations, it is obvious that all we can do is look for patterns of regularity that differ between the situations chosen for study. And we do this “looking” only after recording, which is to say, only after the fact. We need to come to grips with Trendler’s (ibid., p. 593) conclusion:

The application of measurement theory, irrespective of whether it is construed as deterministic or probabilistic, is also not relevant to achieving substantial progress in psychology. Other, more suited methods for the domain of psychology must be found. It might therefore be wise to seriously reconsider Johnson’s recommendation: “Those data should be measured which can be measured; those which cannot be measured should be treated otherwise. Much remains to be discovered in scientific methodology about valid treatment and adequate and economic description of non-measurable facts (Johnson 1936, p. 351).

The situation in the social sciences is as Hayek reminded us: in physics all the individual phenomena are regarded as exactly alike and totally interchangeable. One electron is exactly the same as any other electron, and can substitute for any other in an experiment. But when dealing with social phenomena that is never the case: no two human individuals are ever exactly the same, and they are usually completely different in terms of their prior experience and learning history, their values and needs, and in general, all the variables we wish to study. We will never be able to measure these differences. All we will ever be able to do is record their existence. That does not mean that serious scientific study of these domains is not possible.

Definitional formalisms are not explanatory of dynamical behavior. The Austrian or “subjective” theory of value must be separated from the a priorism proposed by Mises (1966) in Human Action, originally 1949, and in Epistemological Problems of Economics (1960, originally 1933), and at least partially by his followers (e.g., Rothbard, 1976). It is not possible to divorce human action (as a functional concept) from the empirical study of either psychological or economic behavior. The result of utilizing only functional concepts is infinite circularity and ambiguity. The nature and range of human action cannot be specified in advance
from the armchair. Theoretical explanation in any science must relate the cognitive (syntactic and semantic) content of the theory to reality in some fashion, and that can never be done by specification of logical syntax alone, with the postulation of it being an a priori true axiom set of concepts that, like laws of nature, apply every-where and every-when. Sooner or later what Kuhn called a revolutionary reconceptualization will force itself on the domain, and many “a priori truths” of the old view will disappear, to be replaced by what are to the new look very different concepts.

Misean praxeology can avoid that fate only by making vague circularly defined concepts apply to all possible events, thereby depriving its system of axioms of any determinate meaning at all. The praxeological approach is vacuous—like saying a circle is a geometric figure. Of course circles are geometric “figures”—now tell us something we do not yet know, such as what is a circle. Think Euclid already took care of that for us? What about the entire continuum of non-Euclidean geometries, where functional concepts such as “circle” or “parallel” are defined very differently? What is that “figure” over there? You cannot tell without two things: first, specification of the type of geometry involved; and second, a structural analysis of the genesis of its physical realization. That is because all purely functionally specified concepts are intrinsically ambiguous. To disambiguate purely functional concepts we must have a concomitant complementary structural analysis (see Weimer 1984).

The other side of this intrinsically two-sided coin is that physical analysis of behavior alone, as Mises so correctly emphasized, is totally impotent to specify functional concepts such as those found at the heart of psychology or economics. Just as it is impossible (not just hard) to physically define the concept of sentence in language, so it is with the concept of action in both psychology and economics. No explicit physical definition is possible, no matter how complete or thorough the specification of physical particulars. An example shows the inherent problem of ambiguity involved. Suppose a man walks up to a building, goes in, takes out a pen and piece of paper, makes marks on the paper with the pen, and then hands the paper to someone else. Elaborate this into the most exhaustive physical specification of what occurred that one can imagine, even down to the quantum physical level. One can then ask: What action was involved? Or was it even an instance of the concept “action”? The answer is that there is no human behavior or action at all unless more information is empirically determined: movement is physical, and although it constrains action, it cannot explain it. This is far more than the well-known point that functional specification is compatible with an indefinite range of physical events. The same physical movements could exhibit the economic act of cashing a check, the political act of signaling a spy, the Freudian act of exhibiting latent hostility towards one’s mother, and literally countless other acts or even the non-act of a “Boltzmann brain” collection of random thermodynamic assemblages of bits. Without a concomitant theory of the structural determination of behavior, a syntax of action, there is no specifiable determination of action from any theoretical or functional point of view at all. Any adequate concomitant structural determination will have to utilize the distinction, familiar from the transformational revolution in linguistics, between surface and deep structures. The underlying rules of determination are always at a deep structural level. The problem with the Misean approach is that it cannot make the deep-surface distinction in any principled manner, and indeed cannot make it at all.

One can grant Mises any “a priori” specification he would choose as an ex post facto rationalization of what function is represented in physical events. It will never provide an explanation of action (or any other function). The problem is that there is no bridge to reality from praxeology. The ambiguity of action is its unexplainability in terms of any physical realization, and its complete circularity in purely functional specification. To disambiguate action (or any functional concept) one must provide an empirically adequate structural analysis of its generation. And that structural analysis at deep conceptual levels will provide enough constraints on possible semantic interpretations to rule out the indefinitely large number of potentially available but incorrect interpretations that physical movements leave completely underdetermined and ambiguous. The promise of the structural analysis of (psychological) behavior or (economic) action is that it can potentially provide, for the first time in history, an explanatorily adequate account of the functional psychological and economic domains. Human action can never be an a priori domain that is only circularly defined by functional concepts. Knowing what action means requires a structural deriva-
tion of its surface components from a theory that ranges over fundamentally deep and abstract entities. The rules of determination governing that determination of what eventuates into our surface structure behaviors will always consist of a context of constraint specified by negative or inhibitory rules.

SUMMARY

The superior power of negative rules of order in complex phenomena has been discussed and exemplified in cases ranging from the very small (cells in living organisms) through the control of activity by the central nervous system and then into the social realm (the market order in economics and aspects of science). Also explored as related to negative rules of order are aspects of the human epistemological predicament (the nature of objectivity and “subjectivity” in the nature of knowledge) with methodological problems and caveats (the problems of scaling and mensuration, and a priori theorizing) pertaining to the scientific study of spontaneously organized complex subjects. Key points are:

1. Negative rules are the only means possible for the control of indefinitely extended or potentially infinite domains. These rules allow for novelty and the productivity or creativity of behavior because they constrain outcomes by prohibiting general classes of behaviors without becoming bogged down in attempting to specify an indefinitely large number of particular behaviors that would otherwise have had to be achieved.

2. Negative rules are the most economical or efficient means by which one’s finite knowledge can interact with and thus contribute to ongoing spontaneous complex orders. This is why all that is necessary for market participation is the price of goods or services according to their individual value as determined by different subjects. All you need to know is that if the cost is too great you should allocate your resources in some other fashion.

3. The effects of the possibility of novel behavior (freedom arising from the context of constraint) are found throughout evolution, from the speciation of organisms through to the most esoteric scientific and intellectual pursuits. Individual differences (“subjectivism”) are “What makes the world go around.”

4. Because of the uniqueness of subjects (as opposed to the generic nature of physical objects which are always identical and interchangeable) we cannot have enough knowledge to utilize the same scaling and measurement procedures that physical science employs. We are limited (very definitely negatively constrained) to empirical studies (demonstration “experiments”) rather than the fully controlled experiments of the so-called hard sciences. Equally impossible for the psychological and social domains to realize is any a priori fossilization of the concept of action, as was attempted earlier in economics.

NOTES

1. Nowhere is this attitude better expressed than in the development of the philosophies of rationalism that have arisen, primarily from the Renaissance on up, and that found their classic expression in the concept of Cartesian rationality. Thinkers in the Cartesian mold wish to supplant everything that is the result of “blind tradition” or mere “habit” or an unintended consequence with the consciously thought out and thoroughly planned in advance. For them no course of action could actually be rational if it is not planned out completely in advance. For the Cartesian mentality our superiority over the social insects is that our rationality is conscious and directly pur-
positive. Thus Cartesian explanatory models of a domain are cast in terms of specifying positive prescriptions of particulars that their theories postulate must occur.

This attitude of rationalist constructivism (as I have called it, following Hayek) underlies a great deal of the modern attitude toward the social and political realms. It has led to interventionist policies in economics (stemming especially from Keynes in the modern era), to the desire for a made up universal language (Esperanto, from Neurath and the positivists of the 1930s), to the perennial infatuation with socialism, even to the Charter of the United Nations. It underlies the philosophy of progressivism in social and political thought that has been current among "intellectuals" since the mid 19th century. It is that thought that has infected biology and psychology in the form noted in the animal behaviorists above.

2. Modus ponens is the logic rule that if a conditional statement (if P then Q) is accepted, and the antecedent (P) holds, then the consequent (Q) may be inferred. Modus tollens is the logic rule that if a conditional statement is accepted, and the consequent does not hold (not-Q), then the antecedent (not P) must be inferred.

3. There can only be cases of "positive" learning in totally artificial situations in which a finite number of choices is possible, and the choices are specified in advance to, or can be discovered by, the organism. This would be like counting cards in a card game in order to determine whose hand holds which cards. This is so-called eliminative induction, as each successive round eliminates more possibilities from the deck of cards and thus limits the possibilities for which cards remain in a given player's hand.

4. It is, of course, a double-edged sword: while having given us our knowledge and our wealth it has produced not only the weapons of war that have the potential to exterminate us but it is also the source of the alienation and malaise of modern humankind, since our emotions and feelings were determined by our long history in the tribal or face to face order. At present we live in an increasingly abstract and impersonal order in which the traditional forms of "small group" support are less and less available to us. We have suddenly lost all our "comfort food" and the "family life" support structures that have shaped our emotions and group cohesiveness. This is increasingly exhibited in contemporary society, for example by the now epidemic phenomenon of addiction to so-called social media that so many cling to in order to provide a pale reflection of the comforting interpersonal situation and relationships that existed in more primitive forms of social organization.

5. Hayek contrasted two fundamentally different types of order. A taxis was a made up order, such as, to use his example from the ancient Greeks, an order of battle (planned out by a general), or the design of the city laid out by a city planner. So a taxis is an order directed by individuals to serve some purpose. In contrast a cosmos is a spontaneous ordering of events that occurs without conscious planning or direction, and indeed often without any knowledge on the part of human beings. Hayek’s contention was that when dealing with the realms of complex phenomena, comprising more particular facts than any brain could ascertain or manipulate, one was always dealing with a cosmos—a spontaneously arisen ordering of events that no individuals had thought out in advance.

6. This indispensable negativity takes on a ubiquitous character when one collates examples from disparate areas. From the Moralists such as Hume, Smith and Ferguson we learn that justice can be defined only as the elimination of injustice, and that its achievement can never be attained for once and for all, but requires a standing order of obligation throughout our lives. Similarly, political and intellectual freedom depends on adherence to a framework of rules that delimit how creativity can occur. Creativity itself, whether in social or economic conduct, or in the ability to use language productively, or in the genesis of behavior, is regulated by a context of constraint that consists entirely of inhibitory or prohibitory rules. To such examples one may add the negative definition of "economic" in terms of scarcity of what is not ultimately available. Also the concept of cost, as the importance of the next most urgent want that can no longer be satisfied, and also the concept of marginal utility. As noted above, theory of science exhibits many instances. Popper even defined the empirical domain negatively, equating empirical content with possible states of affairs that a theory forbids to occur. There are also numerous negatives familiar from Popper’s slogans, such as "Don’t attempt to justify," or "Do not argue about linguistic definitions," and so on.

7. Should we attempt to make explicit (fully conscious and directed) this tacit matrix in which our reason has arisen we will be limited to a taxis order that is no "smarter" or more adaptive than the particular individual who consciously specified it. It is our inevitable ignorance of the infinitude of particulars that constitutes the consequences of our actions that rules out the possibility of any such conception of "rationalism." Should we attempt to limit
reason and permissible conduct to what is available to us from an analysis of what is in our consciousness we
would find ourselves thrown back to the tribalism of the face-to-face society that most of our species left long ago.
Proponents of such views abound, especially in psychology. Consider the remarks of B. F. Skinner’s protagonist
in his utopian novel *Walden Two* (originally published in 1948): “Frazier: We’re in the throes of a great change to
positive reinforcement—from a competitive society in which one man’s reward is another man’s punishment, to
a cooperative society in which no one gains at the expense of anyone else” (1976, p. 245). This sentiment echoes
rationalist constructivist philosopher Bertrand Russell, in *The Scientific Outlook*: “No society can be regarded as
fully scientific unless it has been created deliberately with a certain structure to fulfill certain purposes” (1931, p.
211). These and similar views are part and parcel of the “common sense” background views of the 20th century.
What needs to be remembered is that there is no support whatever for such views forthcoming from any scientific
theory in either the physical or biological sciences, nor from neuropsychological and cognitive psychology, nor
from the study of spontaneously ordered complex orders in the social domain.

8. By performing an enormous number of computations, the cerebellum acts as a comparative computer to control
skilled movements. There is immediate input to the cerebellum from the motor cortex, and the cerebrum cannot
initiate any action without informing the cerebellum. J. C. Eccles exhaustively investigated the cerebellum (Eccles
1969, 1973a, 1973b), and this is his summary of its functioning:

what you do with ordinary movements is to give a general command—such as “place finger on nose,”
or “write signature,” or “pick up glass”—and the whole motor performance goes automatically. For
example, you don’t have to spell out your name letter by letter when you’re writing your signa-
ture—if you did, the bank manager would not recognize it! You just give the general command
from the cerebrum and let the cerebellum take over in order to give the fine characteristic details.
Normally our most complex muscle movements are carried out subconsciously and with consum-
mate skill. The more subconscious you are in a golf stroke, the better it is, and the same with tennis,
skiing, skating, or any other skill. In all these performances we do not have any appreciation of the
complexity of muscle contractions and joint movements. All that we are voluntarily conscious of is
a general directive given by what we call our voluntary system. All the finesse and skill seems natu-
really to flow from that. It is my thesis that the cerebellum is concerned in all this
enormously complex organization and control of movement, and that throughout life, particularly
in the earlier years, we are engaged in an incessant teaching program for the cerebellum. As a con-
sequence, it can carry out all of these remarkable tasks that we set it to do in the whole repertoire
of our skilled movements in games, and techniques, and musical performance, and speech, dance,
song, and so forth (Eccles 1973b, pp. 122-23).

9. Many philosophers have tried to avoid or resolve this necessary dualism by employing a relational framework.
This has been popular since Leibniz proposed a relational metaphysics. He held that from the point of view of sci-
ence these concepts are relational, since they arise in unison as a product of conceptual analysis, linked by rela-
tions specifying invariance in appearances. Thus the “I” of consciousness appears, from the perspective of objec-
tivity (or better, intersubjectivity) as but one of many of its kind. But it is all too obvious that in epistemology the
priority is undeniable. The I is the absolute subject, unique in spite of the objective equivalence of all other sub-
jects. Weyl put this issue clearly in 1927:

the postulation of the ego, of the ‘thou,’ and of the external world is without influence upon the
cognitive treatment of reality… Yet this belief is the soul of all knowledge… Leibniz believed that
he had resolved the conflict of human freedom and divine predestination by letting God (for suf-
cient reasons) assign existence to certain of the infinitely many possibilities, for instance to the
beings Judas and Peter, whose substantial nature determines their entire fate. This solution may
objectively be sufficient, but it is shattered by the desperate outcry of Judas, “Why did I have to be
Judas?” The impossibility of an objective formulation of this question is apparent…. No answer in
the form of an objective insight can ensue. Knowledge is incapable of harmonizing the luminous
ego with the dark erring human being that is cast out into an individual fate (1949, pp. 124-25).
10. First emphasized by Kant, the objective nature of the subjective is beautifully explicated by neo-Kantian philosophers such as Cassirer (1923, 1957). Speaking of the “ingredients” of the act of visual perception Cassirer noted: “it should be realized that this mode of ideation is no secondary and as it were accidental factor, by which vision is for the time being partly determined, but that, from a psychological point of view, the symbolic ideation first constitutes vision. For there is no seeing and nothing visible which does not stand in some mode of spiritual vision, of ideation. A seeing and a thing seen outside of this “sight,” a “bare” sensation preceding all formation, is an empty abstraction. The “given” must always be taken in a definite aspect and so apprehended, for it is this aspect that first lends it meaning” (1957, p. 134). And as a counter to the physicist’s sentiment noted above, this rebuttal: “In natural science it may seem meaningful and even necessary to let knowledge of the parts precede knowledge of the whole, to ground the reality of the whole in that of the parts. But this road is closed to the investigation of language, for the specifically linguistic meaning is an indivisible unity and an indivisible totality. It cannot be built up piece by piece from its components, from separate words—rather, the particular word presupposes the whole of the sentence and can only be interpreted and understood through it. If we now apply this point of view to the problem of perception—if we take the unity of linguistic meaning as our guide and model—we gain an entirely new picture of sensibility. We then recognize that the isolated ”sensation,” like the isolated word, is a mere abstraction” (ibid., pp. 31-32).

11. For more on Walter Weimer and his discovery of and promotion of Hayek’s The Sensory Order, please see Weimer 2011. — [ed.].

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In 1974 Friedrich Hayek received the Nobel Prize in economics for his theory on how changing prices convey information throughout an economy. In his acceptance speech, *The Pretense of Knowledge*, he argued against a variety of economic approaches. Complex settings for which those in his own field failed to grasp the ineptitude of certain empirical results in relation to the economy as a whole. His timeless declaration proves ever more relevant in modern society, with a special application to the field of Artificial Intelligence. In this article, we examine why it is unlikely for Artificial Intelligence to make real advances while those writing the programs grasp ever tighter for control.

1. INTRODUCTION

*The Pretense of Knowledge* was a specific application of more general ideas presented previously by Hayek in *The Use of Knowledge in Society* (Hayek 1945). What these declarations share is made explicit by the second chapter of *Law Legislation and Liberty*, Cosmos and Taxis (Hayek 1982). The underlying idea is that of planned or unplanned orders, made or grown systems, top-down control or bottom up emergence, planned chaos or spontaneous order, τάξης (taxis) or κόσμος (cosmos). This unifying theme has been critically vetted in the domain of social systems and economic markets. However, it has yet to make an impact on the field of Artificial Intelligence.

In this article, we examine the field under the lens of spontaneous orders and complexity. This realization yields that, above all, Artificial Intelligence has engaged in an almost century-long misclassification. What the field purports to solve—intelligence—is in fact impossible given current and historical methods. It is this assumption that we seek to expose in Sections 2 and 3 while providing an alternative direction in Section 4.

2. HISTORY

The history of Artificial Intelligence is rife with presumptions of knowledge and top-down style solutions. An analysis of methodologies employed throughout the field—past and present—will shed light on this problem. The ambition of early pioneers is well captured in the words of Herbert Simon, “Machines will be capable, within 20 years, of doing any work a man can do.”

It was 1965 when he made that claim. Shortly thereafter, in 1966, Seymour Papert and others at MIT proposed they would solve vision during that summer (Papert 1966).
These presumptuous claims resulted directly from a pretense of knowledge. The audacious claims of the best and brightest researchers are not the issue. Instead, it is the notion that discretizing high-level, visible, characteristics of complex systems and implementing them via centrally planned rules, heuristics, and cost functions will be synonymous with the system as a whole. This is the τάξης view of intelligence and its artificial creation.

Starting in 1956, Allen Newell and Herbert Simon invented a "Logical Theorist," which leveraged symbolic reasoning to solve geometric proofs (Newell 1956). Simon described it as a “thinking machine.” When in reality, it operated on a set of heuristics prescribed by its programmers. The next year produced the "General Problem Solver" (Newell 1959). Peter Norvig thought so highly of this achievement that he said, “there are now in the world machines that think, that learn and create.”

Papert’s confidence for his Summer Vision Project was so high, undergraduates were assigned to the task. The work conducted that summer, and long after, focused on template schemes and hierarchical models (Papert 1966). This approach translated to humans designing features they believed to be important in recognizing visual objects.

Following this trend, there was a rise in symbolic logic, often termed Classical AI. In programs like CYC (Lenat 1995), engineers explicitly write millions of hand programmed rules in an attempt to codify human knowledge and common sense. The paper boasts, “a person-century of effort has gone into building CYC” and "10^6 commonsense axioms have been handcrafted for and entered into CYC’s knowledge base.” While humans rely on symbolic logic at an abstract level, this is not synonymous with a system composed of logic statements. The space of information was, and is, too vast to be codified in a set of logic statements. Though CYC is an impressive engineering feat, it offers no clear path to intelligence.

From the geometric puzzle solver, ANALOGY (Evans 1964), to the ELIZA chatbot (Weizenbaum 1966), and SHRDLU language processor (Winograd 1972), the story is the same. Hard-coded rules, heuristics, and symbolic manipulation to achieve the appearance of intelligent behavior. The quarrel is not, as we will see, with heuristics or symbolic logic. These are essential tools in the arsenal of any computer scientist. The trouble derives from the mindset of the implementor.

3. PERPETUATED METHODOLOGY

Assumptions made in the past can appear comical in hindsight. Unfortunately, we are in tomorrow’s past, and this methodology continues to perpetuate the field. Deep learning, the current method in vogue, is lauded because we no longer assume programmatic declarations of human knowledge. The claim is that because we learn directly from data, we sidestep the aforementioned faux pas. This line of thought is a grave red herring. Deep learning is just as vulnerable as the CYCs or Logical Theorists of the past. Though we no longer rely on rule-based systems, the declarations are still explicit, and the systems centrally planned. This methodological shortcoming is hidden, once again, behind a thick veil—the pretense of knowledge.

The ImageNet challenge contains millions of images and thousands of categories (Russakovsky et al. 2015). Models are trained for weeks and months to achieve optimal error. Autonomous vehicle companies pour millions of dollars into mapping roads and capturing human driver training data. Speech recognition systems rely on manually labeled corpora, with each audible phrase paired with its textual equivalent. Natural language systems consume large chunks of the internet to generate convincing sentences (Radford et al. 2019). These methods share an instilled discretization of intelligent behavior, fragmented from the whole, and explicitly solved in isolation. In terms of system abstractions, Papert’s Vision Project, with designed templates and heuristics, is no different from a convolutional network trained on ImageNet. While the Vision Project devised templates, deep networks rely on explicit cost functions. Though the technical details differ, the underlying methodology is the same.

Those that recognize these deficiencies often turn to reinforcement learning as a solution. This methodology offers convincing results in which agents can solve various problems from autonomous vehicles, navigation, and cooperative games. While reinforcement learning is a step in the right direction, its ail-
ments are nonetheless similar (Ott 2019). Artificial agents are constrained to specific tasks, with the sole objective of maximizing rewards over time. These rewards are defined by the environment, or worse by the researcher! If we believe this paradigm is any different from the handcrafted heuristics of the past we are fooling ourselves:

It seems to me that this failure of the economists to guide policy more successfully is closely connected with their propensity to imitate as closely as possible the procedures of the brilliantly successful physical sciences—an attempt which in our field may lead to outright error. It is an approach which has come to be described as the "scientistic" attitude—an attitude which, as I defined it some thirty years ago, “is decidedly unscientific in the true sense of the word, since it involves a mechanical and uncritical application of habits of thought to fields different from those in which they have been formed” (Hayek 1974).

Much like Hayek’s critique of economics, the same is true for Artificial Intelligence. The field relies on methods derived from statistics and numerical optimization, which is decidedly unscientific in its application to intelligence research. “Scientism” as Hayek calls it, is the desire to abstract a system and precisely quantify aspects of it. Following this approach is understandable from the AI researcher’s perspective, given our position in the scientific community as we are surrounded by fields—biology, chemistry, and physics—that make system-level abstractions and give precise predictions about outcomes. Consequently, cost functions are a natural solution, as they provide an exact quantification of the degree to which the system has learned. However, through system abstraction and quantification, we are likely to lose critical information so as to be no longer relevant to the original system. This process’s technical underpinnings are captured in the discretize and conquer approach, which we detail in the following subsection.

3.1 DISCRETIZE AND CONQUER

Neurons in the brain form the cortical substrate from which intelligent behavior is an emergent property. Mathematically, one can regard the brain as a function and intelligence as an output of that function. Such that the manifold of intelligence is described by the function, \( M = f(S_t; \Theta_t) \). Where the manifold, \( M \), is the output from the function \( f \), \( S_t \) is all input stimuli to the system (all afferent sensory inputs—touch, vision, sound), and \( \Theta_t \) is the internal state of the brain at time \( t \) (all synaptic weights, voltage differentials of neurons, ion flows, gated channels, protein formations, etc).
Figure 1: Discretize and conquer a) Interactions within cortical networks produce emergent phenomena—intelligence—described by an unknowable manifold. b) The manifold of intelligence is unknowable, however, we receive observations from it through actions and behavior. c) Arbitrary bounds are placed on the observations discretizing them. d) A cost function is used to describe the observations. And gradient descent approximates the cost function.

Figure 1a conveys this pictorially, with the brain producing some manifold over possible brain states, $\Theta$, and input stimuli, $S$. In reality this manifold is unknowable from a practical standpoint as well as a computational one. Practically, it is not currently possible to record all biological details—the activity of all neurons, their synaptic weights, electrical and chemical gradients, etc. Computationally, modeling every detail could be done given sufficient computing resources but such intricacy could not run in real time. For all intents and purposes, the manifold is not known.

As a result, we must rely on incomplete observations from the manifold. These observations are high-level attributes or behaviors that are emergent products of the underlying system. Figure 1b depicts this by showing single points that represent observations realized from the full manifold. For example, intelligent systems can perceive through vision, communicate through language, reason through abstractions, and act through planning. These are all visible observations from the manifold. What is not visible is the processes, interactions, and dynamics that produce these high-level attributes. Thus the characteristics we ascribe to intelligent beings are only the byproducts of the system from which intelligence can emerge, they are not indicative or defining features of intelligence but merely the result of it.

With a large collection of observations, it becomes natural to cluster and group them according to kind. This is the discretization stage. For example, one may observe that intelligent agents classify objects, identify their location in space, and label them semantically, all from visual stimuli. Grouping these observations together forms the basis of a vision system. Figure 1c shows boundaries placed discretizing all observations—the green dots may refer to language abilities, red to vision, purple to search, blue to planning, and yellow to speech.

Once the attributes of intelligent agents have been placed in identifiable groups, one seeks to solve each disparate task. This is the conquer stage. A new manifold now describes the red dots clustered together in the discretization stage (Figure 1c). One that a deep learning system attempts to approximate through the use of a cost function and gradient descent. In Figure 1d the vision manifold is approximated by a deep neural network trained with a cost function.
The discretize and conquer (DAC) methodology has been fruitful for narrow, domain-specific, engineered applications—top-down planning, τάξης. Much less fruitful is DAC’s ability to create general intelligence or any form of emergent phenomena. The DAC methodology shows a complete disregard for the process that generates intelligence—spontaneous order, κόσμος. The field of artificial intelligence has focused on discretized subproblems, all the while ignoring that intelligence is the emergent result of a complex system. It is an unplanned order, resulting not from central cost functions or engineered heuristics, but individual agents (neurons) acting on local signals. To only look at visible characteristics of intelligent agents is to ignore the process that makes these attributes possible.

Artificial intelligence is into its eighth decade as a scientific field. Over this period, the field has seen the invention of a great diversity of algorithms, accomplishing tremendous feats in their time. These algorithms have followed a consistent underlying methodology of discretization. The ubiquity of this approach has produced algorithms that are technically diverse but methodologically homogeneous.

4. A COMPLEX SOLUTION

Intelligence—much like economies—is a result of the interactions within large complex systems. Often we cannot measure the system in a broad sense. The definitions for intelligence are inadequate, and the metrics used to assess it are even worse. As a consequence, the field results to the DAC approach. Abstractions come in the form of direct cost functions that our models optimize. Intelligent behaviors are enumerated, and corresponding cost functions are designed for each one. Vision, speech, audition, navigation, and planning all follow this paradigm. The discretization approach yields models with the appearance of intelligence but without understanding. We must consider what is fundamentally different about the economy of neural circuits in which intelligence can emerge.

Much like the macro level, shortcomings are evident in the micro-level as well. Neuroscience generates enormous amounts of detailed observational data. Where regions are discretized and studied in isolation. Unfortunately, the whole cannot be understood by observing the individual. This principle is true of the economy, of ant colonies, and as well as of brains. We will not be able to understand intelligence by observing single actors. Neurons are individual agents in a local-decentralized system. They compete for resources with their neighbors while cooperating in order to achieve beneficial results for the whole. This concept is perfectly summarized in the words of Friedrich Engels, “For what each individual wills is obstructed by everyone else, and what emerges is something that no one willed.” Engels said this in reference to an economy, however, the application to neuroscience and the emergence of intelligence are equally satisfying.

Just as markets coordinate large groups of actions without any one individual being in control, neuronal-markets do the same. No one neuron, or group of neurons, is in charge of all the others.

In his closing remarks, Hayek states:

... he cannot acquire the full knowledge which would make mastery of the events possible. He will, therefore, have to use what knowledge he can achieve, not to shape the results as the craftsman shapes his handiwork, but rather to cultivate a growth by providing the appropriate environment, in the manner in which the gardener does this for his plants. (Hayek 1974).

What Hayek’s words translate to is a change in how we think about building intelligent systems. In no way can we achieve the human brain’s complex behavior by top-down control—whether from hard-coded heuristics of the past or explicit cost functions of the present. Instead, we must cultivate an environment comprised of decentralized local actors (Ott 2020) where each actor pursues his own self-interest—governed by local rules. It is the incentives provided to each individual, which give rise to appropriate dynamics in which intelligent behavior can emerge.

At the current moment in history, it is clear we are capable of designing solutions to particular problems—vision, speech, audition. Given sufficient training data, a deep network or statistical model performs
remarkably well. What remains unclear is the path toward human-level intelligence, that offers a breadth of diversity across all aspects of life. As intelligence is the result of a complex system, it is unlikely for the field to make real advancements while those writing the programs grasp ever tighter for control.

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If time-as-such is inaccessible to us, then there can be neither a correct measure nor a correct conception of time. And if time for us is experienced time, then we need to shape it and give it a form to make it usable (pp. 126-27). We need to mark it and measure it with time-shaping technologies. *Out of Joint* is a book about this marking, shaping, or construction of time for political purposes. The book is organized around two parts. The first (chapters 1-3) concerns the uses of time-shaping technologies from clocks and calendars all the way to constitutional preambles. It is a historical toolkit of the "marks and measures" (p. 4) of time which serve the legitimation of order. But, sometimes, the politics of time gives birth to disorder which leads us to the second part (chapters 4-5). This contains an analysis of the illusory, nihilistic, and ultimately self-defeating nature of primitivism—the postulation of an absolute ‘time before time’—in chapter 4, and eschatology—the postulation of an absolute ‘time beyond time’—in chapter 5. The book begins slowly, builds its case methodically ranging across a remarkably wide range of empirical evidence, and culminates in a clear-eyed and fiery critique of eschatological time-framing by contemporary radical left thinkers: Giorgio Agamben, Slavoj Žižek, and Alain Badiou. This, it turns out, is not only a book about the ordinary politics of time—the empirical how and why of time construction—but also a book about a certain kind of philosophizing about time.

Positioning herself on the side of progressive liberalism, Lazar comes out against contemporary eschatological and primitivist thought. These are failed efforts to shape time. Lazar shows convincingly how such narratives are impervious to political rationality (p. 147). Indeed, if it is true that we live in time, it follows that we live “between the event-free time of the primitive and of the eschaton” (p. 160). Hence, primitivist and eschatological thought is a manifestation of the delusion of “escape from time” (p. 131). No wonder then that these forms of thought boomerang on the left politics that thinkers like Agamben, Žižek, and Badiou stand for, which is necessarily mired in “event-oriented or chronotic time” (p. 137).

A quick perusal of the history of philosophy, however, shows that this time beyond time has been worth thinking about. By comparison, the Western tradition has consigned to relative obscurity the in-between time—e.g. the *saeclum* of the Christians—in which human beings are suppos-
edly mired in sin, alienation, or distortion of their ‘real’ selves. And, lest we think this a Western prejudice, a glance at Mesopotamian, Babylonian or Egyptian mythology among others shows humans perpetually ascending and descending ladders, staircases, mountains, rivers and trees to higher or lower spheres of existence. As Northrop Frye (1990a, p. 15) put it regarding images of the *axis mundi*: “about the *axis mundi*, we can say two things, first, that it is not there, and second, that it won’t go away.” Human beings, we have been told, ought to look to their untimely nature or end in order to make sense of the messiness of time.

Since the end of that tradition, however, the in-between time of events has been ‘brought back in.’ Nomi Claire Lazar joins this illustrious effort dedicated to the liberation of finitude from the chokehold of eternity. Working empirically, she elides the philosophical symbols of the ancient, medieval, and modern purveyors of a natural or redeemed time and considers what we actually do with our time. Since “time-itself” does not exist (pp. 21-24)—or, if it does, it remains inaccessible—hers is a search not for the meaning of time as a whole, but for meaning within time.

Let me, at this point, articulate an uneasiness while granting Lazar’s point on the politics of time. In her rejection of primitivism and eschatology, Lazar calls for “[harnessing] political order in the service of incremental improvement” (p. 145) instead. But can liberal progressivism be meaningful without asking that pesky, old question ‘where to?’ And does not that question require a vision of the human situation purged of the contingencies of time and space? Paradoxically, by reflecting only on the meaning of historical time, we come to the ahistorical view that the future is equal to the eternal recurrence of the same, incrementally improved, “capitalist [realist]” (Žižek 2011, p. viii) present. But, since this is a book about human capabilities, are we not incapable of heeding Nietzsche’s super-human call to imagine the future as a mere eternal recurrence of the selfsame present?

True, to talk of a time ‘before’ or ‘beyond’ time is to enter the realm of non-sense. But, if human societies historically have repeatedly relied on some vision of “stalled or undulating time” (p. 137), and the eternal recurrence of the same is too heavy a burden for us, is that not a plea for reasonable non-sense?

I. TIME AND POLITICS

The first part of the book investigates the relationship between time and politics. Lazar observes that from constitutional preambles, to calendars and almanacs, politics is concerned with the active shaping of time. Leaders shape time through constitutional preambles; Lazar looks at the Hungarian Basic Law of 2012 and the Chinese constitutions of 1978 and 1982. But they do it also through calendar reform and Lazar focuses on Khubilai Khan’s reform of the Chinese calendar in the thirteenth century. Calendars are singularly effective because they reach particularly deep. By superimposing their time-construction on a pre-existing sense of natural time and penetrating our lives from the minutiae of everyday life to the symbolic frame that harmonizes the human with the natural or cosmic order, they raise a total claim on our time experience. Thus, they are a powerful tool in the overarching aim of time talk: to serve the project of legitimation. The key here is the necessarily restorative dimension of legitimacy; calendars do not merely “place … events in shaped time” (p. 3), but, through their rotary movement, purge the order from decay and misuse (p. 62). In the end, calendars can draw from “both wells” (p. 217) which feed legitimacy: the more mundane politics of performance, or the political capacity to provide predictability and manage risk, and the more cosmological politics of alignment, which aligns the existing order with the natural firmament. The politics of time can potentially be a total politics insofar as it operates along all three dimensions of the political: the verbal or symbolic, the non-discursive or formal, and the evental dimension. The potential totality of its claim means that it can also fail spectacularly by overshooting its mark; the revolutionary French decimal calendar, for example, trampled too haughtily on the pre-existing relationship of time with the divine as embodied in sacred holidays of rest (pp. 67-68).

Lazar grounds this analysis of the marks and measures of time on an analysis of meaning. Meaningful narrative must necessarily refer “beyond itself” (p. 4); for example, to broader temporal patterns, be they cyclical, progressive, declinist or presentist. The shaping of time thus becomes an attempt to intervene in this
larger and deeper reality. Lazar calls this “temporal-rhetorical framing” (p. 5). Time plays this role because it “feels natural” (p. 5)—its “marks and measures” can, for example, be “found,” like the rising and setting of the sun, moon, and stars, the tides, cycles of dry and wet, hot and cold” (p. 4). As such, time technologies have the advantage of receding into the background; their “invisibility” makes them so much more effective (p. 43). If politics is necessarily implicated in the shifting realm of opinions, the uncertainty of persuasion and the flux of becoming, time technologies gesture beyond it, to the unchanging realm of knowledge, legitimation, and being. Hence, next to a politics of time, there is also a philosophy of time; indeed, Lazar’s text is peppered with remarks on the universal features of contingent efforts to construct time (cf. p. 19, p. 63, p. 176). It is this side of the time problem, as we will see, that awaits further development in the book.

Lazar’s discussion of the politics of time in this first part easily ranks among the best and most thorough in the literature. She displays a finely-honed sense for distinguishing kinds, uses, and ends of political actions to control the immense empirical materials on time-shaping techniques. As we move into the second part of the book, however, the nature of these materials changes from political to more philosophical reflections on time; although this change is subtle because the focus remains on political legitimation. Here I want to echo my initial uneasiness to reflect on the philosophical grounds of the analysis. “The great difficulty about time,” Frye (1990b, p. 157) says, “has always been that it is the primary category of experience, the most important and fundamental aspect of life, and yet apparently it does not exist.” This suggests that a direct approach to time framing techniques as if time was unproblematically there to be handled like a bar of soap, misses something of the delicate nature of the subject-matter. To frame time, Lazar rightly says, it must be put into a context, to achieve significiation. Change the “neighboring specifics” (p. 62) of a thing, and you have changed its meaning, e.g., when we see a white coat worn by a grown-up in a hospital we behave very differently than when we see a white coat worn by a child holding a paint brush in a daycare center. But it seems to me that she does not frame her own discussion of time in two respects: first, our conception of time for us, today, is framed neither by alternative conceptions such as the Christian, the Greek, or the pre-Old Testament, nor by other cultural “neighboring specifics.” As a result, although we are told that we, human beings, “are always open to other time shapes” (p. 42), it remains unclear what our—late or post-modern—conception of time is and what it excludes, although the literature on this certainly is not lacking. Secondly, the discussion of “time-itself” stops dead on its tracks as she concludes that it does not exist (pp. 21-24). Indeed, it does not in the sense that a bar of soap does, but that is what makes it appropriate for philosophical speculation. This is not mere academic claptrap; Aristotle (1995, III, p. 6, 206a) for whom time definitely exists as one of the infinities, is very specific about existences made not in but from time. The polis, I think, is one of these (cf. Dragomir, 2017, pp. 63-70); and since these are the source of human subjectivity, they are of capital importance to a political analysis.

The upshot is that time itself is left unframed relative to its ‘neighbors’: the age-old, equally invisible subjects of philosophy like being, truth, nature, consciousness, and so on. As Eric Voegelin (1978) put it in a letter to G. H. Müller of the International Society for the Study of Time, it is precisely when time is reduced to empirical time that it ends up becoming something like an independent entity that we can handle this way or that, to suit our purposes. As a result, the nature of time as that which shapes us tends to drop out of view.

Let me say a bit more about the missing frames on our time. In what way do we stand relative to time? Here, Lazar gets oddly non-committal:

there always exists a multiplicity of times and time senses that people use depending on their aims. Though one conception of time may dominate in a particular context, it need not replace other conceptions useful in other contexts. A conception of time aptly captured by a mechanical clock easily coexists with one oriented toward nature-driven tasks (pp. 147-48).

As a result, the narrative tends to paper over differences between epochs. We read, for example, that risk mitigation is a modern concern (p. 109), but in the very next page that it “is as much premodern as it is mod-
ern” and it will continue in the “postmodern age” (p. 110). Or, that the thesis of the Marxist social historian E. P. Thompson’s that clock time facilitates capitalist domination is undermined by the tracing of public clocks in Europe in the Middle Ages (pp. 148-50). Sure, but it may make a difference if public clocks are marking, say, hours of worship or time in a factory. Be that as it may—and the critique of E. P. Thompson is illuminating indeed—it remains unclear what, if anything, is the distinguishing feature of one age from another. Does it make no difference to the politics of time, for example, that we have moved from hearing the perfect music of the heavenly spheres to seeing an indifferent, colossal, chunky mechanism high in the sky?

Time was famously split by Augustine in the Confessions between a temporal and an eternal dimension. Awkwardly naming the symbol as “flow of presence,” Voegelin (2004, pp. 213-4), who is referred to in this book, defines it as “neither time nor the timeless, but the flow in which time and the timeless meet […]. In this flow of presence, in-between, that is where all the [concerns] of man (sic.) are transacted.” The symbol gathers up from their dispersion the dimensions of external time—past, present and future—within an “indelible present” by way of which human beings participate in transcendence. That is why, I think, Frye says that time “apparently does not exist.” And yet it is in its effects; we feel its pulling, moving power as it invisibly gives shape to our subjectivity. We all feel it insofar as we project ourselves beyond what we are or have now. And human history, for as far back as the evidence reaches, is the story of men and women living beyond their visible physical and temporal circumstances. Time, as we experience it, in this account, is not simply intra-mundane or wholly worldly; it opens up beyond what is, “at every instant and from each moment to the next” (Coetsier 2008, p. 103). That is, not finitude but infinitude could well be the basic experience of time.

Crucially, time shaping is at the heart of Lazar’s phenomenology of time: “the narrative structures enabled by shaped time provide a means of transcendence” (p. 12). Temporal framing, she says in words that recall precisely the ‘flow of presence,’ “creates an intersection of connection between the meaning of an individual’s action at a point in time and a point of time in the lifespan of something more grand and lasting. It is the congruence of a point in our time with a point in political-historical time…” (p. 218). It goes without saying that contrary to an individual’s action, the ‘something more grand and lasting’ is not available in the manner of the bar of soap. By shaping time then we open up to what is beyond us; or, better, we exist in that opening insofar as we are never wholly reducible to the sum of our projects or doings, or wholly determined by our cultures or families.

Hence, time does not correspond to world-time. This doubled-up nature of time, as Giorgio Agamben (2011, p. 248), one of the three anti-heroes of Part II suggests, corresponds by analogy to politics:

life cannot coincide with itself and is divided into a life that we live (vitam quam vivimus, the set of facts and events that define our biography) and a life for which and in which we live (vita qua vivimus, what renders life livable and gives it a meaning and a form).

There is, indeed, an analogy to be drawn between the person’s transcendental relationship to time and the political relationship; that odd, ubiquitous, non-objective, yet ineluctable tension between the individual and the community. Lazar recognizes this in the concluding paragraph of her book. However, in the main text, she withdraws from the power of this insight. Bore deep down enough, according to Lazar, and one will find that all action is negative action; we are shaping time, for example, because “we will one day run out of time” (p. 11). The “inevitability of death” pushes us to action in the futile “desire to transcend death, this one objective fact about time” (Ibid.). Time-shaping then is a form of escapism or self-delusion; a bit like the primitivists and the eschatologists that are castigated in Part II. I am not convinced, but this is not a book about phenomenology. The importance of this phenomenology of radical finitude, it seems to me, is that it closes the door to taking seriously the transcendental dimension of time—how time shapes us—and reduces time politics to a series of immanent techniques of power as that which we shape. This has its obvious strengths—ours, after all, is an age that is incredibly inventive in power techniques—and the
book is at its best when considering time’s power tools. But it comes at a cost, as we will see, when in Part II she moves to the relationship between time, politics, and philosophy.

II. PRIMITIVISM, ESCHATOLOGY, AND TIME

According to a commonly held view, our contemporary experience resembles the manic-depressive who swings widely between the firm belief on inevitable and imminent catastrophe (for climatic, economic, biogenetic reasons, or an unforeseeable cocktail of some such) and euphoria about the coming age of justice (singularity, cognitive neuroscience, third wave civilization). The latter is admittedly harder to come by; but the broader point is that we experience ourselves as approaching, feverishly or with pallid dread, the end-times. And it is to this that the post-secular radical left anti-heroes of Part II respond with a philosophical politics designed to restore meaning to a time out of joint, spinning in circles and going nowhere.¹

In Lazar’s account, primitivism and eschatology are two sides of the same coin. Both are after a temporal beyond respectively prior to or after eventful or historical time. The limits demarcating the borders between these three ‘epochs’ are, of course, apocalyptic; not only can the eschaton be brought about only by “massive force with the capacity to stop time” (p. 165), but an unimaginable event has to occur that jolts human beings from their timeless state into time. Rousseau, whose *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality among Men* is the preeminent primitivist text, attributes it implausibly to natural events—immense, ferocious, and, of course, speechless—which “could have forced them to introduce differences into their ways of living” ([1755] 1997, §4, p. 162). Rather than transforming the species, these “massive applications of violence” (p. 172) actually transmogrify a natural species capable of merely tender, unagitated sentiment into another species altogether that is capable of speech, reason, and culture.

As I see it, the aim of these thought-movements is two-fold. Philosophically, they aim to provide human beings with a standard of judgment on history or time as a whole. Politically, as Lazar emphatically states the point, they aim to delegitimize the existing order—shot through as it is with domination, misrecognition, and injustice—and open up a radically free “space of nondomination” (p. 141) to come. Lazar zeroes in on this second aim and her critique of the political perspective of end-time thinking is, it seems to me, flawless. Using several examples, such as the Crying Indian from the Keep America Beautiful 1971 ad campaign (pp. 133-35), she shows that the generic marks of primitivism necessarily displace actual individuals and groups from our picture of reality. It is Lazar’s great insight to note how primitivism, contrary to appearances, “can exhort, but it cannot act” (p. 138). The figure of the Crying Indian does not speak; it has merely to be there, to be seen, in order to fulfill its task of holding “a mirror of shame” (p. 142). This produces a politics of pure presence not unlike the speechless shouting, applauding and hurrahing of acclamation which serves to express the people as a “constituent power” in the theory of the Nazi legal scholar Carl Schmitt (1927, p. 32; cf. also Arendt 1990, p. 125 on the role of the “hissing or applauding galleries” of the French National Assembly in approving the worthless Constitution of 1791). The politics of sheer presence, as Lazar points out, may well be noisy but it is speechless and therefore anti-political.

Historical evidence has long put the matter of the noble savage capable only of “tender and sweet sentiment” (Rousseau [1755] 1997, §15, p. 165) to rest (e.g. Keeley 1996). Rousseau’s text contains multiple examples of animals in the state of nature, such as beggos, mandrills, pongos and orang-outangs ([1755] 1997, note X.2-6, pp. 205-8) and of human beings who live in a state just above the natural, such as the Hottentots and the Caribs ([1755] 1997, inter alia note III.1 & VI.3, p. 190 & pp. 194-95); there is no hint, however, of natural humans. Lazar is right; pre- and post-history do not exist in the space-time continuum. It follows that primitivist or eschatological politics leads nowhere (p. 168).

If we turn to the philosophical aim, however—without Lazar’s help, for she elides this perspective—we begin to get a different picture. If philosophy is to illumine the human drama, it must provide an overarching meta-history that represents all humans at all times unconditioned by the contingencies of space and time; an account such as that presented by Rousseau in the *Second Discourse*. According to Lazar’s own view (p. 17), this gesture ‘beyond time’ makes the very real human drama meaningful. That is, Rousseau il-
lumines the meaning of time itself rather than meaning within time. True, as Lazar points out, he is unable to adequately answer the question of how human beings can live in a society without domination (p. 162). But that is a political question; its answer lies within time. What Rousseau, however, is able to do is to turn the tables on the Enlightenment prejudice about the progressive nature of the drama without slipping into the anti-Enlightenment camp. He, therefore, initiates that dialectical dissent within the Enlightenment that has given us democratic republicanism, romanticism, idealism, socialism, and, yes, even post-secularism (Maritain 1929, p. 112). That, I would say, is a direct philosophical contribution by primitivist thought to Lazar’s cause of progress.

In the final chapter of the book, “A Dead End?”, Lazar moves against contemporary, radical left, post-secular thought. Eschatological doctrines—from quietest Christian to violent totalitarian ones—all agree on the “inevitability” (p. 167) of eschatological redemption when time ceases to flow, politics is dissolved, and infinite justice reigns. Puritans have pictured it as a New Jerusalem here on earth, Marxists have called it communism, and Alain Finkielkraut (2014, p. 20), in a debate with Alain Badiou, has called it “pure kitsch.” Contrary to the usual focus on past religious and totalitarian eschatological movements, Lazar’s case-study of the post-secular radical left thought is of direct contemporary relevance. Thinkers such as Agamben, Žižek and Badiou have turned to the Apostle Paul for a critique of law or political regimes as such. In Lazar’s account, each in his way aims to supersede law and initiate, in Agamben’s words, “non-stat-al nonjuridical political and human life”; a formless “messianic community” (p. 199) to come. Emerging out of the trauma of the exposure of the grand narratives of the twentieth century left as political failures and theoretical follies, the Pauline left has come to accept important parts of the postmodern critiques of Marxism, positivism and grand narratives as such.

I am not sure that Lazar’s eschatological reconstruction exhausts the issue. Giorgio Agamben (2011, p. 141), for example, clarifies that:

transcendence is never given by itself and separated from the world, as in Gnosis, but is always in relation to immanence. On the other hand, the latter is never really such, since it is always thought as an image or a reflection of the transcendent order.

Hence, the formless “messianic community” can in no way be made actual in the bar of soap sense. However, I would like to accept Lazar’s interpretation, for certainly eschatological politics is present here and especially in Badiou. If we grant that the post-secular, eschatological left just as the religious, eschatological right is politically irrational, then we are obliged to raise the question of its fundamental significance. After all, it seems that we cannot do without it: eschatology has been with us continuously, at the very least since the rise of the monotheistic religions and symbolizations of eternal time have taken place well before that. Even the secularization of the Christian imagination in modernity did not wither away eschatological movements; on the contrary, arguably it may have intensified them (Voegelin 2000). It is thus based on a constant experience of our civilization, which has continuously engendered not only political and religious movements, but also philosophy, architecture, and art. Therefore, we cannot take eschatological thought as merely a gross misunderstanding that is localized in time—e.g. the post-communist, neo-liberal context—and space—the radical left in Western Europe.

If an experience is constant, it is unavoidably philosophical; and if it engenders philosophizing, then we are well-advised to ask: What is that engendering experience for the post-secularist thinkers adumbrated here? It is, I think, the experience of being Zwischen den Zeiten, or Between Past and Future as Hannah Arendt (1968, pp. 3-16) put it. In this in-between phase the techno-instituted future appears unimaginable and, therefore the past, with its Fordist economy, representative institutions, and emancipatory class and identity struggles, is, suddenly, of mere antiquarian interest. They—or rather, we—stand half-mute at the beginning of the new millennium as authority and “all that is solid melts into air” (Marx & Engels 1955 [1848], p. 13) with a political vocabulary constituted in the previous one. Consequently, there is a sense that our political and ethical responses are woefully inadequate to the situation in which we find ourselves. The
dramatic nature of this general experience is intensified by a secondary double whammy peculiar to the post-secular left: firstly, the experience of powerlessness that follows from the failures of the radical left in the twentieth century coupled with the political retreat of the moderate democratic left after the 1990s, and; secondly, the delegitimation of the search for new political forms by the philosophico-political thesis of the end of history.

The thesis is not to be dismissed as a will-o’-the-wisp. Its peculiar strength is drawn from the fact that it operates on two levels simultaneously: it is, at one and the same time, a political symbol and a philosophical idea. Philosophically, the end-time discourse can be found in almost every great philosopher of the last two centuries. It is against it that Badiou (1999, p. 121; 2012), for example, trains his philosophical sights. Politically and at the level of real history as it were, the argument was in operation long before being made famous by Francis Fukuyama; Calvin Coolidge (1926), for example, in a rousing speech dated it back to the US Declaration of Independence.

Working on both levels, the end of history links a shared experience with a powerful symbol thus allowing thinkers to move almost seamlessly between philosophical discourse and political rhetoric. That is, it produces a philosophical politics whose symbolism encourages a continuous process of reinterpretation. The end of history is “not an empirical idea waiting for confirmation but a regulative ideal, an a priori that [structures] the perception of the world for those … in its grip” (Sluga 1993, p. 67); a very wide circle of political leaders, intellectuals and philosophers.

Now, of course, the ramblings of philosophers do not stop the world from spinning or freeze history in its tracks. The upshot is an ever-growing discrepancy between our conceptual political horizon, which seems to be stuck somewhere between 1776, Mill, and Marx, and the reality we face, which keeps changing with enormous problems generated by that very horizon. Hence, as Žižek (2011, p. x) puts it, we are “approaching an apocalyptic zero point” due to structural changes in that very environment—from ecology to social inequality—that we are no longer conceptually able to come to grips with. It is against this felt calamity that the post-secular left is in open rebellion: Žižek (2008, p. 1) against the claim that “the era of big explanations is over, we need ‘weak thought,’ opposed to all foundationalism … in politics too, we should no longer aim at all-explaining systems and global emancipatory projects”; Badiou (2012, p. 2) against the urge that “we must adapt to this change or, in the world as it is, be but a mere shadow of ourselves”; Agamben (2000) against the possibility that life might coincide with a predetermined form thus reducing politics into biopolitics. These experiences and the books which respond to them are elided by Lazar, thus ignoring the first rule of hermeneutics: to begin by viewing the world with the eyes of the subject.

From a political perspective, the post-secular line of reasoning is, I think, as follows: while the vocabulary of really existing democracy is the single legitimate basis for political authority, political order has a symbolic character which real-existing democracy lacks precisely because of its frozen conceptual horizon. In other words, our political speech is unable to gesture beyond itself or, in Lazar’s terms, to become meaningful. The result is the accumulation of musty, old prejudices in all policy areas: from free market dogma and climate change to public discourse and the media. Hence, the post-secular remedy: introduce a gap between existing democracy and democracy simpliciter in order to bring politics (e.g. through struggles for emancipation) and philosophy (e.g. Badiou’s Platonism of the multiple, Agamben’s theo-political texts) back to life. They thus respond to the end of history crisis with something not unlike Jakob Burckhardt’s “theory of storms” (Sluga 1993, p. 43): “Crises … are … to be regarded as genuine signs of vitality. The crisis itself is an expedient of nature, like a fever, and the fanaticisms are signs that there still exist for men (sic.) things they prize more than life and property.”

But, Burckhardt adds, those living through a crisis are in no position to assess its true nature (Sluga 1993, p. 72-3). Post-secular thinkers, it seems to me, do not err in the undertaking of a philosophical reflection which necessarily requires, in Rousseau’s fashion, the positing of a fundamental situation freed from contingencies of space and time. Empirical shaped time has an end; but, from the perspective of the meaning of time itself, that end cannot be the last entry in a finite time series. If that were so, we would not raise the question of time at all but throw our hands up in front of the fatality of time. There is a place for Arcadia
and for Elysium, but that place simply happens to not be in the political, but in philosophical, theological or literary speculations about persons, time, and meaning.

The error then is in the place in which these thinkers introduce the gap in the real; in the political, instead of philosophical nature of the gap that would stage a distance between thinking and politicking, between the thinkers and the wholly legitimate experience of crisis in which they find themselves. This gap requires the disjunction of philosophy from politics. This, to be sure, is no easy task; the two have co-mingled since the Enlightenment with Bacon’s submission of philosophy to the “relief of man’s estate,” through Fichte’s (1968, p. 228) anti-Enlightenment task of philosophy “to save the existence and persistence of the German as such” all the way to Heidegger’s pro-Nazi Rektoratsrede and Sartre’s marrying of philosophizing with the class struggle. It is there in Badiou’s call to organize the young in the banlieue with “political discipline” (Finkielkraut and Badiou 2014, p. 22) to destroy the established order in name of “a positive, universal destiny” (Finkielkraut and Badiou 2014, p. 22); in Žižek’s condemnation of every actual movement of the left that immediately obscures the exact purity at its origin; and, to a lesser extent, in Agamben’s vision of homo sacer where there are rights-bearing individuals. The catalogue of errors is lamentably long indeed. The differentiation between philosophy and politics, however, is also no will-o’-the-wisp; not only has it been there since the originary differentiation between truth and power, but it is already back in Žižek’s (2019) late reversal of Marx’s lapidary thesis: “The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways. The point, however, is to change it.”

NOTES

1. To our time thus belong W. B. Yeats’ (1989, p. 187) verses in The Second Coming: “Turning and turning in the widening gyre/ The falcon cannot hear the falconer;/ Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;/ mere anarchy is loosed upon the world/ The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere/ The ceremony of innocence is drowned;/ The best lack all conviction, while the worst/ Are full of passionate intensity/ Surely some revelation is at hand;/ Surely the Second Coming is at hand...”

2. I draw on Hans Sluga’s analysis of the “crisis” symbol in interwar Germany to decipher the “end of history” symbol.


REFERENCES


As every translator knows, translating is a difficult task. And, as every translator of the writings of Max Weber knows, his are notoriously difficult. Furthermore, there are differing degrees of difficulty in Weber’s writings. His “Politik als Beruf” is difficult to render into English, but not compared to “Wissenschaft als Beruf.” Then there are his difficult methodological writings, but the most difficult of Weber’s works to translate is probably Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Parts of it had been translated in the 1940s by Talcott Parsons while other parts were translated by a group of scholars during the 1960s. The complete English version finally appeared in 1968 in three volumes. Now we have a new version by Keith Tribe in which he acknowledges the difficulty in translating Weber’s work. It is an outstanding translation accompanied by an enlightening introduction and two helpful appendices.

The title is Economy and Society. A New Translation; however, it is not a translation of the entire Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft. Instead, it is a translation of “Part One” of that book and its history helps explain why Tribe chose to translate only this first part. Much of Tribe’s 73 page Introduction is devoted to setting out much of this history. And, Tribe not only discusses the history of Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft, he also provides its context for what would become the series Grundriss der Sozialökonomik. Max Weber had been approached in 1905 by his publisher Paul Siebeck about advice concerning the fifth edition of Gustav Schönberg’s Handbuch der politischen Ökonomie. This work had ballooned from two volumes to five and was too large and rather unfocused. Weber offered a number of suggestions regarding size and scope and Siebeck attempted to use them in discussions with Schönberg. After Schönberg’s death in 1908, Siebeck tried to persuade Weber to become the editor and finally Weber partially relented and agreed to become director of the Handbuch. And, he insisted that it be renamed Grundriss der Sozialökonomik to better reflect his approach to social economic issues. Weber had intended his volume to be the third volume published in the series, but he changed his approach in 1913. Then, the initial months of the war caused interference with his studies and when he was able to return to scholarship, his primary interest had shifted to the economic ethics of the world’s religions. It was only after the war and Weber’s return to teaching in Munich that he began to rework much
of what he had written prior to the war. The book that Marianne published in 1922 with the title *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* was a combination of many old manuscripts and a number of new ones. The old ones are found in pages 181-817 and were given the title "Second Part". In the preface to this second part Marianne noted that those manuscripts were written before the "First Part" and they stemmed mostly from 1911 to 1913 (Weber 1922: III). She gave these the title “Types of community building and societal building” (“Typen der Vergemeinschaftung und Vergesellschaftung”). In contrast, the "First Part" was written later, between 1919 and Weber's death in June 1920. He was able to review the page proofs of the first three chapters; thus, "Part One" is taken to be an account of Weber's final thinking. "Part One" carried the title “Die Wirtschaft und die gesellschaftlichen Ordnungen und Mächte” (“The Economy and the societal Orders and Powers”). It is worth noting that the general editors of the *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe* chose this as the title for the volumes which comprise the contents of "Part Two" of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. It also worth noting that the editors chose to list the five volumes containing “Part Two” as Band 22 whereas the single volume containing “Part One” is Band 23. However, the MWG editors added some confusion by also giving the six volumes the title *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* as well as giving Band 23 the subtitle *Soziologie. Unvollendet 1919-1920*. And, it is not clear what is meant by “sociology” nor by “incomplete.” It is to Tribe’s credit that he tries to sort out this confusion and he does so by providing a brief history of this part of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. Before turning to that, I will focus on his translation. Tribe has been translating from German into English for decades and his proficiency here is obvious. He recognizes the difficulties any translator encounters and he provides a 26 page “Translation Appendix.” In it, he discusses the need to balance the twin demands of clarity and fidelity—does the translator sacrifice allegiance to the text in order to make the author’s ideas more intelligible? Or, does the translator stick to the text even if it means that the author’s ideas are not conveyed clearly? Tribe offers three key terms which are difficult to render into English. To take the first one—"Chance." It means either “opportunity” or “allocation”, but it is only by the careful consideration of the context of the word that the choice is made less difficult (Tribe 2019, pp. 459-460). He then provides discussions for 42 German terms which are resistant to translation. To choose one of the most difficult ones: "Herrschaft." As Tribe notes, this is "a central term in Weber’s vocabulary" (Tribe 2019, p. 471). He further notes that the standard translation stemming from Hans Gerth and C. Wright Mill has been “domination” and Tribe acknowledges that there is some validity in that choice. However, he objects to it on the ground that “domination” suggests force and Weber spoke in terms of legitimacy. Hence, "rule" is Tribe’s preferred choice. Tribe’s argument has much to support it, but my preference has been “authority.” That is because “rule” also has overtones of the threat of force and Weber emphasizes that his three types of “Herrschaft” are legitimate ones. Translating is a difficult task and one that is often unrewarding. Tribe not only does a superb job but he also provides an enlightening and a useful Appendix in which he explains the use of the German term, its historical significance, and why “his” English word is the better, or even the best, choice.

Tribe argues that his new translation was warranted by a number of factors. He mentions the usual complaint that Talcott Parsons’ translations are generally flawed; however, he provides five additional important criticisms. First, in his attempt to smooth over Weber’s work, Parsons ended up “blurring the conceptual sharpness of the conceptual structure.” Second, given his own preference for social structure, Parsons minimized Weber’s focus on individual action. Third, Parsons and many others have regarded Weber as not only a sociologist, but a founding father of sociology (Tribe 2019, p. 34). But Tribe correctly reminds the reader that Weber always “self-identified as a political economist.” (Tribe 2019, p. 6). I would add to Tribe’s third point that too often, scholars concentrate on the “society” aspect of the work rather than the “economy” aspect. This is especially problematic given that “economy” precedes “society” in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*. My point is underscored by Tribe’s fourth criticism and that is that Parsons and many others treat *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* as a “book in its own right”, thus obscuring the fact that it was a part of the series that Weber had been involved in since 1908. Furthermore, Weber and his contributors were intent on exploring the social impact of modern capitalism. Fifth, Parsons eliminates much of the particular layout of Weber’s work; thus, confusing Weber’s approach as well as his emphasis. Tribe illustrates this well by
juxtaposing page 80 from the original 1922 edition with page 250 from Parsons’ translation in *Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (Tribe 2019, pp. 9-10). Tribe’s criticisms are all valid and readers of Weber’s work are advised to keep them in mind.

Max Weber’s “Part One” contains four chapters of varying length and differing degrees of completeness. One of the many strengths of Tribe’s book is that he provides an overview of each of the four chapters. The final chapter is the shortest and the least satisfactory in its worth. Its focus is on “social ranks” ("Stände") and “social classes” ("Klassen") and Tribe offers several reasons for its less than satisfactory value. First, it is only three paragraphs in length and is a fragment. Second, Weber differentiates between social rank and social class but this is more of a classification than it is of a definition. Third, Weber did not integrate this chapter into the frame work of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* which also contributed to its fragmentary character. Fourth, Weber failed to provide an account of society based upon class and standing distinctions; however, Weber did distinguish between the traditional social ranking and the modern class system. And, Tribe suggests that Weber provided the “basic instruments” by which later sociologists could develop such an account of class that would be able to avoid some of the problematic aspect of Marxist class analysis (Tribe 2019, pp. 448-449, 454).

The title to Chapter Three is translated as “Types of Rule” (“Die Typen der Herrschaft”) and is devoted to the three types of legitimate “Rule.” These are “tradition”, “bureaucratic”, and “charismatic.” Tribe suggests that bureaucratic “rule” is the most modern and is mostly prevalent in capitalist societies. He further suggests that its defining feature is “formal rules” but he neglects to say anything about how important Weber believed that these formal rules needed to be applied without bias or favoritism. Tradition is “established tradition” and was widespread throughout history. Tribe suggests that it is based upon “personal power” but Weber makes it clear that it is not personal, except in the sense that the traditional leader is the one who is entrusted in making decisions which are predicated on tradition. Charismatic rule is, as Tribe notes, personal and is based upon “special powers” given to that individual. He is also correct to note that “charismatic rule is inherently unstable” and it becomes “everyday” (Tribe 2019, p. 335-337). While the account of “Herrschaft” in “Part One” is a later version, anyone interested in Weber’s account is advised to read the section “Herrschaft” as well as “Die drei reinen Typen der legitimen Herrschaft” in Band I/22-4 of the *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe.*

Chapter One is on “Basic Sociological Concepts” and while Weber did not claim originality for his sociological concepts, he maintained that he has made them as precise as possible. He also makes it clear that he departs from most sociologists who study groups whereas his concern is with individuals. He further clarifies that he is not interested in the status of groups but is focused on actions performed by individuals. Finally, he clarifies that unlike the dogmatic sciences of law and logic which have objective validity, history and sociology have subjectively valid degrees of intentionality. This does not exclude the possibility of understanding others; Weber insisted that “One need not be Caesar to understand Caesar” and this is made possible by the degree to which one can understand the individual’s sense of meaning (Tribe 2019, pp. 77-79). Tribe emphasizes the importance of “Evidenz” “which carries the meaning of ‘transparency’, ‘obviousness’, or ‘self-evidence’” and he distinguishes between the English legal sense of “evidence” from the German—it is not “Evidenz” but is “Beweismittel” or “means of proof.” Tribe not only explains Weber’s usage but adds the German term (Tribe 2019, pp. 466-467).

Tribe has a number of theses which are intriguingly argued if not always convincing. Here I briefly address two of them. One is his thesis that Weber often mentions a scholar but rather than taking this as an indication of Weber’s intellectual debt, Tribe argues that it is often an indication that Weber has taken some point from another scholar in order to radically revise it or to refute it. Tribe points to several examples and one of these is Ferdinand Tönnies. Tribe argued that Weber and Tönnies disagreed in many respects: Tönnies’ *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* is a philosophical book and nothing like Weber’s analytic writings. He argued further that Tönnies’ thinking is binary rather than complex. Finally, he suggested that Tönnies was lamenting the loss of the traditional, rural, living community whereas Weber was not nostalgic but was also concerned about the capitalistic future (Tribe 2019, pp. 49-52). I think Tribe’s account of Tönnies’ work
does not reflect its complexity and while I agree that there were differences between Weber and Tönnies, Tönnies was one of the rare sociologists for whom Weber had respect. This leads to the second thesis and that is Tribe's attempt to adjust Weber's position in the sociology pantheon. Tribe regards Weber primarily as a political economist and not a sociologist and he reads "Part One" as being predominantly a work in economics and less as a sociological treatise. As I have indicated, I share much of this view and I suspect what prompted Tribe to ascribe to these two theses was Wolfgang Schluchter's attempt to make "Part One" into a treatise on sociology. Schluchter makes his general case that Weber was a sociologist in his 2017 book *Max Webers späte Soziologie* and he offers his particular case in the *Max Weber Gesamtausgabe* of "Part One." In the "Studienausgabe" of Band I/23 Schluchter's account is found in the "Nachwort" (Weber 2014, pp. 221-263). Tribe responds that Wilhelm Hennis and a few others have sought to "detach" Weber from the American sociological tradition (Tribe 2019, pp. 5, 33-34). To discuss the merits of Tribe's account and Schluchter's is beyond the scope of this review essay. While Tribe and Schluchter disagree on many points, they are in agreement about Chapter Two. Tribe and Schluchter agree that Chapter One was largely based upon Weber's "Über einige Kategorien der verstehenden Soziologie" and Chapter Three was mostly a revision of the early part of the "Herrschaftssoziologie." And, Tribe and Schluchter agree that it is unfortunate that Chapter Two has been mostly neglected ("vernachlässigt") (Tribe 2019, p. 38; Weber 2014, p. 267). Yet, this lengthy chapter (60,000) reveals Weber as an economic sociologist.

In the overview to Chapter Two, Tribe notes the continuity with the previous one by emphasizing both intentionality and subjectivity. But he also stresses Weber's notion of calculability which Weber expressly ties to the use of money. Given this, it is unfortunate that Tribe appears to minimize Weber's emphasis on money. Tribe writes that Weber "interpolates two paragraphs on money", that Weber "becomes transfixed by Knapp's monetary casuistic", and "Many pages are devoted to an increasingly arcane treatment of monetary forms, including a subsection directly addressed to Knapp's book." (Tribe 2019, pp. 139-141). The book was Georg Friedrich Knapp's *Staatliche Theorie des Geldes* (1905) and Weber claimed that it "brilliantly fulfilled its formal demands, but for material issues related to money, it is incomplete; see below" (Tribe 2019, p. 163). Weber noted that it was "warmly received by the Austrians and that nothing showed that Knapp was wrong." Weber regarded *Staatliche Theorie des Geldes* to be a "magnificent book" and he intended to build upon it (Tribe 2019, p. 309). That is why Knapp is either explicitly mentioned or implicitly referenced throughout much of Chapter Two and that is why Weber devoted an entire section to Knapp's state theory of money (Tribe 2019, pp. 309-318). It may not be too much of an oversimplification to suggest that where Marx saw the main feature of capitalism in the exploitation of labor, Weber regarded money as the key feature because it allowed for rational calculability, it promoted exchanges over distances, and was a durable standard of exchange.

Tribe's overall estimation of Weber's economic sociology seems to be somewhat mixed. On the one hand, he documents how Weber's published portion moves from a rather clear and focused account in Chapter One through the increasing less satisfactory Chapters Two and Three to a fragment of Chapter Four. And, he complains that Weber begins a chapter with a clear focus on exposition but ends up mostly with classifications. Thus, Tribe's complaints about Weber's form and focus are mostly justified. However, Tribe is also convinced that "Part One" of *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* is crucial for understanding Weber's late thinking. Moreover, he believes that Chapter Two demonstratively rejects the traditional opinion that the Austrian School of Economics defeated the German Historical School in the "Methodenstreit" and he is convinced that Weber showed that "a synthesis was always possible" (Tribe 2019, p. 142). If I am reading Tribe correctly, he faults Weber for the lack of clarity but praises him for his advancement of economic sociology. If my reading is correct, then I concur with Tribe's assessments.

The criticisms which I have offered are mostly matters of interpretation or are minor ones, and they all pale in comparison with the tremendous worth of Tribe's efforts. He wrote that he intended to provide a volume that was not only readable but understandable, which is a rather large challenge. In the Preface he writes: 'In presenting this new translation of that work, I hope to make Max Weber's real intellectual achievements more accessible" (Tribe 2019, p. ix). Tribe has more than managed to achieve his goal: his In-
troduction and editorial aids only further the value of his translation and they show that Weber was more
than a sociologist—he was an economic sociologist. As an indication of how much I recognize Tribe’s im-
pressive scholarly expertise and his admirable ability to translate, I can only hope that someone can per-
suade him to complete the difficult task and translate the remainder of Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft.

NOTES

1. Weber referred to Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft as a “fine book” (Tribe 2019). Tribe’s minimizing of Tönnies’ in-
fluence may have led him to overlook the importance of Tönnies’ Die Sitte for Weber’s understanding of the ethi-
cal value of “Sitte.”

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Studienausgabe. I/23.

Ferenc Hörcher, a Hungarian political philosopher, and historian of political thought, has launched a case for conservatism in politics based on the virtue of prudence. His book consists of two main parts, the first a historical survey of the most important thinkers who dealt with prudence from Aristotle through the twentieth century. The second part of the book is more philosophical, and addresses why prudence is a vital concern, given the finite nature of human life.

Hörcher begins by examining ancient and Christian traditions of prudence. First up is Aristotle’s concept of *phronesis*, which might be translated as “practical wisdom.” *Phronesis* is distinct from theoretical knowledge, in that the latter is independent of particular circumstances, while the former consists precisely in how to deal with particularities. In this respect, Hörcher sees Aristotle as advancing from the work of his teacher, Plato, who did not distinguish between theoretical smarts and practical know-how.

Hörcher makes a very important point in his discussion of Aristotle: for the philosopher, what is required for a healthy polity “is not convincing people by argument, but rather through training and experience” (p. 17). If Aristotle is correct, it would certainly explain the interminability of modern political and ethical arguments: for a people not trained in a practice of virtue, arguments in its favor will likely carry little weight. Contemporary philosopher Claes Ryn has emphasized this point in his work on the importance of the will and the imagination.

Moving forward a few centuries, Cicero is understood by Hörcher as offering a conservative defense of the importance of attention to tradition in the face of the radical changes which the Roman Republic was undergoing during his life. However, for Cicero, tradition was not a static idol to be worshipped: “tradition... needs to be updated to meet the demands of the day” (p. 23). Thus, Cicero can be seen as offering an early answer to contemporary critics of conservatism, who contend that it is inflexible in responding to new circumstances.

Augustine is treated only briefly. Hörcher’s main contention is that, due to Augustine’s view of the will, activities in “the city of man” are inevitably self-centered. This keeps Augustine’s politics grounded in realism, even as he stresses the importance of Christian virtue in social life. Somewhat
curiously, a good bit of the section on Augustine is actually devoted to Aquinas, who also gets his own section, however, without another thinker butting in.

Hörcher notes the well recognized influence of Aristotle on Aquinas: human beings are naturally sociable creatures, who could not survive without the shelter of a community. Furthermore, we are “creatures of habit,” either good habit or bad habit, and the formation of those habits, while somewhat a matter of individual effort, are also shaped by our families, as well as the legal regime in which we live. The main novelty in Aquinas's political thought, for our author, is his adaptation of Aristotle's ideas to the context of the Medieval kingdom, where, unlike in the Greek polis, the substance that binds the cives of the polity together is not face-to-face contact, but loyalty to the monarch. Nevertheless, that loyalty is not unconditional: the polity should be based on a constitutional core that blocks the monarch who is a potential tyrant from achieving such an aim. But even more important is that the monarch himself, before ascending to the throne, should have received training in political virtue that renders him personally averse to tyrannical aspirations.

Moving on to the Renaissance, Hörcher’s discussion of Machiavelli, Guicciardini and Botero focuses on a critical turning point in political thought, something noted by Pocock is in magisterial work The Machiavellian Moment. Machiavelli seems to divorce practically oriented political action altogether from the sphere of classical/Christian morality. As Hörcher sees things, Guicciardini offers “the proper answer to Machiavelli’s challenge from within the Christian Aristotelian framework” (p. 42).

Concluding his historical survey, Hörcher turns to “late modern prudencia.” Here he sees Gadamer, Geuss, Ricoeur, and Bernard Williams as leading examples of thinkers who contemplated practical action in recent times.

Hörcher next analyzes the key difficulties which face the exercise of prudence in politics, which he calls “agency-constraint,” “time-constraint,” and “knowledge-constraint.”

The challenge in the first case, agency constraint, is to overcome our ego-centered view and realize that the common good is also our own good. Here, Hörcher cites both Kant’s concept of asocial sociability and the Catholic view of the person as possible means of overcoming this constraint. Discussing the Catholic view, he writes:

That is made possible by the fact that the Catholic philosophy of personhood preserves and reconciles the valuable elements of both the individualist and the communal perspective... There is a mutual interdependence between personhood and sociability (p. 90).

Grappling with the second constraint, time, means overcoming our present-centered view and extending our perspective, as far as possible, into the past and future.

Hörcher quotes the German Thomist Joseph Pieper: “Realization of the good presupposes that our actions are appropriate to the real situation that is to the concrete realities which formed the... environment... of a concrete human action...” (p. 96).

Hörcher agrees with Aquinas that “emphasis on the variety of human means does not concern the end of the action, which is fixed, but only suggest that to achieve it, different circumstances demand different strategies” (p. 99). It is like reaching the peak of a mountain: all may have the goal of arriving there, but each will have to use different means depending upon how they are equipped, where they are on the mountain, and their innate abilities.

And the third constraint of the trio, knowledge, is notable because we never possess the complete knowledge of our circumstances that would be needed to act with certainty of success. In this section the main figures are Michael Polanyi, Michael Oakeshott, and F. A. Hayek. Their theories, showing how knowledge can be embedded in customs and practices, indicate the importance of traditions for coping with the knowledge constraint: traditional practices are usually not, contrary to modern prejudice, superstitious atavisms best replaced by “scientific” methods: instead, they are the accumulated wisdom of a culture.
There is a small problem in Hörcher’s discussion of Oakeshott. Hörcher writes, “To be sure, [for Oakeshott] every practical human activity... requires first of all technical knowledge” (p. 114). This may be merely loose writing, but at least it is misleading. It is not the case that, in Oakeshott’s view, an activity “first of all” requires a technique. Humans did not invent a technique for walking, or hunting, or tool-making, which they then used as a guide to begin that activity. Rather, our technical knowledge is parasitic on an existing practice, from which, over time, we glean various technical rules for how to proceed.

So what are we to make of these considerations? First of all, the prudent individual cannot rely primarily on abstract thought for guidance in political decision making: even more important are the inculcation of the virtues, and the proper character, in the individual. Without those foundations in place, a person’s reason serve whatever (non-virtuous) ends that person happens to have embraced.

In discussing the prudent individual, Hörcher quotes a passage particularly relevant to the current debates over the fate of liberalism: “A successful republic cannot be simply a system of procedures for adjusting interests, employing institutional means devoid of any moral orientation” (Hankins, quoted on p. 127).

At the level of the community, we can best grapple with the constraints of our finite existence by acknowledging the beneficial influence of our traditions and our political culture. In the chapter discussing the community’s resources, Hörcher makes an important distinction between Ciceroan prudence and Machiavellian prudence: Cicero’s prudence was always set in the context of the religious and moral traditions of the Roman people, while for Machiavelli, prudence had degraded into mere “cunning,” that allowed one to achieve whatever political outcome one desired.

In summing up, Hörcher claims that although two approaches to dealing with the problem of agency constraint, Kantian “asocial sociability” and Catholic social teaching, are built on different foundations, “the result is the same” (p. 163). I wonder if this is really so; Hörcher’s own discussion of the two earlier in this book makes me doubt that it is.

The book ends on a puzzling note: the last sentence is:

Abstracting a political philosophy from actual historical cases will always remain somewhat lifeless and thus risky; therefore, the conservative politics of prudence has to confine itself and its findings to what has been written so far and, for the moment, give up digging any deeper or further (p. 166).

I must admit I do not grasp the connection between the first part of that sentence and the “therefore,” nor what it has to do with the rest of the book.

A minor quibble I have is with the editors: while Hörcher is not a native English speaker, the editors at Bloomsbury presumably are, and they could have done a better job rendering the English more idiomatic. For example, one of the chapter titles, “How to Find the Proper Action in Politics,” surely would have been more idiomatic as, “How to Act Properly in Politics.”

But that is a small flaw in an otherwise excellent work. This book is a valuable addition to the political theory literature. By pulling together millenia of discussion on prudence and practical action, and showing how the threads of this discussion weave a coherent tapestry, Hörcher makes it clear that prudence is indeed a virtue in political practice, and not an unprincipled compromise with a fallen world. In our time of ideological extremes, such a demonstration takes on extra importance.
American Public Media runs a weekly radio show called the “Dinner Party Download” that bills itself as “a fast and funny hour of culture, food and conversation.” With tongue in cheek, it is “The show that helps you win your next dinner party.” The quip is humorous because we do not ordinarily see dinner parties as things at which we win or lose. We have dinner parties and they may be successful or unsuccessful, fun or not fun, but they are not, usually, competitions. And they are not competitions precisely because they are seen as “parties” in which conversations takes place.

Plenty of things can go on in a conversation: stories related, questions asked and answered, declarations made, arguments ignited, jokes told, information conveyed—all more or less skilfully performed by the participants. But still, conversations are not quite like having an argument, or being informed of something, or hearing an announcement or merely listening to a storyteller. Whatever they are, conversations are more than or are different from these other activities. Few have understood this more clearly than Michael Oakeshott. As he wrote in “The Voice of Conversation in the Education of Mankind,” conversation is

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\text{to be distinguished absolutely from enquiry, from argument, from debate and from a symposium under the direction of a symposiarch. Its tone is colloquial, but it is not a colloquy. Where others discern a quarry to be pursued and brought to bay, the man of conversation participates in the chase merely for the pleasure of the ride: for him it is a hunt without a victim (2004, p. 187).}
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In a metaphor that always expressed something to be admired in his eyes, Oakeshott noted that “Conversation...springs from the movement of present minds disposed to intellectual adventure.” (2004, p. 189). Moreover,

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\text{Its enemies are the tedious, pertinacious talkers, resisting the flow without being able to give it a fresh direction; those who, like a worn gramophone record, distract the company by the endless repetition of what may have begun by being an observation but, on the third time round, becomes the indecent revelation of an empty mind; the noisy, quarrelsome, the}
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disputatious, the thrusters, the monopolists and the informers who carry books in their pockets and half-remembered quotations in their heads (Ibid.).

Conversation is very much a social activity but Oakeshott also sees it as a manner of thinking. As such, it is a temperament, requiring a kind of self-discipline, self-doubt, and self-acceptance (2004, p. 193). It is “an exercise in politeness and in tactical humility” (2004, pp. 193-194). It “civilizes” any activity and through Plato’s dialectic, it civilized philosophy. Philosophy, or a kind of philosophy, concludes not with a triumph or an agreement to disagree, “but when all simultaneously discover that each has been right all the time” (2004, p. 194).

Conversation is a mode of social interaction, a style of thinking, a manner of conducting philosophy and it is a way to civilize politics. More strongly, Oakeshott asserts that it is the “gist and meaning of democracy” (Ibid.). On his account, democracy as a conversation is not rule by the people or a culture of equality, but a politics in which single-mindedness, abstract intelligence, and dogmatic reforms are dissolved. It is politics that is humble in its aspiration, cognizant of human imperfections, and undertaken by individuals who are neither rulers nor subjects and neither gods nor heroes (2004, p. 196).

In perhaps his most famous use of the idea of conversation, Oakeshott deploys it as modus vivendi for different modes of understanding. In “The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind” (1991), poets, scientists, historians and practical types are able to interact without seeking to inform, debate, or defeat one another. These participants may differ without disagreeing (1991, p. 489). Conversation is way to imagine a plurality of ways of understanding human experience existing, not in separate silos, but in an on-going respectful and lively form of interaction. Conversation suggests a “meeting-place” where these idioms could “talk to” one another without informing, persuading, or refuting one another. The idea of the conversation of mankind captures how practitioners, historians, scientists, and poets could relate to what the other was doing. In a conversation, there is no hierarchy, no arbiter, no door-keeper, no profit and no prize. The participants “acknowledge each other and enjoy an oblique relationship which neither requires nor forecasts their being assimilated to one another” (Oakeshott 1991, p. 490). He goes on to soften some of these conditions by noting,

Of course there is argument and inquiry and information, but where these are profitable they are to be recognized as passages in this conversation, and perhaps they are not the most captivating of the passages. It is the ability to participate in this conversation, and not the ability to reason cogently, to make discoveries about the world, or to contrive a better world, which distinguishes the human being from the animal and the civilized man from the barbarian (Oakeshott 1991, p. 490).

All of this is by way of introduction to Luke Philip Plotica’s wonderful book. As his title suggests, Plotica applies Oakeshott’s notion of conversation to Oakeshott himself. More specifically, he places Oakeshott in conversation with Ludwig Wittgenstein (chapter one), Alasdair MacIntyre, Edward Shils, and Charles Taylor (Chapter two), Michel Foucault, Isaiah Berlin, and Hannah Arendt (Chapter three), and Chantal Mouffe and Stanley Cavell (chapter four). The topics of these conversations range from the character of language and human agency (chapter one) to the relationship of individuality to tradition (chapter two), to the emergence, conditions and character of the state (chapter three), to the meaning and role of deliberation and democracy (chapter four). Although Oakeshott is the primary voice in these discussions, Plotica provides a wide-ranging discussion of a number of issues central to modern political thought.

Plotica’s intention behind his approach is driven, in part, by his observation that although there has now emerged a wealth of insightful scholarship since Oakeshott’s death, it has also “tended toward the repetition and modification of a rather narrow range of themes and has thus left much of the richness, scope, and implications of Oakeshott’s work unexhausted” (2015, p. 4). One is tempted to say that much of the scholarship concerning Oakeshott has focused on trying to figure out what he was trying to say. Plotica’s
project is to discern whether what Oakeshott says can be put in conversation with late twentieth century political thought.

Plotica values the idea of conversation for a number of reasons. First and foremost, conversation is important because it was important to Oakeshott. Thinking about his work conversationally is not an imposition or a procrustean enterprise. Second, it is a way for Plotica to get some leverage on Oakeshott’s positions that are overly rigid. Along these lines, Plotica sees conversation as a way to soften the demand for ideological labels that may unfairly box-in Oakeshott as merely a liberal, or as a conservative, or as a libertarian, or an authoritarian, etc. or as inconsistently advocating one set of ideas over another. In a conversation, Oakeshott need not be saying the same thing over and over again (unless one wants to read him as a boor). Third, Plotica sees conversation as opening up Oakeshott to contemporary debates. Here, Plotica distinguishes his work from the work of Wendell John Coates who reads Oakeshott as being in conversation across the centuries with such thinkers as Montaigne, Augustine, Hegel, Hobbes, Constant, Rousseau and Hume. In contrast, Plotica goes beyond references made implicitly and explicitly by Oakeshott and places Oakeshott in conversation “with significant figures of twentieth-century philosophy and political theory with whose ideas he was almost certainly familiar, but whose work he rarely if ever undertook to discuss” (Plotica 2015, p. 9).

In one of his metaphors of the experience of being in a conversation, Oakeshott writes, “Up go the balls, the plates, the hats, the whole miscellany of the juggler’s box; up and over, in and out spinning and leaping. Nobody asks where they have come from, or on what authority they have appeared; no one is interested in what happens to them when they are once more put away. It is enough that they are moving before us in the air, graceful and enchanting” (2004, p. 187). If the topic of the conversation in chapter one is the relationship between agency and social context, Wittgenstein sets spinning the plate of “language games” and Oakeshott throws in his notion of “practices.” Plotica juggles these ideas with the notion of “critical agency,” wondering whether social context must preclude the possibility of agents calling into question social conventions and norms that have constituted their self-understandings. Well, it’s not quite hats, balls and plates, but neither are there proofs and demonstrations that critical agency is possible within a convention-saturated understanding of the human condition. Rather, the first chapter conveys the sense that when Wittgenstein and Oakeshott are placed side by side one can hear more clearly their endorsement of individuality and the capacity of agency to be enabled by social convention and to be able to critically assess those conventions. Along the way we also arrive at a refutation of a particularly conservative reading of their work in which agency is exhaustively determined by social structure.

When the conversation turns to tradition in chapter two, we find that there are plenty of purveyors of tradition who wish to convince us that we must choose between a view of the world in which tradition constitutes who we are and a view of the world composed of disconnected, disenchanted, atomized individuals. Many readers of Oakeshott have heard him as endorsing the first option or what Plotica calls “the constitutive view.” But, Plotica continues, the constitutive view only makes sense if we ignore what Oakeshott says about the role of contingency. When placed in conversation with Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor, Oakeshott’s theme of contingency can be seen more clearly as spinning in a direction that threads between an unencumbered self and a self that is exhausted by tradition.

The idea of contingency takes Plotica into, among other things, a discussion of a narrative style of understanding and freedom. As part of a style of narrative, the idea of contingency enables Oakeshott to portray the relationships between events, actions and agents as something other than causal or teleological. This view is important for Oakeshott’s concept of historical understanding, but it is also connected to an intersubjectively constituted world that must always be interpreted and understood. In that world, an agent is free “insofar as she enacts herself in response to a world about which she has fashioned an understanding, employing practices that had to be learned and can be used in virtue of being understood” (2015, p. 62).
Freedom on this philosophical (as opposed to political) account is less connected to acting in the absence of external obstacles and more a condition of acting. Freedom is linked to an intelligent (as opposed to caused or behaviorally conditioned) response to the world. The free agent here is not a Prometheus but a Proteus, “a character distinguished from all others on account of his multiplicity and of his endless power of self-transformation” (Oakeshott quoted in Plotica 2015, p. 63). Individuality for Oakeshott becomes the embrace of the Protean possibilities: “Her individuality consists in her self-aware exploration of the proposition that she is what in doing she becomes” (2015, p. 65). There are those who despair over their individuality (the individual manqué) and those who rage against it (the anti-individuals). Throughout this discussion Plotica superbly and concisely considers the relationship between contingency, freedom and Oakeshott’s conception of individuality.

I pause, however, over a couple of lines that Plotica writes towards the end of chapter two (a pause that was prompted by a point that Andrew Norris makes in a paper titled “Michael Oakeshott and the Postulates of Individuality”). The view of persons as mere emanations of networks of tradition, discourse or power-relations is one that Oakeshott regarded “as subhuman, yet possible and often all too real” (2015, p. 66). Plotica goes on to note that only the self-enacted individual who embraces her self-enacted individuality “bears a fully human face” (Ibid.). To formulate my response to these comments in an Oakeshottian tone, I think that this phrasing is unfortunate. It is one thing not to live up to one’s potential. It is another to call the results of that failure subhuman. This objection also raises the deeper question of whether the individual manqué and the anti-individual can really be what Oakeshott says they are. Is it possible to intelligently escape freedom if freedom is understood as an exhibition of intelligence?

The conversation picks up again in chapter three’s discussion of the modern state. In partnership with Michel Foucault, Isaiah Berlin and Hannah Arendt, the chapter offers a very lively discussion of the consequences of the historical consolidation of the state’s powers (Foucault and Oakeshott), the importance of pluralism to a civil society (Berlin and Oakeshott) and the character of the public space (Arendt and Oakeshott). Although this is not the happy form of a conversation in which “all simultaneously discover that each has been right all the time,” it is the strongest chapter of the book, offering a compelling example of how Oakeshott’s work addresses themes that are central to other thinkers even though he never explicitly engaged them. In addition, Plotica uses these interlocutors to enrich and criticize Oakeshott’s views. Plotica writes, “When read alongside the work of Foucault, Berlin, and Arendt, Oakeshott’s political thought breaches the ideological fencing within with it is too commonly presented” (2015, p. 110). Chapter three alone is worth the price of the book.

The final substantive chapter considers Oakeshott’s place in democratic theory. While there is no sustained discussion of democracy in his work, Oakeshott was clearly critical of much that went under the heading of democracy. By partnering him with Chantelle Mouffe and Stanley Cavell, Plotica argues that Oakeshott would have rejected the deliberative democratic call for consensus and he would have challenged their epistemological presumption that political and moral questions are truth-apt. Oakeshott is more liable to see disagreement as indicative of a wider form of pluralism as opposed to some form of misunderstanding. What Plotica adds to this discussion is the idea that a conversational ethos can inspire democracy. Democratic talk, of course, is not the whole of democratic politics. Decisions must still be made—something that Oakeshott understood. Yet, Plotica argues, “when animated by a conversational ethos, democratic politics can accept the necessity of temporary breaks in the conversation and of momentary impositions of tentative priorities, without converting arrest into foreclose or hegemony into exclusion” (2015, p. 132).

I will conclude with two observations, one that may be tangentially related to Plotica’s argument and a second that is connected to whether the practice of political theory is indeed a conversation. My first observation begins with the admission that the pluralist impulse behind Oakeshott’s idea of conversation is one that I find enormously attractive. Despite its attractions, however, there is a passage in “The Conversation of Mankind” essay, where I wince. Oakeshott writes, “A girl, in order to escape a conclusion, may utter what appears to be an outrageously irrelevant remark, but what in fact she is doing is turning an argument she finds tiresome into a conversation she is more at home in (1991, p. 489). “Fiddle-dee-dee” one wants to...
say. Yes, of course, Oakeshott was a gentleman of his times. And yes, his example is meant to show that at least the “the girl” knows something that the boorish Ashleys and Rhetts with their arguments may not. But still, the implication is that her home is in the conversation where she can make unruly remarks and not in the logical world of argument from whose conclusions she seeks refuge. The passage only works because these gender roles are taken as given. There is something up here, not in the “gotcha!” sense of dismissing what Oakeshott says about conversation because of an unfortunate illustration, but in the sense that questions of who can speak about what may help illuminate, enrich and complicate his notion of conversation. Do these gendered presumptions disturb his notion of individuality? Is Oakeshott’s understanding of conversation feminine? Perhaps Plotica also thinks that something is up insofar as he takes care to use feminine pronouns to illustrate his examples.

My final question is connected to the practice of political theory. Plotica’s employment of the idea of conversation as a way to make sense of Oakeshott’s contribution to contemporary discussions is original and significant. The writing is very clear and the text is wonderfully concise. That Oakeshott saw philosophy as being civilized by conversation in the Platonic dialogues indicates how close Plotica may be to how Oakeshott, in his more philosophical moments, wished to be understood. I wonder, however, whether the Socratic dialectic is as conversational as Oakeshott suggests. Perhaps in some dialogues, but in others Plato’s Socrates wants to win an argument and literally stun his interlocutors. Regardless of whether Oakeshott got Socrates right, one would have a difficult time making the case that political theory, as an actual practice, is conversational. Plenty of political theorists want to win the dinner party. In a way that Oakeshott suggests, that’s too bad. But as difficult as it might be to imagine a polity adopting an ethos of conversation, it is just as difficult to imagine our colleagues doing the same.

REFERENCES


The Mercatus Center at George Mason University has re-issued an outstanding collection of essays delivered at a seminar held at George Mason University honoring one of its finest professors, Don Lavoie. His depth of academic interests, and his character as a dedicated student and as a teacher show throughout the collection. Lavoie was the David H. and Charles G. Koch Chair of Economics at George Mason University from 1981 until his premature death at the age of fifty in 2001. His academic career began at the dawning of the Austrian revival at New York University in the late 1970s, and his legacy continues with the work of his students. Anyone interested in Austrian Economics would benefit from reading this collection.

The collection includes an introduction by its editor, Jack High, who along with Richard Fink, Karen Vaughn, and Don Lavoie developed the Market Process Center at George Mason. In 1980, the Center was renamed the Mercatus Center. High provides an excellent overview of Lavoie’s key ideas concerning the socialist calculation debate, hermeneutics, information technology, and cultural analysis. Each of these topics is expanded with the contributions from his students.

Lavoie was one of Israel Kirzner’s doctoral students at New York University. Ludwig Lachmann and Fritz Machlup were also teaching there at the time, and Machlup, a former student of Ludwig von Mises, served on Lavoie’s dissertation committee. Machlup told Kirzner that he believed Lavoie’s thesis was ‘one of the best he had ever seen’ (Kirzner 2018, p. 731). The thesis was completed in 1981 and published by Cambridge University Press in 1985 as *Rivalry and Central Planning: The Socialist Calculation Debate Reconsidered*. This collection includes an extensive bibliography of his writings from 1975 onward.

Kirzner completed his dissertation with Ludwig von Mises in 1957 at New York University, and his thesis was published as *The Economic Point of View* in 1960, with Mises writing the foreword. Kirzner contributes the first chapter to the collection. In the chapter, Kirzner describes Lavoie’s contribution to understanding the socialist calculation debate by expanding Mises’ argument to include the necessity for freedom of entrepreneurial vision for the market process mechanism to function properly.

The contributions from Lavoie’s students form the heart of the collection. Peter Boettke and David Prychitko, two of
Lavoie’s students at New York University, contribute a chapter on Lavoie’s research into the study of comparative economic systems. Their initial research interests derived from the socialist calculation debate and Lavoie’s treatment in *Rivalry and Social Planning*. They also discovered that what they found first in the book remained evident to them throughout his career: his ‘erudition and radicalism’. They argue that the book challenged the perceptions of key political economists on centrally planned economies, and by doing so, Lavoie redirected the discussion from the mainstream to the ideas of Mises and Hayek.

Emily Chamlee-Wright’s chapter develops the idea of cultural economy based on the parallel concept of traditional political economy. Lavoie recognized that existing cultural norms had a significant impact on economic exchange as those of the existing political environment. The chapter describes how he developed that area of inquiry. To begin, for Lavoie ‘culture is the language in which past events are interpreted, future circumstances are anticipated, and plans for action are formulated’. His intuition was to view culture simultaneously as discourse and as a dynamic framework of thought. He understood that economic decisions are embedded in these existing cultural norms. Chamlee-Wright describes the hermeneutic interpretive turn Lavoie utilized to apply this intuition to the culturally embedded entrepreneur. This interpretive and creative process creates in the entrepreneur a fuller understanding of the market process, as opposed to the merely calculative understanding one achieves by only looking at data.

Virgil Henry Storr, contributes an insider’s view into Lavoie’s unique teaching method used in one of his courses. Lavoie used what was then cutting-edge hypertextual research and collaborative writing tools to teach his course. He wanted his students to understand the intersubjective effect created by different readers interacting with the same document hypertextually. As they read the document and append it with their comments, the document becomes a collaborative discussion among the students.

Storr’s chapter is a nice pairing with the Bill Tulloh and Mark S. Miller contribution. The authors describe how the computer-nerdish Lavoie recognized that a seemingly unrelated software architecture design concept may be applicable to understanding economic concepts. The programming concept is called an abstraction boundary. They are used to streamline and add robustness to open-source and object-oriented program construction. Basically, an abstraction boundary is a separately written subroutine that performs a function and returns a value to the program and onward to the user. Because an abstraction boundary is modular, it is portable to other programs as well. The routine’s details and the calculations it performs are transparent to the user. How it does what it does is irrelevant; the only relevance is the result obtained by its use. It functions as a hidden portable knowledge repository. Lavoie’s intuition was that its modularity provides a potential framework for understanding the division of knowledge in society, and how market participants coordinate transactions. He also analogized their functionality to Lachmann’s secondary institutions that function to provide informational points of orientation that assist in assessing the plans of human actors. Here, the institution—performing functions behind the scenes, as with the programmatic abstraction boundary—provides ‘reusable solutions’ to common coordination problems.

The other significant chapters are those describing Lavoie’s interest in hermeneutics. His interest began while a student at New York University with two of his professors, Machlup and Lachmann, who were familiar with the works of Max Weber, Wilhelm Dilthey, and the historical roots of the verstehen tradition. Lachmann also visited and presented lectures at the Center at George Mason several times in the 1980s. G. B. Madison’s informative chapter puts Lavoie’s interpretive turn into its deeper historical perspective. He places the origin in the weekly Mises seminars in Vienna where Alfred Schutz—an expert on Husserl and Weber—regularly attended. Schutz was a student of Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich von Weiser, the latter being F. A. Hayek’s teacher as well. Madison argues that with Lavoie’s incorporation of hermeneutic analysis, Lavoie achieved—to use a Hayekian term—a synergetic collaboration among the two research programs.

Wayne Froman’s chapter continues this theme from Madison and is a very good account of Lavoie’s belief that Austrian Economics and philosophical hermeneutics can work together as research programs toward achieving a fuller understanding of the market process. Froman highlights Lavoie’s application of the method to the essential role of entrepreneurial knowledge discovery. By applying a hermeneutic analysis, the knowledge problem becomes less about discovery of what is hidden and more about what was previous-
ly never considered as relevant. The interpretative dynamic increases the universe of the relevant knowable information for the entrepreneur.

Lavoie explains the process more fully in the appendix to the collection. Lavoie's hermeneutical approach expands the notion of alertness of the Kirznerian entrepreneur, who sees the world directly through prices, to one where the entrepreneur also analyses what is being said by other market participants through their written and spoken words. This theoretically provides a fuller picture of existing market opportunities and thus tends toward the achievement of more beneficial coordination among market participants. For example, the reports, speeches, communications with workers, contracts, and other non-price information may provide the entrepreneur relevant information that can be useful to coordinate more profitable transactions. Through hermeneutic interpretation, knowledge is produced and not simply discovered.

Deirdre McCloskey's chapter is a touching homage to a colleague, describing his humbleness and bravery to persist in pursuing interesting cross-disciplinary research topics and methods to better understand human experience and exchange. To put her contribution in context, it should be noted that her attempts to similarly broaden the discussion within economics with the methods of hermeneutics and the power of rhetoric were met with the same harsh disapproval that Lavoie received—by the same faction (McCloskey 2018).

A phrase that Peter Boettke sometimes uses in his presentations is that Austrian Economics is 'an invitation to inquiry'. Perhaps it is a phrase from his teacher, Don Lavoie, if not directly spoken, then shown in spirit. As highlighted by the contributors, Lavoie's breadth and depth of research in so many areas reveal an inquiring mind, forever striving to understand, and applying what he had learned along the way to explain certain aspects of Austrian Economics. He achieved his goals with an inquisitive spirit—not by having a fixed preconception where it would ultimately lead him, and not by being concerned that his freely chosen path lacked rigid adherence to the methodological proper lane.

As I have already hinted, while Lavoie personified this inviting inquisitive spirit, his severest critics were seldom as gracious or humble. In a review of a collection devoted to the positive nature and impact of a scholar, perhaps it is best to leave negative things unsaid. However, to place Lavoie and this collection into a fuller context, the negative reception of his efforts ought to be briefly mentioned. Several contributors sprinkled breadcrumbs in that direction, but, allow me.

The harshest critic—though he was not the only one—of the work Lavoie and the others were doing at the Market Process Center was Mises' self-proclaimed protector, Murray Rothbard. As the guard on the Misesian tower, he did not take kindly to perceived threats to the kingdom. When Rothbard looked down from his tower through his black horn-rimmed glasses and saw hermeneutics approaching, he anticipated an outright invasion that needed to be squashed, by any means necessary. His utter contempt for the participants in the project at George Mason is rather shocking to this reviewer—though maybe it is laughed off as just 'Rothbard being Rothbard' by his legion of aficionados. I wouldn’t know. But to absurdly compare the hermeneutics project to being perhaps as bad as Marxism and Nazism seems rather unhinged: '[O]ur Market Process hermeneuticians should be warned that there may be worse things in this world than mathematics or even positivism... [T]hat in addition to Nazism or Marxism, one of these things may be hermeneutics' (Rothbard 1989).

Knowing this and seeing Lavoie’s perseverance, despite the severe opprobrium from presumed colleagues—ironically, all with whom he shared a deep appreciation of Mises'—tells us a lot about Lavoie’s character and fortitude, as he continued to better understand the human condition and to apply what he had learned to Austrian Economics. It says something about his students as well. They ought to be proud to be among those who stood with him and learned directly from him. One hopes it also makes the collection more appealing and valuable to its readers who never had the opportunity. Such a spirit is needed in any field of inquiry, and especially so for such a complex and dynamic area of study as Austrian Economics.

To conclude, I want to share my favorite quote from the collection because it epitomizes what this review intends to communicate. It is the conclusion of Virgil Storr’s chapter: ‘Mises, whom Lavoie loved, has
described a pioneer, a creative genius, as someone who "clears a road through land hitherto inaccessible". Lavoie was also a pioneer. It is now our task to catch up.'

NOTES

1. For Vaughn’s comments regarding Lavoie and the program, see Vaughn (1994, pp. 127-33).
2. Peter Boettke (2020, p. 32) recalls seeing Lavoie holding a copy of Human Action in front of a classroom of undergraduates and telling them it was 'the greatest book ever written in economics'.

REFERENCES

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