



ESSAYS ON
PHILOSOPHY
AND CULTURE

John
Xavier

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*His homely Northern breast and brain
Grow to some Southern tree,
And strange eyed constellations reign
His stars eternally*

THOMAS HARDY

INTRODUCTION

This is the second volume of essays I've published and it's the result of an equal lack of forethought as the first. Basically, finding myself with enough random pieces of writing that'd accumulated over the past few years, it now seemed like a good idea to bundle them into a book and release them all together. Of course, due to the absence of planning, this meant that the selection I had to choose from wasn't entirely, shall we say, congruent. Essays on Art and Literature in fact fared better in this regard and the present volume seems to consist of much more tonal dissonance. Not only is there the tension between the philosophical essays (Those dealing with political theory, economics, metaphysics, etc) and the cultural essays (Those consisting of book reviews and film articles) but there's also significant differences in the rhetorical styles and, even, some of the arguments advanced. Which could naturally cause some confusion.

I'm not going to try too hard to justify what I've done here but, out of basic respect for those reading this, a few words of explanation seemed appropriate. For example, the difference in language and surface ideology between *Anti Civitas* and *The Rationalization of Pricing* merits some remarks. With the latter, I was writing with the intention of addressing people more mainstream in their beliefs and so I used phrases like "lawful society" which, as someone with strongly anarchist sympathies, I wouldn't regard with the same uncritical belief that my usage here might suggest. When talking to people across an ideological divide though, it's always better to meet them where they are and my hopes here were to speak in such a manner as to give the widest number of people the chance to connect with the core ideas of my arguments. In *Anti Civitas* conversely I made no such effort to be accommodating and, in fact, I made use of the opposite rhetorical tact of flagrant bellicosity. Because different people respond better to different modes of expression. And, while I may not use an elaborate system of pseudonyms as

Kierkegaard did, I certainly appreciate the essence of his approach. The example of Zhaozhou too provides another instance where one can use different means to the same end in separate contexts and, I quote:

[Zhaozhou] replied, "My etiquette is not your etiquette. When a superior class of man comes, I deal with him from the [high] seat; when a middle grade of man comes, I get down to deal with him; and for dealing with men of the lowest standing, I step outside the temple gate..."

So I trust that those who want to understand me here will be satisfied with that. As for the merits of mixing jaunty book reviews and (A few) densely abstract essays, that's another matter. I could try and argue that the lighter writings are there to offer something like a mental palate cleansing but, seeing as how all the essays are arranged alphabetically rather than organized in a manner which would better facilitate this, that's clearly not the case. Instead, my excuse is simply that I don't feel any guilt for doing so. Either my writing is good or it isn't and, if it's good, I feel no shame in juxtaposing work that has strong variances. A collection of essays is not like a symphony where the totality of the thing has to have some coherence. I expect any serious reader to not require pandering here. That said, I did decide that each essay should have a short description in the index so you can refer to these if you're so inclined.

Lastly, I'd just like to add that some of these essays were published several years ago in a volume titled "State of Evil: A Demand for Revolution, With Other Essays." The major component of that was the eponymously mentioned manifesto, a manifesto I wrote but not a text which was truly a manifesto in the important sense since it was a manifesto for ulterior purposes despite expressing some genuine convictions. That's a bit cryptic maybe but the subtext here isn't relevant. I only mention it to explain why State of Evil isn't hosted on any of my publishing platforms; the reason being because, aside from some minor construction issues which I'd like to amend, my personal convictions have changed and the message of State of Evil doesn't reflect my current outlook. I think I'd like to republish it eventually one day, if only for its modest significance to posterity, but that's not something I'm too preoccupied with. I have enough to distract me as it is and if I get around to it, I get around to it.

John Xavier, March 28 2022

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A TALE OF TWO DESTINIES

The Triumph of Charles Dickens

Not much is expected from most of us. Small ambitions, to the contrary, are often applauded. And nowhere is that more true than in the field of professional writing. Unless someone already belongs to the privileged ranks of the literati, any aspiration they have to write a great novel, or worse, a collection of poetry, is liable to be dismissed as an unseemly effort at self-aggrandizement. Because those who already belong to the cultural aristocracy aren't eager to welcome new members. Each one infringes on their sense of being exceptional and often they care far more for that than they do for the civilization they're supposedly custodians of. Once in a while though, one of the plebs, some uncouth spawn of the working class, will try their hand at letters and far outshine their establishment betters.

Charles Dickens was one of these. His father, an unremarkable clerk, was even sentenced to debtor's prison at one point, during which a twelve year old Charles was compelled to work ten-hour days in a boot-blackening warehouse in order to support his struggling family. Not the most auspicious start to a literary career. The spirit of the young man however would eventually find itself victorious over these adversities; incorporating his early frustrations into material for his writing and, through this, speaking to the common folk getting ground up in a newly industrialized world. Dickens' powers of observation led to his most formidable pair of gifts; those being talents for mimicry and sympathetic portraiture. Of the former, this is illustrated in his ability to create lifelike characters even when he was infusing them with exaggerated traits and in his dexterity while reproducing the various dialects of people from all classes and regions. But it might have been the latter which was his greatest talent. What made him so popular with contemporary audiences, and what continues to make his work resonate with us today, was his keen sense of the hardships that ordinary human beings suffer. Because he himself shared in this. He knew what it was like to be ruined and crushed.

If anything testifies to Dickens' unique relationship with his readers, it's that many among the illiterate and impoverished masses would go and pay out of their own purses to have his stories read to them. A rather affecting realization when you think about it. Victorian London was a place of pervasive miseries yet there were those who belonged to the worst sufferers that were willing to part with what little they had in order to hear an excerpt from one of his novels. It's reminiscent of the story of the Widow's Mite in the New Testament; of a humble old woman's honest yearning for divine grace and her sense of duty to provide an offering for this even when she had so little for herself. It speaks to a tragic desperation, to the hope of a saving power intervening even as it remains beyond comprehension. The novels of Charles Dickens orbit this same star, communicating directly to the souls of the oppressed; said books acknowledged their predicaments and often provided them the happy endings which they knew they themselves would ultimately be deprived. Never is any reader more likely to be overcome with raw emotion than when encountering a fictional tale that captures some repressed misfortune which they have first-hand experience of. To witness your own circumstances in another's story as if it were a mirror is a most extraordinary moment of communion with an author. It is to feel a sense of deep kinship with a stranger.

This also bears significance to the disenchantment with literature that exists for many today. Writers who load their work with irony and exclusionary content have contributed to a sense of alienation among large segments of the population. It seems that the gulf is widening between writing as art and writing as a form of entertainment. In the mythopoetic past, storytelling was fundamentally concerned with addressing the whole community and creating a shared sense of values but in our own increasingly self-segregating era of culture where every genre can have a thousand niches with minimal discourse between them, the idea of populist fiction or a general literary commons are beginning to seem strained and quaint. The novels of Dickens though, with their enduring charm, present a counterargument to this trend. The earnestness and pathos he infuses many of his characters with, while still a source of complaint among some critics, offers a kind of antidote to a world poisoned with cynicism; an invigorating gulp of fresh air briefly breaking up the contemporary smog of neuroses and nihilism. As much as Dickens dealt with the imperfections of humanity, his fiction isn't animated with a sense of defeat towards these. To him, humanity is not a hopeless thing doomed to imprison itself in the walls of its own failings. He believes in aspiration. He lived it.

From beginnings most ordinary can come those who perform wonders. Dickens' idol, Shakespeare, was also one of these. A writer like himself who absorbed all of humanity with an expansive eye and strove above all to be faithful in his depiction of it. Even their villains can be sympathetic. Especially their villains. Who is more wronged in *The Merchant of Venice* than Shylock? And while we may find the Murdstones and Uriah Heep from *David Copperfield* entirely detestable, the anguish of Rosa Dartle presents an example of someone whose deep wounding is still sorrowful even when they're lashing out at their most vicious. Because contrary to what has been claimed by certain eminent writers with blue-blooded backgrounds, Dickens characters do have psychological depth and nuance, which anyone who's experienced predicaments similar enough to theirs will immediately recognize. But only the torn can understand the torn.

If we were to compare Charles Dickens to a ship, we would not say that his launch was christened with a bottle of champagne. Had he not believed in his own talents and used his hardships for impetus and purpose, his unusual name would not today be immortalized. Yet it is because he did. Through adamant will, he rose up from a degraded condition and claimed a place for himself in the pantheon of world literature. More importantly he left us a collection of works that not only fulfills the desire for excitement and romance, it instructs us in the essence of the human without resorting to didacticism. His is a magnificent accomplishment. He had two paths before him in his youth, one that led to the successes we are familiar with, and another, which would have resulted in ordinary anonymity. And this second path followed beside the harder one he took for a long time; urging him in the pinnacles of struggle to surrender to more modest aims. Thankfully he didn't, leaving us the memory of a man whose life and writings we can all learn from. By any measure, he exceeded even the greatest expectations.

ANTI CIVITAS

An Essay Against Urbanization

1. *“Do you huddle close together because you love each other?”* – T. S. Eliot

Cities are a veil over the earth. As much as humanity may be governed today by a municipal perspective, as much as our most powerful and developed nations exist primarily through the interlinkage of vast metropolises, these metastasizing urban sprawls are just a flimsy veneer covering a far more profound reality. Nature itself.

So, the real truth about the cities we’ve built, the colossal monuments to artifice we take such great pride in, is that they are complexes of manufactured illusions... and therefore our naïve willingness to invest ourselves in them is ultimately an insidious self-deception, compounding itself, generation by generation.

There’s a huge difference of course between living among illusions and actually inhabiting illusions. The latter comes from a kind of basic spiritual surrender, a resignation towards brute perceptual stimuli. In the case of cities, this takes many forms. Obviously there’s all the various kinds of advertising that pervades them; an almost unregulated barrage of mental pollution invading every possible niche in the ecosystems of contemporary culture. But besides this, there’s also the, often subconscious, ideology that infuses their architecture and local landmarks.

Because, regardless of what kind of environment we choose to live in, it will always be pervaded with meaning and symbolism in some form or another. Only instead of the myths and religions of previous eras, now the driving paradigms of humanity are converging on a distilled version of the purest and inanest consumption. Soon nothing may have any significance beyond its significance as mere capital. Nothing as such would be sacred. And when nothing is sacred, there’s nothing left which can truly inhibit our destructive impulses. Even where those same impulses are threatening to destroy us as well.

If the primary existential peril facing humanity could be summarized in a single phrase, it might be put like this: **What should concern us most is the death of the infinite within the human heart and its replacement with that which is only finite.** Because finitude is always a terminus and, devotion to it, in any form, is a path that inevitably leads towards extinction.

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2. *“Now this problem of the adjustment of man to his natural resources, and the problem of how such things as industrialization and urbanization can be accepted without destroying the traditional values of a civilization and corrupting the inner vitality of its life – these things are not only the problems of America; they are the problems of men everywhere.”* – George F. Kennan

We have done much to drown out Nature’s voices, to surround ourselves with mirrors that reflect only our own appetites and, given the inevitable unhealthy recursions this results in, is it any wonder that psychosis and modern urbanization have risen together in tandem?

In fact, if we wanted to perform a diagnostic case study of this sickness, a single city would suffice. And probably no city more clearly illustrates the pathology in question than the city of Vancouver, British Columbia. One reason being that Vancouver, so recently established, lacks those historical influences which resist the vacillations of the zeitgeist. Vancouver, being free of such anchors, is readily carried away with contemporary trends, defining itself in fact primarily by whatever ephemera it’s currently absorbed in rather than any solid commitment to, say, a past. And many cities are unable to adapt themselves in quite this manner; Paris for example, or Istanbul. Because they have identities firmly rooted in their own history, histories they can never shed themselves of.

But maybe that sounds like a strength on Vancouver’s part; adaptation after all is the basis of survival. When the prevailing zeitgeist itself is so toxic though, the kind of permeability which defines Vancouver just means it will be that much more susceptible to the toxins our world is being bombarded with. Vancouver as such is devoid of any kind of cultural immune system and so incubates sociological diseases at an accelerated speed. It is the perfect host then for the contemporary malaise of hyper-capitalism and serves as a proverbial ‘canary-in-a-coal-mine’ for the effects of globalization; which itself is the universalizing of urbanized ideology.

Another thing that makes Vancouver globally significant in a litmus test kind of way, is its unique position in the geopolitical landscape. For one, it holds a strategically important location between the two dominate forces in the world economy: the United States of America and the People's Republic of China. Obviously Canada has much closer political ties to the former than it does the latter but as the political tectonics of the 21ST century shift with the rise of emerging economies, the balance of power for influence over Vancouver will flow accordingly. And only those blinded by the aberrations of their own domestic propaganda will expect anything like a steadfast alliance to endure here once realpolitik renders this impractical. As Spengler famously remarked, “... *he who pays the piper calls the tune.*”

But to truly understand Vancouver, one must first understand Canada because Vancouver is the most Canadian of cities; Canadian however in the sense that it is devoid of any strong sense of identity. What defines Canada most is the absence of self-actualization; in its place then, vague abstractions and trivialities of all sorts are inserted to appease the imported cultural subgroups which compose its political demography. Canada is a country that never underwent a revolution and so never achieved what was necessary to assume an authentic sense of national purpose. Instead, Canada was reluctantly granted independence as a political compromise between a dying British Empire and an ascendant American one; a deflationary concession which is naturally reflected in the society of the English speaking parts of the country. One must appreciate that Canada, from its inception, was less a nation than a meeting point between other nations. Now that nation states are in decline though, it is more and more becoming a favorite meeting place between transnational corporations. And Vancouver is the gateway flung wide.

At one time there was a political ideal that held sway. It was called a republic or *res publica* – the public thing. It was a belief in the goal of creating a commonwealth, something that would belong to all who held citizenship. What the philosophers and statesmen who devised this concept in ancient times didn't realize though is that they were inventing something contrary to its own ambition. A gloss that only added a layer of falsity over the truth. Because Nature is already a commonwealth, a thing perfectly shared by all equally, and what the idea of the republic introduced rather was a deviant simulacra of this natural ideal. What we have here then is a shared project of deep self-deception, one that continues today even as its origins have long been obscure to its own practitioners. The seed of an eternal lie.

Again, we can turn to Vancouver to see this corruption at work. City hall specifically. Whatever romantic notions one might entertain about the idea of public institutions working for the public good, the City of Vancouver provides ample evidence of an opposing reality; an entity that, while having custody over the public space, actively schemes against the public interest on various fronts. It can be something as small but calculated as closing a popular thoroughfare in a wealthy neighborhood to appease local residents, or it can be as vast and thoughtless as compromising public data infrastructure by allowing private technology companies to dictate the evolution of this. Because the truth about Vancouver, like every other city and nation state, is that, at heart, it's just a corporation driven primarily by a collective appetite for money, power, etc. The City of Vancouver even sells its own merchandise, promoting itself as one more brand among the sewage of other brands, its logo the logo of a cause no greater than any other. And what of the public servants who work for the city? Are the majority of them dedicating themselves to a lifetime of public service? Or is working for the city just a rung on their resume leading hopefully to something better in the private sector?

Rome conversely was once regarded by its own inhabitants as a sacred place; which is why they sacrificed and died for it. When the fraud of this began to unravel in the late imperial era however, their commitment ceased and so did the illusion of their republic. Vancouver meanwhile has never been regarded by its residents in so lofty a manner but its sense of identity is likewise sustained by an organized machinery of self-congratulatory myths. Living there, one is constantly reminded of how great a place it is in the local media – a message that can't help but undermine its own credibility the more it's repeated. And only a moment's reflection is needed to reveal the deep insecurity present in this, the insecurity of those who are devoid of actual conviction; a tranquility of dilettantes then sustained only by the absence of any martyrs. A peace unsurprisingly corrosive with dishonesty.

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3. *"Cities are the abyss of the human species."* – Jean Jacques Rousseau

There's something metaphorically significant in the fact that the light generated by our metropolises conceals the stars in the night sky from us. It's symbolic of our divorce from Nature. Urbanization and technology have combined to push Nature to the outer fringes of the average person's experiences, and the result of this has been to encourage our own narcissistic and insular tendencies. Humanity is more

preoccupied with itself today than it ever has been and one of the main reasons why is because we've unwittingly created a world for ourselves which reinforces those appetites. In our past, and the more so the further back we go, Nature provided an external correction to human dishonesty. Nature humbled us with its grandeur and punished our vanities. What humanity has gradually done through technological prowess however is to build a cocoon for itself that shields it from the greater reality beyond; like a hermetically-sealed vault intended to protect those safeguarded inside that inadvertently cuts off their oxygen supply and leads them to slow inexplicable suffocation.

Nowadays, many will agree with the basic premise that urban environments have unhealthy qualities while disagreeing with the broader condemnation of cities as a whole. They will point to public parks and excursions to the countryside and things of that kind as examples of ways in which human beings compensate for the loss of natural experiences with artificial substitutes. A garden is not a wilderness though and visiting places that human magnanimity has allowed to retain a portion of its original character is not an equivalent trade off. The only way to truly experience Nature is to be surrounded by it and unable to readily escape. Because Nature is not just its agreeable aspects but rather the totality of these along with all its difficulties and dangers. Warm sunshine and a mild refreshing wind mean something entirely different to someone who is at the mercy of their environment than they do to someone who can retreat to perfect comfort when confronted with the least hardship. Which is not to say that human beings are doomed to inauthenticity unless they return to a primitive state of existence but rather that they are doomed to inauthenticity if they never learn to appreciate the difference here. The danger of living in cities does not lie in any blatant form of injury, those after all are the easiest to address, but rather how successful cities are at creating the illusion of meeting all our needs and the cumulative transformation this produces in society over time. What cities do, through their mechanization and introversion of human life, is to imperceptibly drain the vitality out of humanity. Like taps driven into the social body, quietly bleeding it to death.

The architect Louis Henry Sullivan, innovator of skyscrapers and modernist design, promoted the idea that "*form follows function.*" A sound general inference since the same principle applies in biology where convergent evolution produces similar phenotypes due to environmental pressures. If we consider cities in this light however, what kinds of forms do they compare to? Well, is there anything they

resemble more than a parasitic growth? Spreading their industrial tendrils in a vampiric fashion across the face of the earth, cities siphon the life forces of the environment around them, transmuting this into raw multiplicative power and toxic pollution. What cities do on a fundamental level then is take vast amounts of vibrant organic being that's struggled into existence through eons of terrestrial fruition, the totality of our world's biomes and ecosystems, and reduce it all to dull inorganic materials. Cities are nothing less than death-conversion machines, disguised in this by the superficial human life that decorates them. As such, the human component in cities is equivalent to the human component in slaughterhouses; a form of life in grotesque opposition to its own foundations, a creative being blindly enslaved by the lures of annihilation.

The fundamental disparity here results in a predictable instability. Human beings, participating in a profoundly nihilistic process, cannot help but be altered by this, however hidden from them and esoteric it may be. Adopting the values necessary to succeed in the hyper-capitalist world they've created, incentivized to shed themselves of all moral limitations in the pursuit of profit for the corporate regimes they serve, people invariably begin to erode their own humanity; in each of their own persons individually through the routinization of degenerative behaviour and then also in their communities through the sociological effects of their actions. All of which has its origin in the environments these people are reared in: in cities themselves. Each generation being corrupted right from birth.

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4. *"The accumulation of capital and misery go hand in hand, concentrated in space."* – David Harvey

There is a reformist hope among many architects and urban planners to make cities *"more livable"* and *"sustainable"* but, when their proposals are all laid out, it becomes clear that the solutions being offered amount to little more than superficial adjustments. Utilizing public space in different ways can certainly produce many tangible benefits but it does nothing to confront the underlying imperatives that drive every municipality's creation and expansion. Cities are, above all, the expression of global economic and political forces in confluence, and so, regardless of any alterations we make to them in particular detail, those overriding macroscopic influences will just reassert themselves over time. Zoning diversification, social housing initiatives, public amenities programs and so on can never change the underlying logic that defines the purpose of a city. And what

cities are instruments for projecting power. They are administrative, logistical, and military centers established to assert dominion over a surrounding area. Cities are inherently imperialistic then, boosting tendencies of authoritarianism through their most basic and essential characteristics.

In order to have a metropolis after all you have to have enormous industry. And with industrialization at that level you will inevitably create political and vocational hierarchies. So what a city unavoidably produces, and ever more so with increasing scale, are relationships of exploitation. The bonds of human kinship are stretched beyond their capacity and echelons of alienated and hostile social classes form. This obviously can't be corrected by just implementing mutualistic principles in urban design since these will necessarily be undermined by more imperative economic realities; **rather the city itself must be done away with if our egalitarian aspirations are to achieve any genuine progress.** What must occur is a retracing of the history of cities, civic life, and civilization itself, since these are all bundled together in their origins, to their earliest inception; even to the oldest city states of ancient Sumer. There the fundamental principles which animate urbanization can be found and their pathological disposition addressed.

What cities are, most basically, is a means for centralizing authority. A single marketplace, a single fortification, in short a monopoly, through which power can be projected with the utmost efficiency. Consider the following scenario: if you were a warlord surveying a land of free people, widely dispersed with farms and small communities, and you wished to conquer them, what means would you use to do so? Defeating them in battle by itself wouldn't be enough. No, because you still have the problem of exerting direct control. What you need then is a base of operations established in the most strategically advantageous location and that's precisely what cities are. To this day, cities exist primarily as a means to overpower large groups of people. It's not a coincidence for example that during the industrial revolution, much of the rural population in England was driven into cities; the ruling class suddenly required a labor force for large scale manufacturing and so they coerced the masses into compliance. Apologist historians tend to refer to this migration as a voluntary movement of people seeking new opportunities but we have only to consider how this has been achieved elsewhere to realize with certainty that the orthodox historical narrative is false here. When European states set up mining operations in North East Africa, they encountered a similar need for a conscripted labor force. And how did they achieve this? By creating artificial taxes

and then requiring payment in a currency they themselves controlled, thereby pressganging the local populations into mining work. But of course that's how it's always been done. Today though revisionist historians campaign against this basic truth across numerous fronts of history; they would have us believe now for example that Egyptian farmers willfully hauled two ton blocks of stone across hundreds of miles of the desert and did so not out of fear of Pharaoh's wrath. But, knowing the real world, does that sound remotely plausible?

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5. *"They spoke of such novelties as 'civilization', when this was really only a feature of their slavery."* – Tacitus

The very existence of cities obviously requires an ideology and culture that supports urbanization. Here cosmopolitanism and other forms of urban self-aggrandizement are instrumental in creating a population which regards living in a city as a desirable privilege. Those of us raised in metropolises certainly know the bias this instills from a young age against rural life; whenever a new student would arrive at school from a less developed area, this was something initially held against them. What this helps illuminate is the fact that values themselves are both essential to urbanization *and* a thing manufactured primarily in urban locations; cities are the main production centers for any given zeitgeist and, through an array of media and policy institutions, they inevitably disseminate narratives that reinforce their own interests. Living in a city then is not a neutral experience; those who take for granted the assumptions that come from being surrounded by urban influences are effectively succumbing to multi-generational propaganda. But, being steeped in those dogmas from birth, they will more often than not defend these even where doing so aligns them against their own real interests.

Judged on a moral and spiritual level, we can confidently say that no one truly benefits from their own greed since, regardless of the material benefits this might reap with drive and ambition, those will be far outweighed by the mutilations that someone embracing greed inflicts on their own mind and personality. Feeding our crudest appetites, we always diminish ourselves, abandoning our more profound potential. Even on the most basic psychological level, greed must produce unhappiness because it creates an appetite for material gratification that has no upper boundary and therefore no means to ever be truly satisfied. All of which, the city magnifies. Urbanization, as an independent principle and teleology, pushes for a maximization of growth, for exponential growth even, and so, in the culmination

of urbanity, in the neoliberal metropolises of a hyper-capitalist era, it fully nurtures the avarice of its individual vectors; that is to say, the hijacked agency of those human beings who blindly conform to its behavioural funnels. The city, so to speak, parasitizes humanity to feed the city's own abstraction.

What this shows is that, at the top of the capitalist hierarchy, the ultimate enemy is not a cabal of billionaires or some shadow architect, but rather a lifeless momentum which has subjugated even those highest in the system of oppression. The wealthy and powerful, for all their inexcusable depravity, are still just symptoms of a greater evil, an immaterial power that propagates itself through pure fear and temptation. Our war is not really *with things of the flesh but against powers and principalities*. And so, even though we know we must confront an opposition of human adversaries, we should bear in mind that they are marionettes of a metaphysical enemy which cannot be overcome through material means. The way to defeat the carcinoma of urbanity is not to raze individual cities, even if all of them could be eliminated this way still the impulse to create cities would remain, but to destroy the idea of cities as a desirable element of human life. Which, in the end, amounts to exposing them for what they are. Pitfalls.

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6. *“Justice being taken away then, what are kingdoms but great robberies? For what are robberies themselves but little kingdoms? The mob itself is made of men; it is ruled by the authority of a prince, it is knit together by the pact of a confederacy; the loot is divided by the law agreed on. If, by the admittance of forsaken men, this evil increases to such a degree it holds places, fixes abodes, takes possession of cities, and subdues peoples, it assumes more obviously the name of a kingdom, because the reality is now manifestly conferred on it, not by the removal of any particular covetousness, but by the addition of impunity.”* – Augustine of Hippo

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For thousands of years cities have been a prevailing influence in human history. Nations of course take great pride in their metropolitan areas, so much so that it seems almost impossible to imagine a future in which that attitude could be reversed. But if we look back in time we see that humanity has proven itself capable of extraordinary transformation; how long were slavery and the subordination of women after all part of the ethos of the majority? Cities likewise are no more intrinsic to human society than any of our other long-entrenched mistakes. When enough people awaken to the faults of cities, they will cease to exist.

And just as you can't give life to an automaton through a design based on mechanical gears, so too you will never create a genuinely free society from a network of innately authoritarian population hubs. That much is obvious. Since there are many individuals and profit models contingent on the urban status quo, and then multitudes more who are so thoroughly indoctrinated that the truth will glance right off the armor of their unreasonable ignorance, the critic of urbanity shouldn't expect any truth in their contentions to automatically make inroads. Even where people have no clear sense of their own attachments, still they will shiver with an instinctive unease at the slightest mention of any change which could infringe on these, and their reactions will be as unscrupulously vicious as they are obscene and idiotic. How often after all does a thief, when confronted in the very act, respond with indignation and moral outrage at having their conduct challenged? You can predict then that those who are personally invested in systems of urbanization will defend these to the last ounce of their own hoarded stupidity.

Because cities began in crime, albeit while also being the original sources of laws sanctifying their own perpetuation of moral outrages, so too they can only ever be sustained through criminality. And not the sort of criminality that has sympathetic justifications either. Rather the worst sort. Systematic and brutal criminality of the most monstrously inhuman kind. The icy calculated machinations of those who can weigh the suffering of others with actuarial brutality but who also don't even factor any of that in to their equations unless it provokes some manner of direct opposition. The architects and captains of cities don't simply grow fat on the blood of their fellow human beings, they bathe in it as one of their proudest luxuries. They delight in recounting their own ruthlessness with predatory elation; being able to brag about laying off whole divisions of a company for instance is the sort of anecdote they covet most because these highlight their own power. As Bertrand Russell wisely remarked, *"Since power over human beings is shown in making them do what they would rather not do, the man who is actuated by the love of power is more apt to inflict pain than to permit pleasure. If you ask your boss for leave of absence from the office on some legitimate occasion, his love of power will derive more satisfaction from refusal than consent. If you require a building permit, the petty official concerned will obviously get more pleasure from saying No than from saying Yes. It is this sort of thing which makes the love of power such a dangerous motive."* And cities are where the sadistic urge was first forged. They demanded it.

But why is this necessarily so? Because even in a cesspool polluted through and through, there'll be an overlying film where the worst accumulates; scum truly rises to the top. The city itself, in its own internal structure, guarantees that this must be the case, providing the manner of matrix in which human depravity can ultimately be perfected. The pressures of any metropolis are the kind that mobilize evil, rewarding cruel pragmatism with wealth and accolades because this attitude serves the inherently imperialistic logic of urbanization. If you look at how a real estate market will predictably function for example, certainly the principle of "*Buy low and sell high*" should be at the core of it. But consider now what that entails. It means that buyers are incentivized to devalue the property of others, even without any legitimate basis, and exploit whatever weaknesses they can to acquire these at unfair valuations. As such, the depths of human antagonism are unleashed and promoted merely by arbitrary rules of economy; analogous to how a board game could sabotage the relationships of those who play it by encouraging treachery and cruelty. In fact, there's evidence that real estate provides one of the main drives for class warfare. The wealthy, being the principle investors in real estate, have an interest naturally in acquiring cheap property. To that end they can use their ample political influence to concentrate crime and stimulate poverty in unsuspecting working class neighborhoods, thereby creating downward pressures in the local market that then allow them to swoop in and acquire large parcels of land and buildings. Then, when the time is right, they can clean up and gentrify those neighborhoods, guaranteeing themselves extremely lucrative returns. Again, if we want a specific example of this we can turn to the city of Vancouver and examine the history of its downtown eastside to see confirmation of that.

Those of us who live in cities can easily be taken in by their numerous shallow charms. What inevitably happens though if you examine any city is that the underworld of political and economic realities which reigns from behind its façade comes into view and the pervasive ugliness at the heart of things is made out to be unmistakable. No one who isn't psychotic after all can see how sausage is made in a factory and enjoy sausage more as a result of this; so too understanding how a city actually functions will never produce an increase in admiration for that city. But the question is: Are we brave enough to be truthful here or are we so pathetic we need to protect the measly comfort provided by an outright fraud? If it's the latter, we are certainly on the path to murdering truth completely.

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7. *“God made the country and man made the town.”* – William Cowper

Obviously it doesn't do any good to condemn cities if there's no viable alternative to them and here it's not sufficient to just outline a valid hypothetical substitute; rather what is needed is a general direction and methodology which can promote and guide the transition from an urbanized society to a deurbanized one. Here the key principle is decentralization. As much as cities are predicated on the urge to centralize power, so too their replacement must equally arise out of power's diffusion. The goal then has to be more than simply planning future communities with lower densification but instead to reform the basic political and economic structures of humanity so that centralized planning is superseded by local initiative. In this we should look to Nature with its organic propagation models and derive from these steps towards sustainable independent living arrangements.

Technology too can assist us here. Even though today it is largely a weapon used against the rights of the majority and their happiness, industrialized research being predicated on serving the interests of hierarchical power structures, yet technology itself is completely neutral and can just as much be of assistance to a liberation of the masses as it is deployed to control them. Things like local community industry and craft benefit from today's technological developments and these forms of independence offer insight into how authoritarian systems can be dissolved from the inside out; the chains of bondage melting away through the autonomous choices of individual human beings. The idea that you need to wage war against a form of government in order to overthrow it is entirely wrongheaded; all that needs to be done is to create a parallel society within the existing one that is more attractive than the status quo. Achieving this, the systems of oppression will disintegrate on their own. And technology will only accelerate such transitions.

Every city in fact depends on artificial efforts. They are not perpetuated by people following their own natural impulses but rather by a tiny minority of individuals engaged in the calculated orchestration of events. There is consequently a basic ineradicable apathy which exists in the hearts of the vast majority to all the grand superstructures built up for the purpose of imposing on their lives. One only needs to look at the drastic decline in church attendance the West has experienced in recent years to see how fragile authoritarian systems really are. And the same is no less true of everything from our electoral systems to our digital marketplaces. Ordinary people don't really care about any of it.

The fatal flaw in capitalism is the fact that it can never inspire any lasting emotional investment. While a television commercial or website ad might briefly pluck the heart strings or solicit a laugh, the capitalist world people live in is one that remains fundamentally ambivalent to them. Capitalism doesn't value anything beyond transaction and so it can never appeal to the eternal hopes and longings of a vital humanity. Given that, as the public space becomes less of a commonwealth and more of an arena for purely commercial interests, the disparity here between what people really want and the opportunities provided to them will become that much more stark and transparent. Perhaps serfs in medieval times could content themselves with ploughing the land for their lords because they could truly believe that they were serving God in some small way by accepting this but, in a secular age that idolizes material gratification, why would anyone prostitute themselves for the pimps that run the global economy? So capitalism here disseminates its own undoing; by removing or diluting transcendental values in order to make them commodifiable, they poison the very basis of self-sacrifice which their own systems actually rely upon. Once every sheep is transformed into a wolf, the wolves must cannibalize each other. And so exploitation unravels itself.

The world as we know it is dying. Indeed, it must, because it has aligned itself with the processes of death. We tend to think of our global institutions as immutable realities but they are no more necessary than things of the most trivial kind. Beside the shells of dead sea urchins tumbling in the surf, one can just as easily find the bones of the leviathan. So there is no cause to despair simply because of the scale of our oppressors; their flaws will surely destroy them. As for the city, that blatant tumor on the flesh of the earth, its slaves will try every way they can to disguise its true disposition but its gloomy purposes are beyond hiding. Like the painted sepulchres of a festooned necropolis, the institutions of the city betray its ultimate aim. To imprison forever those who dwell inside of it.

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Arbitrary Values

An Essay on Pricing in Contemporary Society

Introduction

We are often told that the costs of things are decided by supply and demand. This is false though. The true nature of pricing is a much more complicated and disturbing but then that fact makes the prevalence of a simpler happier explanation perfectly understandable. This economic fairy-tale meets the needs of the average person who tells themselves they'd like a general understanding of the world they live in when usually what they want is a theory or explanation that's convincing enough to relieve them of the burden of any further thinking. The supply and demand account of things also feeds into the needs of pundits and other superficial "experts" who are expected to be able to provide agreeable and easily digestible answers to all of the public's questions; they too will obviously be content with any explanation that satisfies their audience and preserves or enhances their own social status, regardless of how far said answers deviate from the truth. Regarding these two groups, it should be mentioned that a genuine innocence may be at fault here. While there is admittedly a great deal of self-delusion going on, those who accept the supply and demand theory of economics may do so with real conviction. A third group however deserves to be discussed. Said group is more likely to be made up of members of the ruling-class (bankers, industrialists, etc) and these individuals promote the idea of supply and demand because it helps to camouflage their own predatory business practices.

Since a satisfactory and benign explanation here puts the whole issue of pricing beyond critical examination, it is essential that, wherever corrupt practices proliferate, an explanation of this kind is maintained. These three groups then are all engaged in a mutually unacknowledged but equally gratifying conspiracy against the truth and, because said groups happen to make up both a numerical majority

of the population and its dominant special interests, the theory of supply and demand retains its standing as an unassailable dogma within the banality of the public consciousness. Certainly there are those who criticize the supply and demand theory; a mélange of philosophers and economists mainly but these professional critics are little more than squawking birds kept in cages. They have no direct authority over public policy and whenever they say anything that conflicts with the prevailing interests, they are safely ignored by those in power. The globalist regime maintains its zoo of dissidents in order to quell the public wave of existential terror that a naked vision of its dystopian hegemony would inspire; these dissidents then help foster the illusion of a democratic society when all the real machinery of power is monopolized by a dictatorial ruling-class. Because ordinary people don't really want to confront this apocalypse and would generally rather justify their exploitation than fight their exploiters, they are ultimately willing, deep down in their enslaved selves where the fantasy of freedom is all the liberty they desire, to do whatever they can to assist in their own deception. As such it's clear that all of those who lie to themselves or benefit from lying to others are well-served by the myth that pricing is decided by a natural mechanism immune to malevolent influence. This is the general utility of the lie.

That said, I'd consider it a personal favor to myself if anyone satisfied with the theory of supply and demand would now refrain from reading the rest of this essay. So far I have only outlined the fraud in question and this characterization of the matter can still be dismissed offhand with minimal effort by anyone inclined to do so. Reading further however will result in a confrontation with a host of specific points and demonstrations which will increasingly imperil any attachment to said theory not grounded in an absolute and mindless ignorance. I don't have the right to deprive anyone of their false beliefs but, at the same time, those who cherish their illusions have only themselves to blame if they seek to test these after being given fair warning. In all honesty, what I wish here is to minimize the whining and untruthful argumentation that arises from the hordes of those who, encountering a disruptive truth, are always anxious to preserve their own misunderstandings. Spare me your masochism and hypocrisy. I'm not forcing the truth on you so don't go seeking the truth if you don't really want it. And if you're going to build a ramshackle hut to live in, don't go cursing the wind that blows it down.

The Opportunistic Nature of Pricing

Like most false ideas, the theory of supply and demand is not entirely wrong. Their correlation is obvious when we consider the most extreme scenarios. When zero demand exists, supply will diminish accordingly and, when there is zero supply, real demand will evaporate as well. Flying cars provide a good example of the latter. A lot of people no doubt think that they'd like to own a flying car but, even in the year 2020 when the mass manufacturing of a flying car is theoretically possible, the absence of supply smothers this idle desire. In contrast to dedicated hobbyists and fanatical aficionados, ordinary consumers don't demand things that aren't readily available on the market, or at least, on the horizon of availability; ordinary consumers are largely passive. Meaning people aren't clamoring for flying cars precisely because there aren't any flying cars being advertised to them. Here we see that supply can actually play a role in inflating demand, motivating the owners of the supply to create a market for it, but then already the traditional explanation regarding the supply and demand mechanism is starting to unravel.

Further analysis causes the theory to fall apart even more. Let's consider the consequences of finite demand and near infinite supply; the electronic book market for example. Are the prices of digital books consistent with the strictures of supply and demand? No. Far from it. The cost of selling a digital book is negligible; sure there are general computer infrastructure costs and those of electricity usage but, together, these are far less than those of the physical stores and transport logistics that physical books require. Which is why the physical book market is swiftly being reduced to a tiny niche of what it once was. Because digital books are far more profitable. Likewise, the logic of profit also explains why digital books don't sell for five cents today even though they conceivably could. Despite a general public demand for anything they buy to be as cheap as possible and the availability of free books in the form of public domain works and libraries, digital book suppliers recognize that the most profitable course of action for them is to keep digital book prices artificially high. In this we clearly see the principles of oligopoly prevailing over those of supply and demand.

People in the business of making money (As opposed to others who seek money in the service of separate goals; non-profit agencies for example) never let the supposed laws of supply and demand interfere with their own opportunities for profit. In the absence of a countervailing force to prevent price-gouging and

price-fixing, these practices nearly always proliferate to the maximum extent that they can increase the monetary gains of their respective actors. But apologists might characterize this as a market aberration caused by special circumstances so to further dispel the illusion offered to us by the supply and demand theory, let's consider the most natural and universal market of all; the human market of potential sexual partners. Proposed as a general solution to any form of pricing, the theory of supply and demand should hold good here too and the "price" of sex should be free. With what is effectively an infinite supply and infinite demand, people should just be casually having sex all the time according to this theory but, even in our age of hyperlinked social networking and all the technologies that can assist us in organizing orgiastic practices depraved enough to dismay even the Imperial Romans, prostitutes can still charge plenty for vanilla services. Why? Because the market of potential sexual partners exists in the real world and isn't some mathematical abstraction conjured up in the hushed alcoves of an ivy league university. Other forces are at work here besides those of supply and demand. The forces of ideology, convention, religion, pathology, repression, etc, plus all the various competing forms of more easily obtainable gratification, each exerting its own downward pressure on human sexual activity. Someone might object to this line of reasoning and respond "Yes, but what does all this talk of psychology and taboos have to do with economics?" and I would reply that any market is defined by the sum total of the forces influencing it, including all the irrational appetites human beings possess. Every human being who belongs to a community is an economic participant in that community and, as such, the principles governing any economy must encompass humanity's most absurd and illogical motivations. Including of course motivations of utter depravity.

Pricing is only tenuously related to supply and demand. Sometimes neither is even required for markets to form. No one wants to get conned and supernatural elixirs don't exist, yet there are still people willing to pay cold hard cash for holy water. Why? Because pricing is ultimately rhetorical; it's defined less by material principles and more by the charisma and techniques involved in the sale of goods. This much has been evident since the time of Edward Bernays, so the lack of widespread recognition here only goes to show that truth is just another thing not governed by the pretentious formulations of neoclassical economists. While supply is often, but not always, limited by material reality, individual and social demands are both always defined first and foremost by a semantic framework, by a cultural milieu. That is to say, demand has its origins in the metaphysics of identity and

aspiration. What people want is not principally determined by material reality but by the individual's introspective contemplations of their own private desires interacting with the social influences they haphazardly encounter. In this way, demand is manufactured *creatio ex nihilo*. It comes from nothing. In fact, absence is the very foundation of all desire but setting aside the esoteric investigation that deep inquiry would necessitate, it is sufficient for us to recognize that mere material conditions do not inherently impose anything on the mind and only have any significance once we've contextualized them within some kind of explanatory framework of values. Which, because of the increasingly artificial nature of the human environment, is itself likewise becoming correspondingly arbitrary.

At all times in history, people have always paid whatever it was they were convinced they should pay. It doesn't matter what we're talking about here, the specifics of such transactions were inevitably secondary; the real determining power arose out of the mental-linguistic interaction between seller and buyer. At a primitive level this might amount to nothing more than a contest of wills, as it still is even for several forms of negotiation today but, within our sophisticated civilization with its many layers of convention, our most arcane and intellectualized negotiations continue to hinge upon the manufacturing of convictions. Prices are social constructs and their degree of connection to any external reality is contingent on the emphasis this has for the relevant economic participants; which I believe I've already shown tends to be slight at best. Perhaps one more example should be provided though. A market so outrageous in its contradictions of the views advocated by neoclassical economists that the very mention of it must strike fear into their orderly hearts. I am of course referring to the burlesque and travesty that is the world of contemporary art.

What is a painting worth? Given that the valuation of a painting can range from anywhere between zero and a billion dollars, figuring that out is going to be quite complicated. Perhaps there's an easier question to answer though and one which would prove even more illuminating? I think there is. Said question is: How are the prices of paintings determined? And, to provide the most encapsulating response here, the answer is talk. The prices of paintings are decided by people talking about said paintings. The more they talk about them, the more valuable the paintings being discussed tend to become. What's really significant here though is that the utility of the objects in question is united with their own valuation process. A painting is "useful" in an economic sense the more it can be talked about, the

more others are willing to make reference to it and analyze it, and this use of it in turn imbues the painting with greater significance and hence greater value. Which is why provenance is so important in the art world; it adds to the “story” of the painting. Does this fit in with any reasonable formulation of the demand aspect of traditional pricing theory? I don’t think so. We can obviously contextualize our concept of demand to encompass any interest or influence we want but, in doing so, the concept will quickly lose its integrity. Whatever definition of demand we decide on, it must still be limited to some kind of empirical framework of vectors directly acting on the fluctuation of prices and, such a framework, is clearly inadequate to explain pricing overall. The prices of specific paintings, as it’s just been pointed out, are influenced more by their general notoriety than they are simply by a market of buyers, since the former is what generates a large portion of the reputation that informs the latter. In other words, Van Goghs are generally more valuable than Miros because of the influence of ordinary people who lack the means to purchase works by either artist; but with all the Van Gogh posters and Van Gogh merchandise, as well as a greater public interest in Van Gogh museum exhibitions, individuals totally excluded from purchasing his works contribute to the estimate of their value and the prices that arise from this.

Even a casual assessment of the art market reveals the problematic nature this presents to traditional economic theory, so some kind of explanation seems needed to account for the tendency of economists to ignore it. Like many other scientists though, economists have an emotional bias that favors order (Science is principally the organization of information after all) and will gladly focus on orderly phenomenon to the detriment of a more comprehensive view of economic realities. That they’d usually prefer to live in a Euclidean universe is shown in the choices they make in their work. Truth however is often much more fickle and spiteful than the preferences of its investigators would allow and the result of this is the proliferation of oversimplified theories and categories that subsequently require additional effort to dislodge. Hoping to not commit this same error myself, I won’t offer anything as ambitious here as a systematic theory of pricing or values. Rather what I want is to reveal the prevalence of a species of error.

The theory of supply and demand is not only a terrible and misleading mutilation of the truth, it’s a stupefying idea (It sows stupidity) as a result of the fact that it corrupts our understanding of something so basic. Like an incorrect axiom polluting an entire system of reasoning, accepting the theory of supply and

demand instigates a deterioration in the general thinking abilities of the infected individuals. The more falsities we consume, and the more profound said falsities are, the more we will become vulnerable to falsity. In fact our appetite for falsity will only increase. This is related to the previous remarks regarding the motivations of the three principle groups involved here; the more they become habituated to untruths, the more the public will demand them, the more the experts who instruct the public will be motivated to provide these, and the more an inherently dishonest ruling-class will feel empowered to manufacture the same. As such we see that the very force which animates the opportunistic aspects of pricing also animates a more general and opportunistic deception. Said force is greed.

Greed's Compound Effects

To be clear, values are arbitrary because the ideological and other mental structures which govern decision making are entirely plastic; they're shaped by whatever motivations just happen to prevail at any given time. An economy that genuinely followed the principles of supply and demand could conceivably exist then if the necessary circumstances won out for any length of time and people were more generally motivated in ways that adhered to the rationalistic limits this required. That's true of almost any economic theory however and only those theories which espouse the logically impossible would be unable to function on some timescale no matter how brutally they were imposed. Regardless of its merits as an ideal then, a supply and demand economy could be artificially constructed, but implementing such arbitrary systems has never been the stated goal of economics as a general science. What economists have aspired to when discussing the problem of economy is to discern what laws, if any, govern economic behavior and what tendencies do actual economies have. With respect to laws, I have no plans to propose anything definite here and will only venture to outline some dominant principles that seem to be at work. Usually to dispel the particular myth of a false economic law. As far as tendencies are concerned however, I'll be more assertive (I believe I've already demonstrated as much) and the tendency I'll concentrate the most on is that of greed. Unlike the various disingenuous species of sophisticated liberalism nowadays that warmly advocate economic liberty to mask their apologetics for cold avarice, I'll not only condemn greed as a pathological influence but will identify it as one that will likely prove fatal.

Human values had their origins in necessity. Way back when, everything was simply a matter of survival and our values were dictated accordingly. With the advent of agricultural and urbanization though, surplus productivity emerged alongside numerically significant social groups that weren't preoccupied by labor. Preeminent among these were political and religious hierarchs who gained control of their respective societies through predatory tactics and strategy. Although occasionally they would be mitigated by more egalitarian movements (Athenian democracy and Roman republicanism being notable examples) said movements were always compromised by some degree of hypocrisy and it remains a simple matter of historical investigation to observe the record of their moral and cultural degenerations over time. That is to say, each society flourished under the influence of a revolutionary ideal that increased the degree of meritocracy in said society and then withered as this ideal lost its persuasiveness and parasitic attitudes took root. Spengler was therefore right when he identified cycles of decay in history and the preeminent importance of a spirit of social commitment to maintain societal wellbeing. Anyone though who thinks that vitality here is best preserved by a supposed aristocracy is delusional; the selfishness at issue causing the fabric of a society to unravel begins precisely at the point where notions of "aristocracy" prevail since this inevitably leads to the interests of a subset group (The ruling-class) being separated from society as a whole. Naturally, once this conceptual division is established, a division of allegiance follows and the ruling-class begins to act ever more in its own interest, over the ensuing generations, at the expense of its social obligations; this is like a disease incubating in a single human body. Then, when the ruling-class has become thoroughly corrupted, the working class sees the truth of its society for what it is, not as a collective endeavor but merely as the arena of competing self-interests, and it follows the example of the ruling-class, leading to widespread degeneration; here the disease escapes from the single body of the ruling-class and begins to spread throughout the general population.

I am of course referring here to greed. When necessity rules, this contagion remains impossible because too many individuals are compelled by matters of survival to even think greedily, let alone act upon such urges but, as more and more individuals are released from brute necessity by the emancipatory aspects of civilization, the appeal of greed starts to predominate. First it begins as a conspiracy by the few against the many, a kind of exploitation, but then through increasing emulation it gradually becomes a culture and, once that occurs, the bonds that

authentically united one human being to another disintegrate and society itself becomes a fraud. We ourselves are living in such a time; our social structures are little more than superficial organizational frameworks without any really profound influence over our hearts and people, educated by the examples of their politicians and business leaders, are succumbing to socially destructive self-interest. Contrary to what some will say about the social benefits of selfishness, it's obvious that if people act to benefit themselves regardless of the cost to others, their cumulative indifference will destabilize every social structure they participate in. If greed were truly good then having cancer would be the ideal state of health.

The reality is that basic levels of cohesion and harmony are necessary for any society to thrive. Admittedly a society that's too collectivist, one that demands ideological purity for example, will atrophy just as certainly as a society infected with ruthless self-interest will disintegrate, but this amounts to no more than recognizing that two different extremes are lethal. And if I were living in an overly collectivist society I might emphasize the jeopardy of this but, since I live in a society, a globalized civilization in fact, where individual greed is pumped with the steroid of hyper-technology, where its continued proliferation seems destined to consume everything, it seems appropriate to focus my remarks in that direction. Not that I expect to impede this. Whatever good might come from knowledge can only come through its manifestation however so my only specific hope here is to understand what is going on and articulate that understanding. Beyond this, my hope is blind. Because what I see is that the arbitrary nature of values is leading to increasingly arbitrary values. Which may seem intellectually justifiable but then so are the merits of suicide when life is no longer considered inherently valuable. The fact that we can arbitrarily value anything should at least be recognized as a matter distinct from the premise that we should arbitrarily value everything. Otherwise we are liable to commit suicide simply because we failed to distinguish that a justification for this is distinct from the mere ability to do so.

Greed is, by definition, an absence of moderation and accordingly a rejection of reason and rationality. Reason and rationality are always acts of self-moderating since they involve contemplation and, accordingly, a restraint being placed on our immediate impulses. Logically then, even the rationalized justification of greedy aspirations is always more fundamentally irrational; it contravenes the basic premises of rationality and so places itself in a fundamental opposition to this. Like someone creating a weapon of mass destruction and calling this an act of creation,

the contradiction here is obvious. So regardless of how sophisticated greed is in its chosen objectives, we can still recognize that greed is intrinsically unsophisticated, arising as it does out of the well of mindless appetite, and so always an enemy of culture in some ultimate sense. All the possible forms of culture and society are grounded in mutual cooperation and every form of laissez-faire ideology can be seen for what it is now; as the expression of social degeneracy. Like water droplets trickling off an icicle, the laissez-faire individual abandons the whole in a leap of disintegration, only to isolate themselves morally from all community and thereby succumb to something like self-evaporation. Without a sense of obligation to others, human beings are without substance. They are nothing.

Value Erosion

It might seem that the issue of pricing has been abandoned in this essay but the more general discussion of values that ensued was critical for its proper understanding. Prices reflect the values of society. They mirror our appetites. Not in the traditional sense though of revealing an underlying and objective reality, in which buyers and sellers are statically situated, but rather that of a spectrum of psychological interactions that approximates rationality and society at one end and irrationality and enmity at another. Contrary to the opposing claims that pricing is either one or the other of these things, I am asserting that it's both. An appreciation of the malleability of pricing, and its correlation with an equally fluid dimension of values, should be enough to dissuade those who appreciate this from pursuing the dream of a neoclassical economic system or any of its variants. Ironically this desire to impose a crude order on things is a contributing factor in the furthering of disorder since it conceals the real problems and allows them to fester unhindered. The inability to face up to reality is one of the main reasons why problems tend to get so large before we address them, economic ones or otherwise, and if we wish to truly serve our own interests here we will correct ourselves wherever we perceive this tendency. Now more than ever perhaps, this is imperative. Where previously the natural forces of social upheaval prevented stagnant regimes and ideologies from perpetuating themselves indefinitely, today the technological and industrial powers of the ruling-class imperil us with the very real possibility that the next system they impose could become permanent regardless of its oppressive characteristics. And all forms of perpetuity are hell.

The decay of those values which are essential to the vitality of any society, values like truth and liberty, is therefore especially concerning now since it appears that a process of immutable globalization is currently engulfing the world. Meaning we cannot expect any political revolution to occur in the future which would be profound enough to reset the general condition of humanity. As our capitalist technological development threatens to establish an unassailable disparity of power then, between the increasingly technocratic ruling-class and the hypnotized masses, this trend will reveal itself at the outset in pricing discrepancies which we are already seeing. Prices must accordingly become more irrational as coercion and fraud gain prevalence; “deals” and “sales” for example will less often offer genuine bonus value and more often simply be a means to capture the consumer’s attention so that dishonest vendors can push deceitful transactions. As in the speculative financial market where complicated financial products have been designed to mask their inherent worthlessness, other industries are adopting similar predatory agendas. Ordinary banking for one is no longer the customer oriented business it once was; now banks aggressively market their own products and harass their account holders in the pursuit of maximizing profit. So too the telecommunications industry and all its major corporations have become the purveyors of swindling phone and data contracts; today any transaction with them is like sifting through a small minefield. Cynicism is the only appropriate attitude when purchasing goods and services in this kind of economic environment since the language of commerce is itself infiltrated with all sorts of absurd hocus-pocus. What we are witnessing can perhaps best be described as the rise of the anti-social marketplace. Of a market dominated by an underlying hostility between all participants.

Pricing as such is maybe the clearest barometer we have for the degree of corruption in a society; where prices are increasingly divorced from the rational limits provided by informed consent, where those who have the power to set prices do so disproportionately in their own favor, this can only be indicative of other mechanisms at work, besides those of supply and demand, which are being used to distort reality and coerce buyers into unfair transactions. Supply and demand in truth could only fully pertain where informational symmetry exists and asymmetry here will always have exponential consequences. Those who esteem the principle of *caveat emptor* no doubt do so because they identify themselves with groups who benefit from exploitive practices (Since even the most immoral person will oppose this principle if they feel they’re consistently suffering as a result of it) but

what even they fail to realize is that they are contributing to the poisoning of their own economy. And, when this attitude is prevalent enough, what you have is a slow but inexorable seppuku of the marketplace. Because, like in ecology, where destroying one layer of organisms in a mutually dependent biosphere will kill the biosphere itself, so too when you destroy the social incentives for cooperation in the working class, who are the economic foundations of the current hierarchical pyramid, you are also undermining the basis of that pyramid. But of course the main problem resides in the social structure provided by said pyramid itself.

Any society where there is a hierarchical structure will inevitably devolve into a pyramidal system; this can be seen from the fact that competition tends to centralize power just as much as cooperation tends to decentralize it, and the fact that hierarchies generate competition by their very nature. Whenever individuals are treated better or worse than each other according to reasonably consistent criteria, you will foster competition among them. Where profit is involved and exchanges occur, this competitive attitude will naturally express itself in predatory strategies of transaction. Meaning price discrepancies with respect to the real value of goods and services (Their actual utility for the buyer) When this attitude is prevalent enough in the ruling-class that a point of critical mass is reached, that will result in the organized promotion of toxic values (In the same sense of toxicity as toxic assets) by the ruling-class against all others. To a large extent we have already passed this threshold. Certainly in the United States a culture of predation prevails today in its major sectors and its political system. In fact, this attitude has begun to descend to ever lower strata of the pyramid; a proclivity for fraud is building now among the lower classes too. What this can only lead to if left undeterred by any novel force is the total destabilization of society. And the leaders of the world have only themselves to blame for setting the example here.

Conclusion

The language of commerce is succumbing to ruin. With every new trick and gimmick introduced by vendors to dupe their customers, another brick is laid down for a future mausoleum of cynicism, a mausoleum being built around humanity that will wall it in. Societies pervaded by cynicism can only be ruled by paranoia and paranoid societies do not survive. Trust is the foundation of all social enterprises so

the extinction of trust will amount to the extinction of everything that depends on it. There is a challenge here posed to us by arbitrary values but the solution to this is not the postmodern one of a confused rejection of values. If people think they are following Nietzsche here in some kind of higher transvaluation, they have only to consider this philosopher's own remedy for nihilism. He rightly perceived that life must be given preeminent value if the promotion of life was in fact a social priority and that, everything else, everything which subordinated life to some other idolatry of abstraction, must be rejected. I wouldn't promote all of his more specific conclusions by any means since I think he vastly underappreciated the worth of spirituality and other forms of transcendental aspiration but, at the practical level that addresses the basic welfare of our societies, an emphasis on vitality is essential. A society will inevitably decline if its leaders don't successfully promote social values among the majority of its members and the most basic social value is that of cooperation. Which means prioritizing truth.

A culture of truth will value truth and a culture of lies will value lies. Whether you value truth or lies then depends on which culture you belong to. However we need not have any special affinity for truth in its own sake, for the aesthetic value of truth, to recognize the practical reality of truthfulness being essential for the continued growth of any society. The culture of lies is a suicidal one and, unless its members are content with that, they would do better to value truthfulness. Which cannot mean simply valuing truthfulness by others; a genuine valuing of truth here means practicing it oneself. If values are arbitrary in the sense that we can choose whichever ones we want, then they are equally not arbitrary in the sense that only certain values can be the means to specific ends. Simply relabeling cyanide as aspirin doesn't make it so. And somehow pathological self-delusion remains enormously prevalent. Hardly anyone may be stupid enough to dispose of toxic waste in their own backyard but those who lie to themselves are committing the psychological equivalent of this. They are poisoning their own minds. If this was a merely private cost, the rest of us could easily ignore it but, their actions, driven by the poisons they consume, effect those around them. Everyone then will pay the price for their folly. A debt now accumulating a monstrous interest.

November 29, 2020

BLOSSOMING IN TWILIGHT

“What does it mean to be young in an aging world?”

Each new generation grows up among the tombs of its ancestors. History is an accumulating process and the ruins of empires gather over centuries; meaning those born in later times are ever more saddled with the burdens of old legacies. Alienation as such slowly takes root. In the distant past there was little difference between the lives of parents and their children; as hunter gatherers, human societies barely changed over thousands of years, but the emergence of civilization spurred advancements that then resulted in accelerating and irreversible degrees of discontinuity. Now the young are increasingly estranged from those who came before them. Less and less do they share the same values or even the same language. And this divorce, as resolute and cataclysmic as the scattering of a cosmos being torn apart by the forces of dark matter, is the beginning of an ahistorical humanity. Because while the past swiftly becomes unfamiliar to the contemporary age it will also fade into irrelevance. And along with history goes civilization itself. Youth, which by virtue of its strength and freshness is naturally optimistic, has today been fated to witness a colossal decay. The towers are already beyond their zenith. Now they are falling.

During the European renaissance there was much public debate regarding the relative merits of the ancients versus the moderns. Of all who contributed in this, perhaps none made a more profound remark than Francis Bacon when he said *“The age of antiquity is the youth of the world.”* But why so? And how could a man, in an era so much more ingenuous and full of potential than our own, already be succumbing to the weariness hinted at in these words? Yes, there’s something astounding in this, like a lookout on a watchtower shouting in alarm at the empty horizon, only to be proven correct in the next hour as a vast barbarian horde rises into view. That said, he wasn’t making a prediction of the future becoming diseased with ennui. He and his contemporaries could no doubt scarcely fathom that such a collective listlessness would ever creep as deeply as it has into the human spirit. We’re talking about a time still centuries removed from the birth of any general nihilism. What did Bacon see then? I would propose that this innovator of the scientific method had awakened to nothing less than the logical conclusion of science itself. In other words, the terminus of reason.

Two things can come out of a mechanical procedure. Either it succeeds in its objective, in which case the prison of a system is erected, or it fails and those who invested themselves in said method must cope with the intellectual disorientation that follows. This fact however seems to be largely ignored nowadays. In the less sophisticated era of Newton and his colleagues, the high tide of the clockwork theory of the universe, it was well understood that absent the intervention of an external force, quite reasonably appreciated then as something that could only be provided by the divine hand of a deity, everything in the universe must eventually grind to a halt. And this cosmology was further mirrored in the cultural milieu of neoclassicism. But slowly, like some weed spreading itself through various enclaves by the wind, a quantum revolution trickled up out of the material order of things. In truth this manifested itself in various simultaneous incursions. Absurdity in art, cynicism in morality, irony in politics; all of these new trends and their parallel counterparts were branches thrust from the same tree. Analysis. Anatomy. Atomization. That every claim was susceptible to doubt meant that no creed could be left sacred. Reason, by definition, is purified of emotion. It does not admit occult forces like love or truth that can only thrive in an atmosphere of inviolable unknowns. Reason cannot tolerate infinities. Faced with infinity, it contextualizes this to some specifiable domain, mutilating the infinite so it will fit in convenient niches, and in doing so admitting of that which is limitless only what does not exceed the boundaries of its own cottage windows. The heart transformed into a machine is a heart for which everything else becomes cog and gear.

We are the survivors of the wasteland. Still too pessimistic to dedicate ourselves to its restoration, we have instead adapted to the bleakness. Our idols lie discarded in the dust. Frantic hunger has turned to calm emaciation. The rose is now replaced by the skull. For those more advanced in years, the alternate reality which has taken hold of the world is grotesque but external and, being external, has the aura of a foreign invader. In this there is some comfort; or at least a sense of self still enduring in a not wholly tarnished state. Those who are just coming into adulthood however must of course have a radically different experience. They are not yet old enough to feel the onset of a desolation and so the growing desert will not appear as something in which absence has prevailed but rather it will seem a natural state of being without any special jeopardy. Here it is easy for scarcity to masquerade as plenitude. And what is at work should not be dismissed as something which is simply an abstraction; no, not as something limited to the idle

speculations of privileged academics. Consider for a moment the state of freedom. Consider the old legal protections of police investigators needing a warrant to search the private effects of someone's locked desk and the current reality that they can access information just as weaponizable, and often far more so, through the mere whims of third party technology companies. Consider the extermination of privacy and note how this draws us closer to the condition of prisoners and domesticated animals. But what can youth accomplish against the hostile forces of destiny that've built up their power and momentum over consecutive millennia? Isn't it forgivable here to shrug? Who can honestly look on a codex of laws which defies the real comprehension of any one person and convince themselves that it could all be swept away? Are we to believe that this long sustained convergence of a legalistic social order isn't the result of some manner of inevitability?

When the sun goes down we may wish for the light to linger but we don't make fools of ourselves trying to reverse the nightfall. Despite an always eager forgetfulness, humanity does in fact gradually learn its lessons. And each time the earth is repopulated, said lessons are decreasingly questioned until they at last settle into the subconscious of the mind and harden as yet another layer of blind instinct. Case in point. Back in the seventeenth century, sarcasm was a carefully cultivated affectation among the higher echelons of the literati; at the dawn of the twenty first century, elementary school children brought up in the average suburb are able to casually outdo the cold-blooded viciousness of a La Rouchefoucauld. There is an ongoing desensitization and it's growing exponentially. One can even glance over one's shoulder at the existential terrors which plagued humanities scholars as recently as the postwar years in the last era and laugh at how naïve and fragile they were. Meaninglessness? What is mere meaninglessness to a society systematically force-fed a diet of industrial banalities? What is a period of smog to a people put on ventilators at birth which deliberately pump their lungs with air pollution? In a world so sick and dying why not give in to apathy? What are a few atrocious face-tattoos in comparison to a commercial arena where ritual sexual debasement for the amusement of internet spectators is a competitive career opportunity? If the young know anything at all, they know how cheaply they are valued. They know that their grandparents are perfectly willing to sabotage their future in order to squeeze out the last drops of prosperity for themselves from a waning epoch of plenty. Of course idealism is going to be abandoned. If anything it's amazing that there are values still being upheld when all of civilization is

teetering on a precipice. You'd think decades of continuous napalm would be enough to kill off the last of the rebel guerillas.

If we have proven ourselves capable of being reconciled to any monstrosity though, doesn't this also entertain the possibility that we have an inherent strength of will capable of overcoming them? After all, is it so much harder to fight an atrocity than it is to embrace it? That is the crucible in which youth finds itself today. On the one hand, it is beset on all sides by centuries of rotting ideology and dogma; a neoliberal dystopia purged of every sacred touchstone. On the other, it has gained what can only be called a post-apocalyptic spirit of survival; a capacity for extracting desperately needed moisture from even the driest of air. We may have rolled our eyes at Nietzsche's hysterics but the ransacking of our temples was a genuine ordeal and what has not died out in us did indeed grow stronger. Above us now is a darkened heaven devoid of constellations but we have learned to navigate by the shadowy terrain of our nocturnal world. We have adapted. And it is this, our mutant soul, which alone preserves the many threads of fate we share from the cosmic scissors that are always waiting to sever them.

What is meant here is best illustrated perhaps by our Hellenist forerunners long ago. It was the geographical partitions of Greece which led to the original diversity of their social experiments. One must have walls after all to build enclaves. And because of this movement to create independent communities founded on radically different social ideals, intellectual and creative courage was fostered in an outstanding way. Like the Cambrian explosion several hundred million years earlier, a state of critical potential was achieved which erupted in a sudden plethora of new forms of life; the tension of oppositions here, as is always the case, being necessary to unleash the huge reservoir of trapped energy. And even today their example remains as a kind of background radiation reminding us, inspiring us even, via an extraordinary period of human genesis.

During an era of globalization conversely, one can predict the cold-blooded imposing of inhuman homogeneity. It will be a violent process to be sure as residual oppositions clash but one that ultimately has a uniform end. Market forces abhor complication; it spoils the pure ideal of logistical efficiency. Wherever a show is made of integrating individuality, wherever diversity is celebrated by economic powers, it is certain that this is for the purpose of eroding them. Different cultures and orientations are not conducive to profit. If you want to create a business that

maximizes revenue you don't feed individual liberty, you obliterate it. You use your advertising budget to indoctrinate the public in the desire of a single product and you build yourself a monopoly. You recreate humanity into a lifeless consumption machine that mirrors and equals the manufacturing side of the economic equation. It's called streamlining. Where people are reduced to a resource out of which one wishes to extract energy in the form of labor or payment, there is no room for the sentimentalities of relationship and social idealism. When F. H. Bradley spoke about "*an unearthly ballet of bloodless categories*" he could just as easily have been talking about the cruel synergies of market forces. Yes, behind all of the vibrant propaganda, the sober truth is this; capitalism is nobody's friend.

This is why a certain anarchic joyfulness prevails. The young, inundated from birth in a never ending media maelstrom, all understand on some basic level the fraudulent nature of the world around them. Sure they might try to offset this with specific credulities but, in general, they see the world for what it is; an ecosystem of brutal competition. Because while individuals will seek sanctuary still in various havens of idealism, they nevertheless recognize that pessimism runs the streets. Something that has never been the case before. Earlier generations didn't confront their enemies as fellow casualties of despair; they just saw other zealots serving a vile heresy. That's what's so different now. We are not divided by ideas in a way comparable to how we were in our earlier political history; now only the material oppositions really have a say. Previously everyone understood that there was always the possibility of radical transformation. In this the otherwise diametrical apocalypses of Robespierre and John of Patmos were in perfect agreement. Today however the battlefield is not for the future but for the present. Which gives the young a kind of nihilist commonality and the cynical observation is therefore always sure to get a laugh, even between the bitterest foes.

In any normal garden, flowers compete with one another. That is what drives their beauty. Imagine a garden though after the sun has been extinguished. There will be no incentive to engage in long-term conflict; only immediate concerns will matter if anything matters. And this shared fate, the hopeless situation of these flowers, will be a vine between them of mutual understanding. The dying world, the crumbling empire, is almost like a burning museum that a crowd gathers around. Sure, each feels the loss, but a part of them is still glad that something has brought them together. Human beings need events to inspire conversation. In the absence of these they will resort to anything, even discussing the weather, and here

the tragic gloom of this age provides a kind of shibboleth for the young. It's the most relatable thing they all have. Whatever subculture they might belong to, however large the distance separating their respective countries, they can all reaffirm themselves in the digital company of total strangers by mantras gleaned from a global dystopian ooze. Quotes from popular streaming shows serve as a good example here. The more inane they are, the more passionately they are repeated, and orgies of this sort occur with frequent regularity in all forums of online discussion. It's a way to keep the despair at a distance. Not that this always works. But it's part of the culture now; a syncretic ritual integrated into the fabric of the youthful zeitgeist. Perhaps a doom chant as well.

Today the future lies across an especially ominous event horizon. On the other side of this there might be planetary catastrophe, there might be transhuman apotheosis. Or any number of other inconceivable possibilities. The suspense though is largely cancelled out by the apparent futility of affecting the outcome. History seems immune to human intervention. Cybernetic powers have taken over. But of course, this is not universally true. Some outposts of optimism remain. Dreams animated with the rarest courage have adapted every strange means available to them to subsist in the present wasteland. Communities so bizarre they come close to defying anthropological explanation have flourished away from the insipid circus of mainstream culture and these testify to an underlying vitality that hasn't been eradicated. Will something evolve in these tidal alcoves that can rise up on to the land and bring about another age of fresh civilization? Time will decide. It certainly can't do any more damage than it already has.

Make no mistake, all our towers will be destroyed. This is part of the nature of towers. Other creations however could fare better. Those that don't place themselves in opposition to the natural forces of the universe. And we too can survive. A remnant at least. Although it's certainly too much to ask that the world as a whole be preserved in its accustomed form, still another enlightenment could sustain us. And it will begin with those born today. Here the meaning that we sought will finally become ours, it being nothing less than the following: Youth in an aging world means growing old without the earlier grace of innocence; it means having an unprecedented responsibility, over the fortunes of all coming humanity, brusquely thrust upon you. And whether the young today will overcome this challenge or retreat from it is a dreadful question as yet unanswered. This while an entire planet waits, seeming to hang on the cusp of oblivion.

DELUGE OF ILLUSION

How Power Drowns Out Justice

The truth is free speech, by itself, means very little. Laws and rights enshrined in words amount to nothing if society as a whole doesn't devote itself to their honest realization. Alone they are merely a claiming of ideals and as such will only express an ugly hypocrisy; disguising the reality beyond the false rhetoric of saying *a hundred flowers should be allowed to bloom*. Because, while people aren't generally murdered in modern democracies for speaking out against the interests of the powerful, the punitive consequences of doing so remain an enduring threat to the progress of justice and the preservation of a morally grounded society.

Power is to ethics what antimatter is to matter; the one negates the other. In fact, a major precondition of being an ethical person is literally just the voluntary limiting of one's own exercise of power in deference to the welfare of others. Again, morality means self-restraint, so now contrast this with the way our political and economic systems are structured and incentivized. They revolve around a culture concerned with exactly the opposite, with maximizing personal profit and control even if that means polluting the public discourse with utter fabrications. It'd be absurd then to expect that a culture oriented by such greed could produce anything besides the levels of dysfunction, stagnation, and corruption that are evident in our existing political circumstances. Throw people into an arena and they'll die or become gladiators; raise them in an atmosphere of deceit and they'll likewise become dupes or liars.

Free speech often receives adulation as an end in itself but really it's only a means and a means to something that's rarely grasped with any clarity. Failing to understand the value of free speech, what free speech is truly useful for, it's all the more likely that the right to free speech will be twisted and stifled until it can't serve its original purpose. Why is free speech so important? Why was it such a major concern for political theorists during the eighteenth century enlightenment; the era which the globalist democracies of our world most owe their existence to? A lot of people can easily provide correct but superficial answers here. Free speech is

important because it's essential to protecting individual liberty, because it's essential to providing an outlet for the redress of societal injustices, because it's essential to the moral and intellectual progress of humanity, etc. But then, to the extent that free speech is suppressed in any way, the qualitative growth of civilization itself must suffer and the primordial forces of decay strengthened at the expense of everything good we've achieved as a species.

There's no humanity without justice; there's only a travesty of humanity disguising brutal ambitions and appetites. Wherever justice is suppressed, said brutality is fostered, and this brutality invariably seeks its own expansion. Consider the growth of clandestine surveillance by nation states and their abetting corporations for example; even if there was no direct conflict between their interests and the public interest now, still the systems being put in place today can easily be turned against the public interest whenever such conflicts arise. The benevolence of institutions is a fickle thing and if ordinary people are made to depend on a benevolence here because their own political and social leverage has been systematically eliminated, it's almost inevitable they'll be made to regret their complacency in the future. Certainly their children will pay for it. And in this case what we're talking about is not the perpetuation of specific acts of injustice but the creation of a radically new environment in which the public has scarcely any means to defend itself against existentially perilous forms of injustice. Something much more insidious then. People as a whole are far better at protecting themselves against concrete attacks than surreptitious maneuvering. Against what's basically gradual sabotage. So which is the greater crime against justice? One act of injustice or the fundamental undermining of the people's ability to obtain justice for themselves? And, in this case, the relevance to the issue of free speech is obvious; if laws against free speech aren't being passed, nevertheless apparatuses capable of destroying free speech are speedily being constructed. All while the only thing to ensure they'll not be used for that is the dubious moral courage of our political leaders.

There's an analogy between what's going on in this case and an incident in Gulliver's Travels. When Gulliver first awakens after landing alone on shore from a shipwreck, he finds himself bound and at the mercy of the tiny inhabitants of the island of Lilliput. So too, however gigantic the people as a whole are compared to the minority of the individually powerful, the freedom of the former can always be taken from them by the latter as a result of the former's complacency. Sadly nothing reveals this fact more than how most people with the nominal right of free speech go about exercising said right. Regardless of which part of the political spectrum you consider, you'll find that the majority of those who are politically engaged do little more than parrot the talking points of institutionally anointed pundits. Phrases constructed by public relations firms and party strategists are repeated with thoughtless tenacity in thousands of ordinary conversations daily and all this does is reinforce the interests of those with power at the expense of those without. The noble purpose of elevating the principle of free speech by contrast was to promote the self-liberation of those who had only their own voices to advance this; but that hope has been largely neutralized by media organizations subservient to plutocracy. And on top of that, the initial promise of facilitating a greater democracy which the development of the internet presented, has given way to morbidly dystopian tendencies; the manipulation of public opinion through commentary by swarms of human impersonating bots, the distortion of facts by strategic censorship on social media, and a host of similar kinds of action. Once Silicon Valley

could be seen as a force capable of contributing to the positive transformation of the state of our politics but now, with all the evidence of collaboration by major technology companies against the public interest, Silicon Valley must be recognized as the primary epicenter for the greatest threats facing democracy and truthful society.

As technology becomes more pervasive it becomes more powerful, and similarly, those who control it. Meanwhile what has allowed for all the social progress that has taken place in the modern era was an imperfect but effective arrangement of political checks and balances which the advances of technology are currently unraveling. While technological progress certainly gives new powers to the average person, it nevertheless distributes power unequally; the political interests of corporations as diverse as Google, Goldman Sachs, and General Dynamics have all benefited more from technological progress for example than ordinary individuals. The reason is because technological progress has so far resulted in the further centralizing of production and power, leading to political influence being increasingly concentrated in the ownership of capital and the ability to influence public opinion through the sheer generation of pervasive media content. Although the masses can over shout small groups when natural limitations still dictate things, if these groups are given megaphones, the balance of power shifts to the latter. What we are seeing today then is the purpose of free speech being undermined without the right to free speech itself being manipulated; rather those belonging to the plutocracy and acting in its interests are simply becoming more dominant through technological augmentation. The power of speech is relative to its capacity to be heard and people who think that social media intrinsically favors the individual are all unfortunate victims of delusion; if your voice depends entirely on the stillness of the air, your ability to say anything is contingent on the whims of those who control the wind. To believe otherwise is to be lulled to sleep by an unreliable calm.

As human existence becomes more circumscribed by its own artificial creations, the natural world is proportionally reduced to insignificance, and lives once ruled by the inescapable facts of independently persistent realities are submerged in the oceans of their own fictions. Not even a single collectively determined ocean though because humanity is now able to conjure an endless supply of segregated intellectual microcosms to satisfy any demographic prejudice. As such this just empowers those who control the existing social environment even more since they can use the hostile principle of divide and conquer to that much greater effect. If the internet doesn't seem like a place of open discovery anymore it can probably be accounted for by the fact that the architecture of cyberspace is being continuously altered so that it better conforms to the interests of those who have power over it. The masses of humanity have always had to contend with the illusions created by their political overseers but the ability by those in authority to project their power was significantly limited due to natural constraints. With the erosion of these limits, the dark powers of illusion will only grow more dangerous.

If things continue as they are, traditional rights like those preserved in constitutional documents will become increasingly irrelevant. To emphasize what's already been said, it's not that they'll be eradicated so much as overwhelmed by the crushing presence of vastly greater forces. This then leaves the question of what if anything can be done. Since reform at the level of institutions and legislation must arise out of a well of culturally derived social willpower, that's

where change must begin. Long before every revolution that was ever launched, a period of social unrest first had to develop in which the people as a whole become dissatisfied with an unjust state of affairs. This means concentrating on an elevation of the public consciousness regarding the specific issue of the systemic deceit being perpetrated. Free speech is being made obsolete as a direct result of a new world order and hardly anyone sees the global scale of the corruption. It's not as if what's happening is being perpetuated in some mystical or esoteric way though; it may be a web of conspiracies but these are mundane conspiracies identical to countless others hatched in the ordinary course of politics. Only technological progress has made it so that the arachnid avarice for power, which has been constant throughout human history, now represents an existential threat to individual freedom. Our one hope lies in the truth, in more people being brave enough to speak the truth no matter the consequences. Without genuine free speech, genuine freedom will perish; the question is will we defend these?

Franny and Zooey

A Review

This is an unusual book so it's fitting that unusualness, and the frustrations of being exceptional, are themes it focuses on. The title characters, Franny and Zooey Glass, are siblings from a large brood of precocious children belonging to a married pair of husband-and-wife vaudeville performers. Each of the children was also featured at one point on a radio quiz program where their knowledge of trivia managed to pay their way through college. But this is all in the background. At the start of the book, Franny, who is the youngest, is currently in college and the others are considerably older. Most have aged out of the family's Manhattan apartment on the Upper East Side. Two are already dead though and one, the eldest brother Seymour, committed suicide several years earlier; an event which Franny and Zooey are still wrestling with. Much of the book revolves around Franny's present state of spiritual and existential crisis which Zooey tries to assist her with. In the end, a significant step towards this seems to be achieved by Zooey coming to terms with Seymour's death and that then enabling him to finally help Franny.

Not surprisingly, the spirit of idiosyncrasy imbues the whole story. Prodigies raised by burlesque entertainers aren't exactly the sort of people you'd expect to emotionally thrive in a world full of banalities and the tension here between these two forces, conventionality and individuality, prevails throughout. Which all plays to Salinger's strengths. Previously he'd created one of literatures' very best representations of an adolescent male youth, maybe the greatest since Huck Finn, with Holden Caulfield in *The Catcher in the Rye*. That level of complex realism, admittedly one that is heightened with a certain degree of extra-natural theatricality, is also on display in *Franny and Zooey*. Both the siblings demonstrate wit and cleverness in abundance but, even more, Salinger's authorial power manifests itself by his ability to invent such characters while at the same time portraying them with all the subtleties of their dysfunctional condition. Because it's one thing to be able to write characters who always have the upper hand against others in the fictional world one's built for them, but it's another to actually devise truthfully portrayed geniuses and then craft these with organic and plausible flaws.

Salinger however has a rare gift for depicting neuroses. Franny and Zooey, if it were nothing else, would be a masterpiece of psychology.

But there's a lot more here. Before going further in depth however, the structure of the book merits consideration. Franny and Zooey consists of two parts, both originally published separately in *The New Yorker*; Franny, a short story, and Zooey, a novella. As Salinger himself admits in the dedication, it's a modest offering in terms of size, but there's a delicate elegance here that additional content would probably diminish. Despite being written as standalone works, Franny and Zooey fit together perfectly; the former a natural setup to the latter. The habit of dividing novels into roughly equal sized chapters remains popular, no doubt largely because it fits the existing expectations of the reading public, but it's still an artistic yoke; a deadening of creativity. It was nice to have something different in this case. Franny consists of nothing more than a single meeting between her and her boyfriend Lane while Zooey takes place later at the family apartment and involves the morning interactions of the two siblings and their mother. There's not a lot here in terms of plot but the dialogue is strong enough that it keeps the narrative's momentum going. Overall, a sense of authenticity prevails.

Salinger's descriptive prose isn't especially stylized but the skill with which he depicts speech and thought is so commanding in its nuances, it approaches a kind of poetic hyperrealism. An imaginary reality that outdoes the real world in the measure of its vitality. Salinger's characters all feel alive. There's an underlying insecurity in Franny that's deftly introduced for example when she's so insightfully critical of the actions and beliefs of those around her, including her boyfriend, and yet shrinks from confrontation when their discussing this leads to a potential argument. That is precisely how the youngest genius in a family of geniuses would behave; having grown accustomed to being outmatched by her older siblings and thereby becoming naturally disinclined towards interpersonal conflict. Likewise the pretentiousness of Lane unfolds in two notable ways. First of all, when he's explaining an essay he's written for school to Franny, it's clear that despite his overbearing manner he's quite eager for her approval. You get the impression that somewhere in the part of himself that understands the world honestly, he knows she's a much deeper person than he is. Secondly, during the events of the Franny section, Lane uses the phrase "goddamn" inordinately. It's immediately noticeable. Only later in the Zooey section though is it revealed that he had recently interacted with Zooey and had conducted himself in a subordinate and ingratiating manner.

This is significant because Zoey uses the same phrase himself, only less frequently, and the obvious implication here is that Lane has now taken it up in unconscious imitation of someone he feels intellectually deferential towards.

The character of Zoey could have easily been made into a one-dimensional know-it-all but Salinger circumvents this by offsetting his intellectual dominance with an extravagant disrespectfulness towards his mother, hindering any blindly sympathetic attitude one might be tempted to have towards the character, and then balancing that with revealing insinuations of personal pain and moments of quiet weariness. It's soon evident Franny isn't the only one inwardly struggling and that Zoey's aggressive behavior, admittedly softer but still present in relation to his sister, is a compensatory reaction to a current sense of powerlessness he's acquired through tragedy. Because while he's often incredibly dogmatic, he's just as quick to tell Franny or his mother to just do or believe whatever they want. These instances of retreating from unmitigated arrogance seem to stem from dual influences; from his still basically kind-hearted nature but also from an injured cowering to human limitations. At twenty-five years old he's just starting to grow up.

There's much of course that can be said about the religious and philosophical ideas discussed in the book. They're pretty interesting although initially Franny's preoccupations could seem a little trivial and bizarre. But a thoughtful reader, an open-minded reader, will find a great deal here they can profit from. Like *The Catcher in the Rye*, Franny and Zoey is especially valuable for self-reflection; something that probably explains why a notable minority of those who read it really detest the book. Because, like with a mirror, we don't always find what we want to see. The flaws of Salinger's characters are as unhappy as the flaws of real people and the issues he addresses in his stories are ones which have their roots deep in the soil of modern society. Franny and Zoey especially feels contemporary. Even among the great works of literature, this is a rare quality. And it's not just because it's from the less distant past. The same kind of relevance can be found in the classics of ancient Greece and it's because these works, like Franny and Zoey, don't anchor themselves to artificial ideals that'll eventually perish when moral fashions change; they aspire to the most direct and honest communication of what it means to be human. Without cropping out eccentric details. For anyone looking for vacuous entertainment or an unchallenging application of old tropes, this novel shouldn't be recommended. But for those hungry for truth in art, this is an excellent choice. You won't find another novel like it.

READING INTENT THROUGH VALUE-BASED ANALYSIS

And its Application in Threat Assessment

OUTLINE

Aristotle's famous saying that human beings are political animals still holds true today even as technology and systems encroach on the traditional provinces of biology. And unless our species goes extinct through death or radical evolution, it will continue to hold true because, even in a transhumanist future for example, the motivation to exist and exist in specific ways will continue to ultimately decide things. As such, basic animalistic principles don't just hold sway over individual people but also over any system where a collection of human choices plays the deciding factor; meaning even for major corporations, nation states, and other large scale actors. In any case, an alternative to this condition where no animal principles factor into considerations is one where politics ceases to have any significance anyway; so the present essay, being interested in providing a politically relevant analysis, will limit itself accordingly.

To go beyond Aristotle's saying however and speak more directly to the contemporary situation, it is necessary to recognize the degree to which strategic thinking has expanded since the days of the ancient Athenian polity. For the moment, it will suffice to observe that strategic thinking is no longer as exclusive to military and civilian leaderships as it once was; rather we can assert confidently that strategic thinking is more or less pervasive in most societies at the present time. Given this, individual and group actions are more susceptible to rational assessment since rationality is confined to where logical connections exist and strategy itself is grounded in logical considerations. So human beings are no less animal than they ever were; only the depth of their own political sensitivity has increased in the form of personal strategic awareness. And despite the fact that this expands their capacity for subterfuge and other means of disguised intent, it nevertheless makes their ultimate intentions more intelligible and more open to the inference of others in a superficially paradoxical fashion. **A fully rational actor is someone whose intentions are least susceptible to obscuration.**

To satisfactorily demonstrate that this is indeed the case, the present essay will delve into what will be called “interest analysis” from here on out. Through the discussion of said analysis, it will hopefully become clear that identifying the values of particular agencies, whether individual or collective, is the most powerful means to determine the future actions of said agencies. Of course this won’t result in an omniscient prognostic framework but it will be proposed as the proper framework for the highest prognostic success irrespective of scale and context. Meaning that regardless of whether one is considering the actions of an individual person or a transnational business conglomerate, interest analysis will provide the most useful and basic foundation for assessing these. And, as a partial demonstration of this, an example of said analyses will be offered with a case study in contemporary geopolitics at the conclusion of this essay. For now though, epistemic matters take precedence and will have to be treated first.

A DEFINITION OF INTEREST ANALYSIS

It is common in public discourse to speak of interest groups and the interests of individuals. This is entirely appropriate and correct but, without understanding how interests are formed, the true significance of the separate interests in society will not reveal itself. Therefore it’s appropriate to ask where interests come from and how they arise into being; not just with regards to specific contexts but more generally because determining an individual or group’s *actual* interests is first and foremost contingent on perceiving the set of principles which describe how any interest formation transpires. After all, an aviation engineer for instance won’t typically be concerned with the idiosyncratic aspects of how an individual jet gets built (Except when there are disasters) but more the essential components and steps needed in particular jet designs. Likewise, it is the blueprint and manual for the formation of an interest which is most valuable.

To that end, the most important thing to understand about any interest perhaps is that **every interest is a sum of values**. In the case of an individual person this means that their interests are defined by the total aggregate of all their values; both those that align and those that are conflicting. A person’s specific interests then arise from the resolution of these, either through complex values that synthesize various competing elemental values, exclusionary values that succeed

in the natural selection of the arena-self to prevail over others, or values that simply don't require their fulfillment at the expense of any others. Because people constantly acquire and dispose of values as circumstance and personal change dictates, any state of interests and their underlying values is always relatively unstable, but there nevertheless tends to be long enough periods of local stability (Local meaning some subsection of the individual's total value state) that most individuals act in a more or less coherent manner susceptible to analysis by others. And the same is true of organizations too; in fact, the larger an organization is the more the innumerable multiplicity of values and interests within it converge on stable interest patterns. The obvious analogy here is with meteorology where the general behavior of a large storm is much more predictable than the behavior of a localized gust of wind. In itself this is hardly a new insight about human nature but, when the real source of this is recognized, the underlying value structures, this provides **a means to circumvent most other forms of analysis**. Because once the values and interests are recognized, other information becomes far less relevant. Here we have something like an algorithm for bypassing signal noise.

The contrast between interest analysis and what will be referred to as signal analysis is profound but, before delving into that, it will be useful to say more about interests states (Again, of both individuals and groups) What interests really are is a more concrete fusion of general value sets; they are the specific teleology behind how individual values reach out into the world in order to gratify themselves. One can also liken them to a coalescing or coalition of values. Individual values, utterly immaterial in themselves, fuse together into interests that then enter the world in various forms; for example, as policies, ideologies, investments, and so on. These represent the more stable, but still modular and organic, forms that values assume in order to achieve a functional significance. They're like rivers running down from an alpine lake; the inert form of values taking shape for practical effect. Above all, this is where values acquire **directionality**. Prior to the coalescing of an interest state, there is no movement towards anything. Interest states then are the inception point where values transition from inward effect to outward affectation.

Here the term "effect" is employed to illustrate the fact that values are not self-subsistent but rather are created by the convergence of perceptions within the individual consciousness. Values emerge from the interaction of various worldly elements synthesizing within the nexus of the individual and this helps explain how values themselves can transform the valuation process; they express themselves

as interests and the consequences of said interests being pursued in the world then re-enter the individual as new perceptions that proceed to alter said individual's total value state to the extent that they can. In other words, the most basic forms that values take as wants, appetites, concerns, etc are still just concretized and local approximations of an abstract and complete rationality which cannot be distorted or obscured precisely because it's entirely abstract and therefore immaterial. To adopt a phrase to designate this concept though, this essay will use "ideal rationality" from here on out. But it heavily stressed that while ideal rationality can be valued in a psychological sense, **it is not a value in and of itself as much as it is a limiting concept on all values.** What we're talking about here is like the difference between *a* quantity (Three pounds of flax, the number 7, 144,000 Assyrians) and the concept of quantity itself. So yes, when an individual desires a specific quantity of something they desire quantity in general but desiring quantity in general without desiring any specific quantity elevates one's desires beyond the political realm and into the religious. Politics has no transcendental values and that is to its detriment but it's nevertheless intrinsic to the political outlook (The animalistic part of the human being) so we do well to accept this aspect of it as fact.

Recognizing that politics is inherently irrational at its foundations in no way undermines the worth of rational analysis. While, yes, there is a fundamental irrationality that can only be transcended through the transcendence of politics entirely, still politics is largely governed by strategies and ideals that pursue various local approximations of ideal rationality. **In other words, politics is ultimately the rational pursuit of irrational ends.** And even here, the irrationality of the ends are only irrational relative to ideal rationality; by far the greater portion of political objectives are substantiated by several layers of well-constructed rationalizations that are all wrapped around a small irrational core. Like a rigorous chain of logical arguments beginning with a single false axiom. But even false axioms tend to be created with a kind of logic so, again, rational analysis is merited here as well. And this is also where the generality of rational analysis gives way to the specificity of interest analysis because **when we're talking about interest analysis it should be clear now that we mean the rational analysis of agent's interests and the value conditions that contribute to these.** As much as values have dominated the discussion so far, this was only to show that interest analysis was being erected on solid foundations; on a practical level, value-based analysis is interest analysis because values can only meaningfully enter the world in the form of interests. Aside from this they only exist as abstractions in idle discussion.

To reiterate the main assertions advanced in this section of the essay; interests are pervasive in society, interests are formed through value resolution, interests can be analyzed, the analysis of interests is best done on a value basis for both individuals and groups, and said interest analysis is the most powerful method for predicting the future actions of any agency. Its power of course is limited and to understand these limits will require some further discussion of how irrationality manifests itself within generally rational environments and how rationality and irrationality are distinguished using the framework of interest analysis. This will lead to the extensive contrast between interest analysis and the signal analysis previously hinted at so this essay will now continue as such.

AGENCY WITH AND WITHOUT INTERESTS

Agency, understood within strict parameters, requires an interest state to manifest itself. This is because purely random or reactive activity is not agency in the proper sense of an individual who otherwise manifests agency; it's instead a more basic natural process taking over the individual's behavior. When a doctor for example hits a patient's knee with a rubber hammer and causes them to kick reflexively, that's obviously not the patient expressing their agency. Similarly, when agents (Political actors or otherwise) react outside of a rationally formed interest framework, they are succumbing to external pressures in a way that overwhelms their capacity for agency. Outside of acting in one's own interests then, there is no true agency in the same way that outside of a correct mathematical operation one cannot solve a mathematical equation with a missing term; **reaching the correct answer by accident in fact would be the worst possible outcome because it would provide superficial confirmation for a false method.** Misinterpreting actions that don't express agency as if they did is a similarly dangerous confusion and can have personal and global existential ramifications depending on the scale of the error. For example, judging the interests of a kamikaze pilot with the usual assumption that a pilot places a high priority on preserving their own life would obviously allow for many disastrous consequences. Certainly interest states can crumble under external pressures as already mentioned but even this tends to leave behind other interests and an underlying framework of values. The question then in interest analysis is how to distinguish these with respect to specific agencies.

The main source of confusion in this context perhaps is the conflation of interest analysis with signal analysis. Here signal analysis is defined as something separate from signal intelligence and signal processing but, for all that, not totally unrelated to them. The concept of signal analysis presently being offered though is broadly non-technical and consists in the meaning that can be derived from the external behaviors of an agency or system. As such, signal analysis encompasses not only forms of animal communication like a cat hissing and arching its back in response to a perceived threat but also things like the behavior of index funds in the stock market. Signal analysis is simply observing signals and trying to analyze their importance regardless of the more specific methods one uses to do so. What this essay proposes however, and this may or may not be a novel conclusion, is that signal analysis is always wrong where it conflicts with interest analysis. Only where interest analysis is inapplicable could signal analysis have any separate legitimacy and otherwise all it can do is confirm or obscure the interests of an agency. As such, overcoming signal biases is critical to proper interest analysis.

To clarify why this is, it would be sufficient to demonstrate that signal analysis can only offer truly independent conclusions within a narrow range of undetermined states where an agency is both ambivalent and telegraphing its decision information. Otherwise we are left with purely natural signals (Like leaves changing color in autumn; so not agency) or false signals sent out solely to deceive; in either case, interest analysis can generally minimize the importance of signals. The basic difference here is roughly equal to the difference between calculating the trajectory of a cannonball versus trying to read omens in its flight path. This is because the former is making its inferences from the principle of an agency while the latter is making inferences from incidental details outside of any logical basis. Successes in the latter are therefore *a priori* accidental because even if the entire methodology used to do so is perfectly correct, the method itself has still only been obtained by accident and so is axiomatically circumstantial. Even if God directly bestowed a system of infallible divination on someone, it would still not be proper to speak of said individual as having a correct method for arriving at the truth since they lack the basic knowledge needed to claim they understand their own system **and so don't really "possess" the system in a truly methodological sense**. They are like someone with no understanding of circuit boards or machine programming claiming they understand how computers work because they know how to use a computer through a standard user interface.

What complicates matters here though is that signal analysis has been widely successful for quite a long time due to the twin preponderance in life of candor and obliviousness. An animal offering a threat display for example is engaging in an evolved behavior to try and protect itself in a straightforward manner and likewise the majority of human communication is generally as straightforward. However you also have behavior that tends to betray thoughts and feelings (A nervous twitch, a reflex gesture, etc) and due to the effectiveness of exploiting these kinds of observations, the value of signal analysis has been accordingly inflated. What this tends to obscure is the fact that wherever a signal leads to a true insight, said insight is only true because the signal is consistent with underlying values. In such cases then the signal simply happens to be correct and demonstrates no necessary truth by being such. Self-conscious agencies conversely, be they individuals or groups, tend to be highly successful at disguising their intentions at the level of overt behavior provided only that they become aware of how they telegraphed these. Even someone of below average intelligence can successfully hide their motivations with minor adjustments in behavior. Therefore when we consider the utility of signal analysis with respect to professional political operators and large organizations, we find that it diminishes to almost nothing.

Consider the game of poker. Even professional players can slip into tells but the myth that tells can be exploited at a level in which said exploitation determines the outcome of long term success is grossly exaggerated. Far more often, one is likely to be signalled with a false tell than a real one because it's relatively simple to make oneself inscrutable at a poker table; the player simply needs to remain calm and self-controlled. So a poker player who invests themselves in signal analysis at the expense of a genuine strategic understanding of the game, which would be what interest analysis favors, is making a poor allocation of their own personal resources. At best they can expect marginal and fluctuating returns and only among amateur players; far more worthwhile here is obtaining a correct knowledge of the fundamentals of the game and how to take advantage of them for maximum profitability. Admittedly here, the focus is as much on recognizing what's in one's own interest as it is identifying those of one's competitors but the same general approach is being confirmed in both.

Apart from interests, it's seen that agencies cannot really be understood. To understand an agency is largely a matter of understanding its interests and the values behind these. With respect to individuals, values are at their most important

because individuals can alter their interests with some degree of genuine surprise; for example due to things like changes in personal fortune or religious conversion but, even granting that, interest patterns tend to remain stable over significant time periods. And due to the prevalence of certain basic values, there is even more stability than there might otherwise be. Organizations meanwhile become increasingly stable in their interests as said organizations grow because the summation of all their member's values converges on predictable interest states. The whole of humanity for example tends to have the most stable interest patterns since the factors that affect interest fluctuation are minimized by the relative environmental stasis and the massive sum of values involved. In short, people are generally predictable at the individual level when their interests are appreciated and groups of people are more predictable the larger said groups are.

IDENTIFYING INTERESTS

Because signals are unreliable for determining interests, an obvious question arises as to how we should do so. Here the previously mentioned concept of directionality comes into play again and this essay will likewise return to the issue of values for further consideration. When assessing any agency, one has to understand its values in order to derive its interests and recognizing said values requires a further understanding of the composition of said agencies. For an individual human being this is utterly simple. What is their physical and financial state of being? What are their beliefs? What associations are they members of? Obtaining basic information of this kind, one should be able to piece together a fairly accurate picture of their values without even that extensive a collection of information. Human beings are more complicated than, say, rabbits but not fundamentally different; once the greater complexity of motivations is factored in, the analysis should proceed in more or less the same manner. What distinguishes humans from animals most is that humans are less identical to members of their own species than other animals are to theirs (Although animals too have individual personalities as anyone who observes them in detail can attest) Said differences though are largely psychological and social however so the information needed to assess them is widely available given the state of technology today. The one notable exception to this rule is individuals with transcendental (Highly abstract) motivations because these are essentially impenetrable to rational analysis. Few individuals of this kind though involve themselves in politics.

Identifying the interests of an individual can therefore be challenging but given sufficient resources it remains practical in all but a few unique cases. For example, even the interests of someone as exceptional as Napoleon is subject to straightforward interpretation once his basic values are appreciated. He always wanted more power and glory and his personal history attests to that. It's why, for example, he abandoned the principles of classical republicanism when the opportunity to crown himself emperor arose. Signal analysis here could very likely have focused on his revolutionary rhetoric over his ambitious nature but interest analysis would recognize the greater weight of the latter. Napoleon was never going to spread revolution around the world; revolution was just a convenient means to authoritarian ends. Likewise, even a religious saint like Francis of Assisi is amenable to interest analysis within the context of his worldly actions. Maximizing a personal renunciation of wealth for example is not a transcendental pursuit; it's a worldly one which will result in predictable behavior patterns. Again, highly abstract values that aspire to things independent of material states of affairs represent a trivial fraction in the broader value sets of any one individual who holds them and so are almost always politically inconsequential. But even if they weren't, they would still transcend politics.

Groups meanwhile are incapable of sustaining transcendental objectives regardless of being founded on ideologies that claim to prioritize them; this is because the transcendental is not subject to systemization and quantification so it cannot be structured in such a way as to make it organizationally compatible. This is also why idealist principles tend to bleed out of an organization over time and materialistic and political ones take over. Interest analysis then can be undertaken successfully here with an even higher confidence that transcendental values won't be a real source of interference; aside from obvious logistical and financial needs, the internal directives and communication such organizations engage in will clearly indicate their true intentions regardless of what kind of public relations messaging they offer. And at the scale of the largest global actors, one almost doesn't need to resort to any individual assessments because these actors have converged into archetypal patterns of behavior. Look at their closest historical approximations and you will find identical patterns regardless of time and place because their interests are defined by their analogous compositions. Walmart is not that different from the East India Company and businesses sharing closer business models even less so. That this is so is precisely to the degree they share identical interests.

Accepting the stated primacy of interest analysis over signal analysis, it follows that the search for small telling details in an agency's behavior should be de-emphasized for individuals and almost entirely abandoned in the context of large scale actors. Only where uncertainties and confusions prevail can signal analysis be merited; as such it may have relevance at a short-term tactical level but almost none in a broad strategic context. Ultimately the directionality of any agency's activities will conform to statistically normalized patterns set by their rationally defined interests (To the extent that they are rational at all) Since all organizations depend on internal rational structuring and all forms of reproducible individual success depend on rational behavior, consistently predicting the actions of such agencies will depend on a framework that replicates the focus presented here as interest analysis. Profound knowledge is always superior to superficial knowledge and valued-based interest analysis is the most profound of all.

The general method for identifying the interests of any agency then consists in understanding the composition of its most prevalent and stable values and deriving the directionality these will take in response to relevant environmental factors; that then amounts to its prevailing interests and the circumstances it finds itself in. As such, even the rationale for diametrically opposite actions should become quite evident; a corporation for example will go on hiring sprees in certain conditions and layoff sprees in others but both represent a deeper underlying directionality defined by a more basic interest, the desire for profit. Even the method for assessing the values of widely different agencies remains largely consistent; whether individual or group, idealist or realist, meager or eminent, the values an agency has will consist in a synthesis of its basic nature and the set of principles that define its perception of the world. To understand what a person or organization will do then amounts to little more than appreciating how it views itself and the world; given its perception of its environment and its own capabilities, it will pursue its values accordingly in the form of the interests it communicates to others and the ones it guards as secrets.

Said secrets though can never be incompatible with its basic values and the most important of these will tend to be the most obvious since they are defined by the agency's perception of its own nature (Which will be rational in proportion to their own rationality) and what it takes to be the most relevant facts of the world it finds itself in (Which will be equal to any other assessment in proportion to

equivalent rationality and information) And to the degree that any agency's values do change, this will consist of an evolution that generally correlates with its overall past directionality. Here confusion might result from misidentifying fluctuating tangent vectors (Opposed actions) as an agency's directionality but when one recognizes that said directionality is better given by an agency's entire vector arc (Its cumulative behavior) said confusion should be alleviated. Because however much an agency might try to disguise its motives, **its goals will always depend on being in a position to obtain them** and so the analysis of its positional state when combined with an analysis of its own necessities-state will reveal its real situation and, as such, a more or less predictable directionality. Knowing this, the actions of empires become the most foreseeable of all actions. And so where there's a zero sum state of affairs, when fate becomes vast actors clashing over indivisible ends, the outcome is even more calculable than chess.

A DEMONSTRATION OF INTEREST ANALYSIS

Since interest analysis is applicable to all that falls within the scope of politics, there's no reason a demonstration of it shouldn't address what's most important. And when all the geopolitical factors are added together, one should find at the top of such a list the current situation regarding the Island of Taiwan. What we have is probably the two largest interest groups in the world, the PRC national interest and the Five Eyes capital interest (PRCNI and FEI from here on out) coming into direct conflict and in such a way as to maximally involve all the surrounding regional powers (Japan, Russia, India, Vietnam, the two Koreas, etc) What happens with respect to the Island then has maximal political ramifications and, in all likelihood, will decide what sort of future the Earth as a whole will have. Because if the opposing interests between the PRCNI and the FEI degenerates into armed conflict, the scale of warfare that will probably ensue will make all past wars trivial in comparison. And total warfare here is, in fact, the most probable scenario.

To understand why that can be asserted with confidence, one only needs to have a basic understanding of the PRCNI. Imagine a people then that maintained the highest level of civilization for centuries; a people whose poetry and science and philosophy requires no apology in comparison to any other's. Then subject these people to a history filled with foreign conquest and atrocities of the worst kind imaginable, culminating in a crescendo of humiliations that only ends with a

costly and dramatic revolution during the middle of the twentieth century. Add to this that they are surrounded by three major powers they have directly gone to war with and several middle powers they either have or could and any conclusion that results from doing so will be worthless if it fails to recognize that territorial integrity is one of the foremost concerns for the PRCNI. Here the Island has both maximally symbolic and maximally practical significance, both of which are intimately related. To lose the Island to a declared independence movement, organic or otherwise, is a threat to the whole of the PRCNI's territorial integrity. The most significant thing about losing the Island then is that it will, in all probability, precipitate the complete breakdown of the nation state on the mainland and lead to events equal or worse than what happened in the former USSR. The question though is what is the PRCNI willing to do to prevent this?

Answering that depends on how one views the decision makers in the PRCNI. Two interpretations here will suffice for the present interest analysis however; the propaganda view pushed in English language media, an extremely critical view advanced by a conflicting interest, and the most charitable view one can take with respects to the PRCNI. Because this will more or less provide the whole continuum and, the most likely outcome, total war, is derivable at both limits. If we accept the premise that the PRCNI is dominated by a completely ruthless regime willing to allow any number of deaths to preserve itself, this conclusion should be obvious. We can call that the Tiananmen narrative. A regime that elevates its own preservation over the welfare of its people is certainly willing to demand any sacrifice of them it needs to and so total war is nothing they will balk at. Conversely, if we accept the premise that the PRCNI has a government committed to the national wellbeing of its people as a result of the ethno-ideological principles it has itself propagated, then such a government should also be willing to engage in total war if the preservation of its ideals demands this. We can call that the Long March narrative. Sacrifice in the pursuit of an independent future not under the thrall of foreign powers. And in either case, what must be done will be done.

A conventional war of "annexation" on the Island is unlikely however. It would take too much time and too many resources on the part of the PRCNI while giving its main rivals, the FECI and others, the opportunity to act against it. Since preventing the Island from declaring independence is of the utmost imperative though, the use of WMDs now becomes realpolitik. As the nation state on the mainland functions today just as well without the Island as it would in the future,

even the near destruction of all human life and infrastructure on the island is imaginable. Given a Nagasaki like event, or several presumably, the Island would be easily returned to the direct governance of the mainland authority. And to justify this at the level of propaganda, all the mainland authority would have to do is first use a WMD against itself and present this as a justification for its reaction. As much as the foreign media will condemn the PRCNI's conduct, they will condemn them regardless of the specificities of said actions, a WMD response to a WMD attack is certainly justifiable enough to allied and neutral parties that it will suffice for their geopolitical purposes. This could be presented as a deliberate act by a third party nation, or even terrorist group and, however much the FEI dismisses such an explanation, they certainly won't be able to disprove it. Would FEI governments be able to show that the WMD used on the mainland wasn't one of theirs? To prove this they'd have to open their entire WMD arsenal up to third party inspection and the strategic cost of doing so prevents that from being a realistic scenario. Therefore the PRCNI has a permanent advantage here and the only limits to their use of WMDs in this context are self-imposed ones.

In the Tiananmen narrative, the PRCNI using WMDs requires no further explanation. It's just an amoral regime doing what it's compelled to given the external pressures it's facing. For the Long March narrative though there still might be some uncertainty that merits address. Is the PRCNI leadership capable of committing itself to total war? If the conflict between the PRCNI and the FEI comes down to a game of chicken, we should not expect the former to blink first. The PRCNI leadership comes from the second generation after catastrophe and national revolution. The events of Nanking for example are not as distant to them as the events of Gettysburg are to their enemy. Much of their leadership in fact has direct experience with being reduced to a state of degradation as a result of the Cultural Revolution and so one should expect that their resolve has been hardened by such experiences. On top of that, the internal politics of the mainland government is played at the highest stakes which, again, purges softness from them as a collective. In contrast, if we look in the prisons of the FEI nations will we find as many governors, politicians, and billionaires? Far fewer because their politics is defined by a class system that protects the upper echelons from the worst consequences of their own actions; the political actors in the PRCNI conversely don't have the same level of golden trapeze net to catch them if they stumble. Regarding the Island then, total war comes down to what extent the PRCNI is a rational actor. If amoral, the certainty approaches 100%; if moral, maybe 50%. A coin flip at best then.

Of course the above scenario for total war is massively simplified. In all probability, the PRCNI has numerous other stratagems which would make total war much more advantageous to them. An increase in complexity here actually favors them because the FEI has essentially reached the further possible extent of its own stable power projection and any further attempt to project power, meaning increase its influence, will generate solidarity incentives in all other major powers. The rivalries in East Asia are rivalries for local influence but all East Asian powers have an interest in preventing the expansion of foreign power in their region. Given many underlying instabilities too, like the benefits to Russia from climate change and the remilitarization and increased autonomy of Japan if the prospect of warfare returns to the region, there's nevertheless a near certainty that any action which threatens the territorial integrity at the center of the PRCNI is one which will lead to widespread chaos. Regionally and globally.

Given the fact that there is no major power on Earth whose interests align with truly global chaos, given the prevalence of a desire for something like neoliberal stability, the FEI encouragement of independence on the Island is not straightforwardly obvious. If we can assume that they are not acting out of pure ignorance of the overwhelmingly likely response this would inspire, we have to assume that there's a degree of desperation at play here. The FEI of course represents the hegemonic system of a long existing status quo going back to the ascent of the British Empire. The increasing industrialization and self-assertion of nation states outside its sphere of control meanwhile represents the erosion of that hegemony and so what is going on here ultimately amounts to the oldest of all conflicts, the bipolar conflict between the *"haves and the have nots."* Regarding total war and the use of WMDs however, even one instant is liable to send the world spiralling into destruction. Because as soon as it happens, cyberwarfare and drone warfare will simultaneously be launched with full force and all the nations of the earth will be consumed in the turmoil and holocaust that follows. The PRCNI is less incentivized against this scenario though because, if forced to choose between it and the dissolution of its own power structure, something locally equivalent is likely anyways. The FEI on the contrary is trying to sustain a relative position geopolitically by making further gains so its own incentive for total warfare is far less; the introduction of WMD usage and total warfare at a regional level will normalize this across the globe and dramatically multiply the FEI's own perils. And if the FEI is just bluffing here, they are still far better off folding.

CONCLUSION

Interest analysis provides a simple and effective framework for assessing agencies at all levels and does so because it minimizes superfluous details while maximizing critical ones. Individuals capable of deep interest analysis represent a valuable resource for organizations of all kinds and can be employed in a predictive capacity with little to no additional technical training required. Together with a team of technical colleagues however, an interest analyst should be able to provide deep insights into general sociological patterns even where these involve complex technical matters. Certainly any organization with significant investments in prognostics and intelligence will benefit greatly from the perspective of a capable interest analyst and said analysts are perfectly able to provide their insights regardless of an employers' own interests or outlooks. An interest analyst can contribute on any side of the field and need not prefer one team over another. Their own interests of course will tend to lie in their preference for analytical employment and so are free agents in both the philosophical and vocational senses of the phrase. And having insight into value itself, they are of course very valuable themselves. Only it takes insightfulness to recognize insightfulness.

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ROMANTICISM IN MAINSTREAM CINEMA

Introduction

When thought of in relation to film, the word “romantic” is overwhelmingly associated with the genre of romantic comedies. The consideration of such works however provides no insights into historical romanticism so, sidestepping their innocuous appropriation of the term, anyone interested in the more traditional meaning here and its influence on film will have to look elsewhere in the cinematic landscape. Something which is a worthwhile inquiry to indulge because Hollywood, and large-budget productions in general, are often heavily indebted to historical romanticism. Which is what exactly?

Romanticism was a bundle of interrelated cultural and artistic trends that began and thrived in Europe between the mid-eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries. Among its notable contributors one is obliged to include Beethoven, Wordsworth, Goethe, Delacroix, and numerous other individuals of enduring merit. It's doubtful that any movement, based solely on broad sensibilities, has had a greater impact. Though often treated as a purely aesthetic vogue, romanticism permeated politics, philosophy, even science, at the apex of its pervasiveness. Naturally this meant it was of lasting consequence; the effects of which can be identified up to the current time. To simplify things, this essay will consider a selection of films in relation to a self-formulated set of criteria. The chosen works and the means of their evaluation will then be justified simultaneously.

Criteria and Examples

In order for a film to be considered romantic in the traditional sense, the following trinity of conditions will be proposed; said film will have to prioritize the aesthetic over the factual, it will have to emphasize drama over objectivity, and it will need to focus on the heroic at the expense of the realistic. Note that the dichotomies being offered are not simply semantic opposites; the intent here is to purposely isolate a more illuminating disparity. To contrast heroism with being unheroic for example certainly can't provide a demarcation of qualities since any worthwhile narrative about heroism will involve a conflict between heroic and

unheroic tendencies. To contrast semantic opposites then would render incoherent the very concepts in question; as if heroism could meaningfully exist in the absence of all self-conflict. The contrasting values in each instance then are chosen now due to their distinctly unromantic qualities and an identifiable tension with their counterparts. The aesthetic after all is discriminate where the factual is passive, the dramatic narrow where the objective is broad, and the heroic ambitious where the realistic is disengaged. More on how each of these concepts pertains to historical romanticism will unfold as this analysis proceeds but the outline, as it's been drawn, is hopefully sufficient for now.

Six films will likewise be discussed; each for certain specific reasons while still allowing organic insights to evolve. The films selected as representative examples are: 1998's *The Mask of Zorro* (Generic Romanticism) 1993's *Tombstone* (Overt Romanticism) and 2002's *Gangs of New York* (Mixed Romanticism) Meanwhile, the films selected as unrepresentative are; 2007's *There Will Be Blood* (Aestheticism as Unromantic) 1995's *Heat* (Drama as Unromantic) and 1981's *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Heroism as Unromantic) These will all be treated in considerably more depth than the preceding summaries might suggest but hopefully by grounding them in this way the analysis will gain an underlying stability. If nothing else, it will provide a hub to return to in the event that discussion becomes too tangential.

It should be added that while all of these films are selected on the basis of their having some cinematic accomplishment, the quality of the films, especially in comparison to each other, is not a question presently being focused on. The relative merits of said films are not the matter at issue. In fact, a film of even the lowest quality could exemplify romanticism or its opposite but the analysis of such would hardly be as rewarding. That said, it's notable that there's an obvious populist versus avant-gardist continuum evident in the spectrum of the films and this will elicit comment. Populism was in fact an issue in historical romanticism.

The Films

The Mask of Zorro: Equalled only by *Raiders of the Lost Ark* here in its being explicitly commercial, this film's status as a generic example of romanticism is not unrelated to that. The distillation of any genre tends to occur through repetition; when a film is truly original and ground-breaking conversely, it's precisely because

it transcends pre-established conventions. As much as a work that inaugurates new exploration might be held up as an ideal within it, whatever reproducible qualities this has will inevitably be further drawn out through subsequent imitations. The Mask of Zorro, being not merely a late incarnation of a romantic style narrative but furthermore a late incarnation of the Zorro franchise itself, provides a polished, albeit derivative, example of what romantic cinema is. Here the three crucial elements are fully realized throughout. A highly stylized film that offers a visually pleasing and fabled depiction of its 1800's California locations, The Mask of Zorro obviously adheres to historical facts only in so far as they serve the enhancement of the romantic adventure it seeks to portray. Likewise, the plot and dialogue are all structured in a way to maximize its dramatic effects, not to present an objectively detailed representation of the characters. By in large they conform to archetypes, which is common in romanticism since its various artistic creations often focus on things of symbolic and universal significance. Lastly, the story of Zorro here, while modified to allow the film's two lead actors to both play a version of the titular protagonist, nevertheless satisfies the conventions of a heroic tale well enough not to challenge its target audience – the broadest public. And within this framework, one furthermore finds a preoccupation with several other concerns that pervaded historical romanticism; these being emotion, individualism, liberty, and naturalism. Regarding the latter, there might not be a stress on the natural environment itself, however that aspect is still present to a degree given the overall significance of naturalistic humanity being underscored; a humanity not bound by oppressive and rationalized social-structures or industry or conventions but a humanity natural in outlooks and appetites which finds authenticity in its own passions. The famous scene where the younger Zorro uses his sword to carve off the dress of the female love interest can be considered emblematic of this tension. The “triumph” of vitality over conventionality; although it should be added that the present analysis is not an endorsement of the specific manner in which this is portrayed since there's an obvious element of cavalier fantasy at work here which humiliates the female character for a cheap thrill.

Tombstone: As with The Mask of Zorro, this film completely embraces all of the elements of romanticism which it employs. Where the two notably differ is that Tombstone more fully explores the subjective attitudes and conflicts of its characters, especially Doc Holliday and Wyatt Earp, but also, to a lesser though still impressive extent, its villains. Here too we see a connection to the literature and art of past romanticism where tragedy was so predominant with the prevalence of

multiple tragic story arcs. And in contrast to an unromantic narrative, specifically a realistic one, where death will be portrayed as something abrupt, unforeseeable, awkward, meaningless, or with any other number of unpalatable realities, the tragic events in *Tombstone* are highly charged with theatrical energy. When Wyatt's youngest brother dies, he dies surrounded by his horrified loved ones; a few last heart-aching words fading from his lips as he succumbs to a nefarious ambush. Similarly, the death of Doc Holliday is the culmination of his destructive lifestyle and the fatalism of his condition here is a counterpoint to the freedom that defines Wyatt Earp's destiny. We see a parallel inversion at work too in Earp's love interests where the wilting wife is traded for a rejuvenating new paramour. In each case the film touches on something at the core of the romantic tradition. It's fair to say then that *Tombstone* really exemplifies how much a contemporary film can draw upon romanticism without invoking much of anything from the two largest later movements, modernism and post-modernism, and still achieve mass appeal. In fact, it's arguable that given trends like hyper-industrialization and technological overload, romanticism will remain essential for the foreseeable future as one of society's primary modes of escapism.

Gangs of New York: This film represents a highly successful interweaving of romantic and unromantic elements and does so in such a way that it reflects the historical culmination of romanticism itself. The dominance of romanticism after all began to wane when industrialization took hold and realism became the leading artistic movement. Cities, bulging with various kinds of newly pressganged labor, and made even more squalid with growing industrial pollution, grew inimical to the kind of idealism a romantic attitude required. The spirit of the Anglo-European enlightenment and their two revolutions had cooled considerably and realpolitik was the reigning mode of thought once again. Nowhere is this more strikingly evident than when the two foes in *Gangs of New York*, the orphan-turned-liberator Amsterdam and the warrior-tyrant Bill the Butcher, agree to a street battle in the ancient tradition and then proceed to have their epic confrontation overwhelmed by cannon fire from the Union Navy. It's as if romanticism itself is dying here in a highly romantic fashion; the one event a symbol for the whole tradition. Likewise we see the contrast between the romantic picaresque episodes of Johnny and Amsterdam, stealing from a burning building and making off with a corpse from a botched robbery, juxtaposed with the growing influence of larger social and political forces that define the latter part of the film. All of which is hammered home in the final shot of the neglected graves in present day New York.

There Will Be Blood: It's hard to imagine a film which could be less romantic even if it was deliberately created with an anti-romantic objective. Even the unified aesthetic sensibility evident in its cinematography and score, something otherwise common in romanticism, is so brutal and cold that it deflects any attempt at romanticizing. Then on top of that you have dialogue and plot that eschews the pleasing formalities of romantic stories in favor of something far more twisted and anarchic. From the opening scene in the mine shaft, through the random fortunes and misfortunes characteristic of the oil industry, all the way to the final and surprising denouement when, after a significant lapse in time, Daniel Plainview's relationship with his adopted son implodes and he then revenges himself on his old nemesis Eli, an omnipotent chaos presides throughout. Additionally there are no heroes here; just worldly people largely governed by materialistic ambitions. And, even when H.W. tries to protect Plainview from the schemes of an imposter, this is thwarted by his own disabling deafness and Plainview's knee-jerk response to ship the boy elsewhere. It's a raw film then simmering with the messiness of human existence and so is diametrically opposed to the romantic vision of self-actualized individuals deciding their own fates. Here the world is not shaped through human passions; rather human beings writhe in the grasp of inhuman forces.

Heat: Despite its strongly atmospheric qualities and a dramatic structure which conforms well enough to the demands of romanticism, the story itself has minimal romantic elements and instead combines a hyperbolized realism with modernist sensibilities. The atmosphere of *Heat* is one of stifling deficiencies; all the characters are crippled by a dire inability to fundamentally change their lives. Each is an addict. The criminals to their criminal lifestyles, the police to the thrill of pursuing them, and the female partners of both to the machismo and charisma of their chosen mates. Like compulsive gamblers, no one here has the capacity to act in their own interest, even when they have an overwhelming incentive to do so and the path towards this is free of any obstacles. Notable examples include McCauley revenging himself on Waingro, Hanna going after McCauley immediately following his stepdaughter's suicide attempt, and Cheritto deciding to go through with the last heist. Romanticism's idealistic attitude towards liberty is contrasted as such with a deep-seated pessimism where the inhabitants of Los Angeles are slowly being digested by it. And not because the characters are oblivious to this either. Hanna and McCauley's moment of kinship at the climax of the film illustrates their sense of shared futility and the misfortune of being opponents to a mirror image of

themselves. So too the unromantic qualities of the film are well demonstrated in its treatment of emotion and liberty. The characters throughout heavily repress themselves to cope with the stress of their chosen livelihoods and only find release from this through outbursts of violence; there's no exploration of passion as a reaffirming human value. Likewise, in the characters' attempts to obtain what they desire they are thwarted not only by their own natures but also by pure chance. At multiple points in the story, individuals are forced to cope with events not being amenable to their plans (But most notably in the foiled arrest scene where a single officer on the surveillance detail sabotages this through a random coughing fit) and this could even be called the overarching theme of the whole narrative since it's not only present throughout the entire film but actually defines the opening and closing events. And then, as to the issue of heroism, while individual characters do perform heroic acts, none of them can be regarded as subscribing to a heroic ideal. McCauley is portrayed the most sympathetically in this regard but even the code of honor that leads to his ultimate downfall is a self-serving ethos; something the audience partakes in when the utterly loathsome Waingro gets the fate that he deserves. But in the end it's just another meaningless death in the predatory ecosystem that defines the criminal society of a sprawling soulless cityscape.

Raiders of the Lost Ark: Given the many elements it has that seem to fit well within the parameters of romanticism, it's tempting to include this film and the rest of the Indiana Jones franchise within the corpus of romantic cinema. Adventure, exotic locales, strong contrasts of good and evil, all lend themselves to a positive assessment. However odd it may be though, the purely aesthetic qualities of the film work against this. More specifically, the lack of deliberate aesthetic sensibility. Romanticism, being so rooted in sensuality, really demands a sensual texture and style. Raiders of the Lost Ark however, like most of Spielberg's oeuvre, is largely lacking in distinctive aesthetic qualities. The film looks and sounds as traditionally blockbuster as any film could. Which is not an impediment to enjoying it, and as a work created to provide entertainment one shouldn't ascribe any fault here, but it's simply an obvious fact that the film demonstrates zero concern with being consciously artistic in that respect. No doubt the absence of this is related to the film's purpose of gaining mass appeal, hence the desire to eliminate any possibility of aesthetically induced alienation, but since cinema is an inherently artistic medium this aspect of the film places it in the company of many other commercially focused works that prioritize the utilitarian over the creative. The fact that Raiders of the Lost Ark is more concerned with box office issues rather than issues of self-

expression doesn't make it inherently unromantic but this does drain it of the potential for romantic, and other, intensities. When something exists primarily to entertain, it won't challenge an audience in ways that might stimulate them towards a reaction more profound than one of pure enjoyment. And admittedly some films manage to do both, 1999's *The Matrix* for example, but *Raiders of the Lost Ark* does not aspire to this. Another thing about the film that excludes the romantic is the nature of the heroism that's portrayed in it. It's a heroism that's almost entirely uncomplicated by a sense of awakening to higher purpose. Indiana Jones, however much he might grumble about it, is content to be an agent for modern industrial power against a transparently evil opponent. In this there's nothing of the radicalism that pervades the romantic movement in all its various forms. And the way the Ark of the Covenant is treated in the film compounds this with a de-spiritualizing of the spiritual. In this sense a notable cynicism underlies the work. An artifact of the greatest social and theological significance is just something to be crated up and stored in a warehouse.

An Interesting Comparison

If the qualities of a romantic cinema can be further illuminated, this might best be done by contrasting two specific films. Here *Gangs of New York* and *There Will Be Blood* offer an excellent opportunity to test this. Specifically with respect to their main characters, both given a spectacular realization through the acting of Daniel Day Lewis. It's striking though how much each character parallels the other, not only in appearance and disposition but also in terms of their personal story arcs. Both men distinguish themselves through exceptional fortitude; Plainview crawling through the desert back to town with a broken leg while Cutting recounts cutting out one of his eyes as a debt to his nemesis. Both men achieve eminence through ruthlessness and sinister acumen; Plainview in the oil business, Cutting in the criminal underworld. Both men offer confession to an enemy neither perceives; Plainview to a man posing as family, Cutting to a son-like apprentice intending to assassinate him. Both men have their trust destroyed by treachery. Both men react to this by self-destructive recklessness. Both men end up alone.

Given all these similarities, the contrast between these two films provides an excellent basis to isolate the presence of romantic qualities in one that are absent in the other. Because Bill Cutting is a romantic figure and Daniel Plainview isn't. So

how is this possible? Perhaps the most obvious difference between them is a definite flair for the theatrical in Cutting that Plainview lacks. Cutting soliloquizes on the way to stab a man while demonstrating this on a pig hanging in a tavern; he gives dramatic speeches with irony (*Poor dead rabbit*) and metaphor (*Well, I'm New York*) This reveling in spectacle and drama is nowhere more evident than in the scene at the Chinese theater where he demonstrates his knife throwing talents before successfully luring Amsterdam into attacking him. While the performance feels authentic because of how well acted it is, the performance itself is still “over the top” because Bill “The Butcher” Cutting as a character personifies this. Now contrast that with Daniel Plainview though. The difference here is like a nuclear bomb through fission and a nuclear bomb through fusion. Although there are scenes where Plainview erupts in a dramatic way, he does so in a much less controlled way. When he “repents” in Eli’s church, when he thrashes Eli, and when he at last kills Eli, each of these incidents is precipitated by him being overcome by a provocation. Otherwise he stew and prefers to present himself as quiet and plain spoken. Plainview, like the oil derricks he erects across the country, only explodes in a catastrophic way. Cutting on the other hand exalts in the outward expression of his emotions. And this goes to the more general ideals of the two men. What Plainview wants is largely just power and control. Cutting however wants to live in an essentially romantic environment despite the bloodthirsty requirements he imposes on this. Cutting wants to be a warrior-poet, not unlike the Colonel Kurtz character in 1979’s *Apocalypse Now*. Plainview however is modernism incarnate, a man at the end stripped of all his human qualities who through this becomes the consummate tycoon. Despite all their remarkable similarities then, each of them represents a fundamentally opposed outlook.

Summary

The reason why romanticism was so influential and why it continues to be influential is because it was an awakening to certain core human values at a time when the territories of humanity began to be encroached upon by its own systems and technology. Romanticism is intimately interwoven with the preservation of human being and its ability to exist in a human enriching environment; meaning it will endure as long as human feeling endures. And, as in so many other ways, we go to the cinema to experience what we cannot have, vicariously.

SILENCING OTHERS

Morality and the Suppression of Speech

Having the power to do something is obviously not the same as being morally justified in doing it. This distinction however isn't always clear generally and, even more so, in certain specific scenarios. I suspect that this is partly the result of the fact that we live in a highly legalistic society established under the aspect of popular consent and therefore we find it easy to define the scope of morality by what is permitted of us by law. If the law says I can do something how can I be acting wrongly? Of course, as soon as we put it like this most people will probably say it relies on faulty reasoning but, in practice, it's not far from how people actually behave. Even people who don't really care about the principles behind the law will justify themselves by appealing to the law when they consider themselves innocent of wrong doing in a legal context. Criminals then are able to see themselves as being unfairly treated when errors in the law are made against them even as they give no thought to their own transgressions.

One important area, where the scope of the law becomes morally irrelevant almost, is in the context of free speech and normal socializing. Free speech is a supposedly cherished right in all democratic nations but in practice it is suppressed through all sorts of perfectly lawful means. Punitive consequences for saying things that displease others is the norm rather than the exception and there are very few situations where those trying to prevent what is being said become liable to any kind of legal prosecution. You'll notice for example that any public figure of even moderate intelligence won't state controversial

public opinions in certain formats (Evening talk shows, major interviews, etc) This is because they're prudent enough to recognize that even if they have beliefs which conflict with popular prejudices or are strongly opposed by a powerful enough ideological minority group, the negative consequences of exercising their "right" to free speech far outweighs any justification for doing so.

Free speech in democratic societies then is merely free speech in the context of overtly legal repercussions, which in reality isn't even close to free speech. The ideal of free speech is something more like an immunity to forms of persecution simply for stating an idea, no matter how obscene or condemnable said idea is regarded by anyone. We see how sad Voltaire's quixotic romanticism is for example in the statement "*I do not agree with what you say but I'll defend to the death your right to say it.*" Simply having the right to say anything is meaningless because in reality the orthodoxies of the mob and the machinations of the powerful can make being an honest person unbearable. This can be illustrated in various ways but, to give a single scenario, picture someone unfortunately committed to a benign but odd belief, something incapable of harming anyone. Say, a belief in the afterlife or about some metaphysical truth. Furthermore assume this person doesn't proselytize this belief at all. Are they free to state it?

The answer is no. If their belief is disagreeable enough to certain people then they had best keep it to themselves. Saying that they're free here is similar in a sense to saying that all prisoners are free because no prison is impossible to escape from. It's the prisoners own fault then if they haven't figured out how to escape from their prison. To the contrary, we can say that freedom is infringed upon whenever some kind of duress is being directed towards anyone acting in some specifiable manner. Even if a person can't speak freely in the above sense still it must be acknowledged that they're always existentially free – if they're willing to suffer anything for speaking freely then they're certainly free, optimally free even, in at least one fundamental way. But this isn't the kind of freedom democratic societies have traditionally relied on as a claim to their own greatness – said societies rather promise and eulogize free speech as something that is ideally conferred without any contextual costs. Supposedly we possess freedom of speech as long as we are simply members of said societies. In truth though we possess freedom of speech only in so far as we speak within the boundaries of what is acceptable in all the circumstances we happen to find ourselves in.

It should be noted here that the opportunities of freedom cannot be reduced to mere hierarchies of power. More powerful individuals and groups can actually be more constrained in their freedom of speech than less powerful individuals. A major political figure or corporation after all can't get away with saying all the things that the average

person can say on social media. Their greater influence actually makes them more threatening to the interests of other powerful entities and so makes them more likely to be targeted for persecution in this respect. That said, the poorest, weakest, and most vulnerable individuals naturally get the worst of things. While they can express whatever beliefs they want with little consequence in most cases (Think of the lunatic shouting things on a street corner for instance) this is because they have already been excluded, for whatever reason, from the opportunities that come from self-censorship. As such they're already had their freedom neutralized.

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Moving on from what is actually entailed in free speech, it's possible now to begin discussing the more subtle ways in which it's absent from contemporary society. One especially important context pertains to social websites and the internet in general. Obviously, as our societies become more invested in these mediums of exchange, their unique characteristics will become increasingly important. Aside from the shadow of popular opinion which looms over all discourse, social media furthermore has the specter of banning users which is, at least thematically, a kind of return to past social orders where exile, ostracizing, and excommunication were regular actions orchestrated by social institutions. Nowadays the moderators and administrators of any website can exercise a similar kind of power, although clearly not one with the same dire level of consequence. Here though the significance of suppression is relative to an individual's personal dependency on a social media platform. While most of us can endure a banning fairly easily, anyone who's built a personal business out of a specific social media platform is obviously in a far more vulnerable position. These people then are very susceptible to making unpleasant compromises when it comes to free speech.

Of course, when a person signs up to be the member of some website they agree to abide by the decisions of the owners of said website. They explicitly acknowledge the authority of the site owner's within the domain of the site in exchange for opportunities and resources that said site provides. This is simply a classic social contract in the form that was outlined most generally and famously by Hobbes and Rousseau. And because no coercion forced them into this commitment, the user has no contractual basis for issuing complaints if they're banished from a website of this kind where they've infringed upon the agreement they themselves endorsed.

However, because websites usually secure for themselves broad and arbitrary powers with their user agreements, it's not clear that they're always morally justified in fully exercising their powers. It's generally acknowledged that a person can't consent to something they don't truly understand – likewise it can be argued that contracts broad

enough in scope can't be consented to, even in principle, where the powers entitled within these contracts have consequences beyond anticipation. Again, the need for understanding as a foundation of all true consent is what is problematic here. In addition though one should consider that there's something like a purpose for which every contract is created and, is itself, contingent on. And also that this factor is crucial for determining the proper limitations of the agreement.

For example, if a website promotes itself as a haven of radical free speech but retains arbitrary powers for banning users in its user agreements, it can properly be considered in breach of the spirit of its own contract where it punishes users for any kind of free speech. Because the spirit of the contract was for the ostensible purpose of founding a free speech forum. This is why the user is agreeing to it – so they'll have somewhere to freely express their opinions etc. Beyond even the legalistic significance here though, a site that acts in such a way, or misrepresents itself in a similar manner, is engaged in an exercise of bad faith and so is acting with clear immorality.

The moral significance being considered at present is obviously not limited to social media platforms though. In any kind of exchange there are moral considerations which go beyond the rule of law and, indeed, are more fundamental than the laws themselves. Laws after all are created to serve broader underlying principles and in regards to free speech this consists in things like the value of mutual tolerance and the widespread social benefits which such a general attitude provides. Because the world is a better place for everyone, regardless of specific fluctuations in advantage or disadvantage, when such a commitment prevails – although this naturally depends on good faith social practices where people are consistent when it comes to adhering to the social values they themselves proclaim. If everywhere you say that freedom of speech is a good thing but in reality you betray this principle then you are acting immorally – and the same is true of any principle. Plus, anyone who exercises a greater freedom in speech than they tolerate in others is quite obviously a hypocrite.

Hypocrisy in fact probably gets right to the root of what is immoral. We can judge someone's actions independently of what they claim or believe is right but, if they're consistent in these two respects, it's hard to see how we can say they're being immoral. If I can will something on myself which I try to impose on others then I am being morally consistent aren't I? In such a context I must think the thing that's being willed is good because it's good enough for me; at least in principle. And that sets the ethical foundations for imposing obligations, legal, moral, and whatever, on anyone else. In this way a person can be justified in punishing tax evaders if they themselves pay all the taxes they legally owe, and so on. But not otherwise.

With regards to power, and free speech specifically, it is more than a question of what we're allowed to do by law or by whatever others means are in our favor. To be moral in this regard we have to not just be willing but even desirous that a greater power would behave the same towards us, if our position was reversed, as we would to a lesser power. I should run a social website then not just with a user agreement I can accept but also in a way that applies the agreement in a manner I'd want for myself. For the most part I think this means power wielded in a charitable and generous manner since this seems to be what most people favor for themselves. Similarly, I should engage people not just with a consistent set of personal rules but also in the manner I'd ideally like to be treated, all rules aside. Now this doesn't do anything to justify morality, it merely shows us that morality is only possible within the outlined context. Morality then doesn't consist entirely in moral rules but, more importantly, in an attitude that conscientiously exerts itself in fulfilling the best realization of its own principles.

To truly believe in the merits of free speech then entails speaking in a manner that strives towards the liberation of all voices, both from their oppressors and from whatever internal forces shackle them. Short of this, we will all be engaged, in the deepest part of our own self, in our own silencing and the silencing of others.

The Concept of Free Will – A Chess Analogy

A lot of people take philosophical issue with the idea of freedom and, if human beings are free, this is certainly an interesting thing to be passionate about. Of course, the skepticism towards Free Will is based on many well-grounded observations which shouldn't be summarily dismissed; as such, said objections will be properly addressed in any valid explanation of Free Will. Among these, causation, motive, and structure, are at the heart of the most formidable claims of the opposition so they will be spoken of in turn. In order to focus on the essence of Free Will however, a simplified scenario without extraneous details is desirable; so further discussion now will proceed in reference to the game of chess.

Chess is a game of strict rules, which might make it seem a strange context in which to try and illustrate Free Will. If you can disprove an argument in its state of greatest advantage though, you have done the most you can to disprove it. Therefore, chess is really the ideal context in which to make the case for Free Will. And before expanding to discuss the game as a comprehensive whole, it would be interesting to begin from the imaginary perspective of the individual chess pieces themselves. Because the chess battlefield is almost a parable in itself.

Each kind of chess piece has a unique move set that's defined by different degrees of freedom. The Queen for example is the obvious candidate for being the most free and the Pawns the least. Bishops and Rooks meanwhile have different angles of movement but an equal range of freedom within these. Knights on the other hand have less of a range of freedom than either but possess unique abilities that no other pieces have, not even the Queen. And as for the King, well the King competes with Pawns at the bottom of the freedom hierarchy because while they can move in any direction like a Queen, they can only move one tile and are the preferred target of all the other piece's attacks. Now that all the inhabitants of the chess board have been covered, notice that nothing in regards to Free Will has actually been discussed. But this means Free Will isn't defined by degrees of

freedom, neither in range or quality, and what that shows is that the structure of the environment is irrelevant. Adherence to rules is neither here nor there when it comes to Free Will. Even in the case of Pawns, where they sometimes have no other options than to stay put or move forward one tile, this does nothing to infringe on the qualitative distinction defining an act of choice. And as long as Free Will has any choice at all, even the least choice, it has a means to express and fulfill itself. So structure is irrelevant and that's a check to the hard determinists.

Moving on, the singular objective in the game of chess, the goal of winning, might seem like it offers something against Free Will. But this could only be true for an agent of pure calculation (Which of course wouldn't have any truly independent agency at all) In obvious contrast to that, the game of chess is played, and can be played, with a remarkable variety of purposes. Even where winning remains the dominant paradigm, one can still desire to win in endlessly different ways. A player for example could arbitrarily choose to play using a range of styles and strategies. Meaning even within the narrow constraints of winning, Free Will is still capable of expressing itself. And chess doesn't even need to be played to win. One can play it to lose, to entertain, to frustrate one's opponent, and for a whole host of other reasons. What this reveals is not just that strict rule parameters don't affect the freedom of motivation, they don't even infringe on the potential for any particular motive to be distinguished by an infinite variety of influencing sub-motives. So motivation, contrary to the idea that it constrains the Will, actually preserves the Will's freedom through unlimited modulation. Any individual move, tactic, or strategy, can have multiple motives. Again, a check to hard determinism.

Since the pieces on a chessboard though are only dead things moved by external movers, they would seem to offer a symbolic final say on the matter of Free Will. But because what defines Free Will lies in its origination rather than its extension, disproving Free Will would require more; it would require showing that the Will itself was not the primary source in any chain of influences and that its own influence did not arise out of freedom. This is more than demonstrating that the chess pieces are dead then; it further demands that they are shown to move unfreely, as either an unfree effect or an unfree cause. The existence of Free Will, rather than its location, is the Matter-at-Issue. And with this we see that Free Will could only be disproven teleologically; disproven only by logic in metaphysical argument. No analysis of any particular chessboard will do.

If freedom can't be reduced to chessboards, if it isn't decided within any material order or form of structure it, by definition, cannot reside in a chain of influences. It transcends such things. To say otherwise is to reify freedom when we know it's an abstraction. So the Will cannot be made unfree through influence. The chess analogy here would be that a player's moves can't force their opponent's moves. Even in an end game situation of compulsion, one's opponent can always just forfeit. Or walk away. And now we are left with one possible counter argument; that, regardless of external things, the Will itself isn't free. Or more clearly, that the Will itself is incapable of willing. Because it's already been shown that peculiarities of circumstance, the states of a chessboard, are irrelevant. To say that the Will is incapable of willing though is to assert that the Will is a nonsensical concept, like a round square. Something then that's certainly not incompatible with anything else but instead is just meaningless. However, for such a thing to be true, there could not even be the least degree of Will at all. Nothing could be willed and no one could will anything. Something which requires not merely a commitment to the idea that the Will is an illusion but that it is literally unimaginable. Because even if the idea of willfulness could be extrapolated from external perceptions, this could only be done by a genuinely willful agent. Because they could only make an inference from a perception and create a concept from it by the actual imagination of said concept. As such the inward recognition of Free Will is itself sufficient proof of it, just as the perception of chess as a game of rules is proof that a game of rules you can call chess is possible. The Will and its freedom are therefore absolutely proven by inward reflection and if one can't perceive their own freedom it's because they're a robot. As robots though they're fortunate in that they're incapable of willing themselves to be anything else.

With this knowledge of Free Will, the absolute and fundamental freedom of the Will is established. No oppressive order can ever destroy it because it does not exist within the order of destructible things. The Will is forever free, forever pure in and of itself. As for hard determinism? Many might still cling to it but they'll do so without any real justification. In other words – checkmate.

The Happy Prince and Other Stories

A Review

Oscar Wilde is synonymous with decadence. He is the aesthete *ne plus ultra*, the presiding cynic of the agora, passing a harsh but languid judgement on the *fin de siècle*. As someone who from first acquaintance always admired both his prose and poetry, and who considers *The Picture of Dorian Gray* to be an incontestable masterpiece, I have nevertheless long attributed a certain unhealthiness to his writing. The pathology I perceived in him was that of superficiality because, aside from dandyism, I wasn't aware that he was an advocate for much of anything. *Art for art's sake* certainly didn't sound impressive. And of course this wasn't helped by the fact that Wilde, being the perfect figure to fashion into an archetype to represent decadence, was unfortunately but predictably subjected to a sort of hyper-caricaturization by society in order to provide this. Everything that's turned into an idol after all is done so in the service of its priests and their followers. The idols themselves never have a say in this.

But that's the Wilde we find in old tomes of quotations and copious literary magazine references. That's the Wilde regurgitated at cocktail parties held in ritzy lofts by those whose sole tact in conversation is to parasitize the wit of others. And it's a false Wilde; a mutilation of the man. The resigned sarcasm we come across throughout *The Importance of Being Earnest* for example, as well as his other famous works, apparently was more of a reaction to the society of the ruling class than anything else. I can say this with absolute confidence here because in *The Happy Prince and Other Stories* we find the exact opposite. There's so much heart and raw emotion in these fables it's astounding. Yes they're still full of witticisms and mockery at the expense of humanity's flaws, but there's a pervasive sweetness and sincerity balancing these, a spirit of truth more powered by love than loathing.

He wrote these stories for his children so it makes sense that he would reveal more of himself in them; more of his real values. Being Oscar Wilde was a job, a persona he manufactured as a matter of career advancement, but beneath that was a much deeper human being who cared for the world in his own wounded way. Previously I've contrasted him in the privacy of my mind with Kierkegaard as an example of someone his equal in aphoristic talents and satire but of a much more substantial character; now I will no longer do that.

What will no doubt be surprising to many first time readers of this collection, as it was to myself, was the persistent theme of self-sacrifice in the service of others and the spiritual transfiguration that arises from this. Given that and the repeated emphasis on the centrality of redemption, it's clear that Christian literature and religion were a dominant influence on Wilde. Again, another surprise to me. Less dramatic a discovery perhaps, but still unexpected, was the full display of Wilde's abilities as a prose stylist. I never would have thought to put him in the same category as James Joyce or Cormac McCarthy before but there are several passages in this collection, those contained in 'The Birthday of the Infanta' and 'The Fisherman and His Soul' being at the forefront of my mind, which certainly place him in the same rank. When I used to think of Wilde's prose it was something of a paragon for me of purity and functionality but, to label the following that, would be a gross disservice:

Yes, she must certainly come to the forest and play with him. He would give her his own little bed, and would watch outside the window till dawn, to see that the wild, horned cattle did not harm her, nor the gaunt wolves creep too near the hut. And at dawn he would tap the shudders and wake her, and they would go out and dance together all the day long. It was really not a bit lonely in the forest. Sometimes a bishop rode through on his white mule, reading out of a painted book. Sometimes in their green velvet caps, and their jerkins of tanned deerskin, the falconers passed by, with hooded hawks on their wrists. At vintage-time came the grape-treaders, with purple hands and feet, wreathed with glossy ivy and carrying dripping skins of wine; and the charcoal burners sat round their huge braziers at night, watching the dry logs charring slowly in the fire, and roasting chestnuts in the ashes, and the robbers came out of their caves and made merry with them. Once, too, he had seen a beautiful procession winding up the long dusty road to Toledo. The monks went in front singing sweetly, and carrying bright banners and crosses of gold, and then, in silver armour, with matchlocks and pikes, came the soldiers, and in their midst

walked three barefooted men, in strange yellow dresses painted all over with wonderful figures, and carrying lighted candles in their hands. Certainly there was a great deal to look at in the forest, and when she was tired he would find a soft bank of moss for her, or carry her in his arms, for he was very strong, though he knew that he was not tall. He would make her a necklace of red bryony berries, that would be quite as pretty as the white berries that she wore on her dress, and when she was tired of them, she would throw them away, and he would find her others.

Because of how long it took before I even became aware of the existence of this collection and their muted recognition in Wilde's own oeuvre, let alone the broader literary canon, I have to infer that they're not that highly esteemed among the literati. Which just goes to show how worthless the literati are as the custodians and curators of great literature. As far as the quality of their prose, these short stories belong right next to Joyce's 'Dubliners.' As fables go, they're in the same league as the 'The Jungle Book' and 'Watership Down' and exemplify the best of what you can find in Aesop or the Brother's Grimm. And, if you want to cultivate a love for literature in them and give them the gifts of imagination and wonder, all while bonding over a beautifully written book, these are the stories that you should be reading to your children. Discover them together if you haven't already.

The Rationalization of Pricing

An Outline of the Solution

Introduction

The rationalization of pricing depends on an equilibrium of demand that can only be set in nonzero time given any non-rational state. This equilibrium of pricing furthermore can only arise through a dialectical engagement between all invested parties (Consumers, employees, manufacturers, etc) Fluctuations in demand naturally reset even local rationalizations back to non-rational states and so equilibrium here can only be achieved holistically. Note also that the general principles being articulated extend beyond pure economics to essentially include the whole of social motivations – wherever demand exists and its fulfillment is contingent on social interactions, equilibrium will always depend on some process of social exchange.

Pricing and Demand

What should things cost? The easy answer to this is that they should cost whatever supply and demand decides. Reducing the equation to focus simply on demand, since zero supply would make the question of demand irrelevant and costs will otherwise, regardless of supply, always be contingent on actual demand (People will never consensually purchase something if its costs exceed their desire, regardless of how small the disparity) we are still left with the question of how demand can actually decide prices. It's also reasonable to infer that there must be some consistent mechanism here which can be outlined in a general way without resorting to technical details. Attempting to do just that, I will now proceed to discuss various philosophical aspects of pricing theory and offer some answers to

what I perceive to be the most critical questions. The results of this I hope will provide a good permanent foundation for the further development of economic theory in a variety of significant areas.

By the phrase “equilibrium of demand” I mean that demand has settled into some specifiable determination with respect to the value of any good or service – indeed anything commodifiable. Obviously the rationalization of pricing then depends on the rationalization of all the individuals who make said determinations of value. So everyone involved in every part of any economic exchange. Now, one can ask why rationalization doesn’t simply depend on the seller and purchaser but of course value determinations will affect every point of acquisition in an exchange. As such the value determination of a good will encompass its entire economic history; meaning the entire history in which it was held by someone capable of engaging in economic activity. This isn’t to suggest that sellers and purchasers have to be aware of the entire history of every commodity they exchange; only that they must have a means to rationally determine the value of said commodity which would be equivalent to what a rational agent would determine given full knowledge of it. Because otherwise they wouldn’t have sufficient means to recognize the actual value of the commodity which they are involved in an exchange for. Rational determinations can only be made by access to all relevant information about a commodity. This much is obvious. Information that has any positive or negative impact with respect to the metric of valuation will always instigate a fluctuation in pricing. People will adjust their expectations regarding how much they can sell something for and how much it will cost them to purchase it.

Knowing just the past then isn’t good enough. Sellers also have to be able to make rational inferences about the future. Prior to that they can’t rationally evaluate whatever it is they are seeking to exchange. Again, the equilibrium of demand is what’s crucial. If there is any foreseeable chaos in future demand then pricing becomes a guessing game and at best an individual will have the means to rationally determine only a range of value. But then that’s not full rationalization. To speak of temporary equilibrium then isn’t to speak genuinely of a real equilibrium at all; it’s obvious that equilibrium means precisely future equilibrium. That is to say, equilibrium for all time. Even if pricing were to stabilize for a thousand years still one could not make fully rational determinations of value if that stability could not be guaranteed to continue as a result of a rational assessment. And immediately we can eliminate the possibility that the future of

pricing is foreseeable finitely. We can't be certain about tomorrow if we can't be certain about a hundred years from now because the rational means by which we would determine the former are contingent on there being no possibility for any radical instances of fluctuation. If the situation is unstable enough to allow any radical events ever, the determination of values becomes imperfectly rational.

Does this mean that the rationalization of pricing is impossible? If we are considering full rationalization then yes it does. The future simply can't be prophesized perfectly by any rational means. Economics though is properly more concerned with practical results than perfect epistemological methods – as such we can ask whether practical rationalization is possible. To this I'd also say yes. Clearly the more relevant information about a commodity we possess, and the more significant said information is, the better we'll be at determining its value. We can therefore still inquire productively into the rationalization of pricing and the mechanisms by which this would be achieved, only now accepting that we can only ever hope to possess methods by which the determination of value is converged on. Perfect rationality then is irrational in a sense similar to how an irrational number is irrational. No final determination can be made. At the same time though, exact determinations can be made at specifiable ranges. What said determinations will depend on though is having access to enough relevant information and this will only be obtainable through some form of dialectical engagement with the other individuals whose desires affect the value of any commodity. Regarding the social aspects that contribute to an equilibrium of demand, I will now speak at some length.

Coming to Terms

Despite appearances perhaps and despite popular prejudice, one can say confidently that economics is grounded in trust. This isn't to say that any economy that has ever existed was fundamentally fair. The history of economically complex societies is unanimous to the contrary. Even in the most predatory and acrimonious circumstances though, the fact is obvious that exchanges are only possible where there is some level of trust. If a person being offered an exchange has no hope of self-preservation in conducting that transaction, they won't go through with it. Imagine a professional assassin doing business with an employer for example – the

employers must be able to convince themselves that the assassin they're hiring isn't going to kill them. Either because they can't or they won't. But while specific issues of trust can be circumvented through various measures (Only meeting assassins from the other side of bullet proof glass for example) they can never be completely eliminated between fundamentally independent agents. The total absence of trust therefore would simply lead to avoidance. And obviously economy can't exist in those conditions.

From this simple fact the importance of communication is established. Since economy depends on voluntary actions, anyone who wants to engage in the exchange of commodities has an incentive to encourage socialization, the rule of law, and trust in general. One can see for example how important the reputation of a bank is for people to trust it with their money – and keep in mind how lucrative banking is. The opportunity for profit then ultimately depends on the existence of public confidence. Consider the absence of this for example where a customer perhaps decides to change which bank they use due to a sudden dramatic shift in fees. The fees themselves aren't necessarily significant though. Or at least they needn't be the most significant concern and the customer in question might still have been able to find a work around if they really wanted to keep their bank. The thing is however, they probably no longer have a reason to trust the bank to not try and exploit them. If the bank has made what in their view was a predatory action towards them, they should naturally seek out a new financial institution to do business with. And presumably the bank will never get their business back because they have no confidence in the bank any more – even if the bank were to react to customer losses by liquidating their entire management there still wouldn't be a real reason to trust the bank's corporate culture. In such a scenario, communication wouldn't necessarily be able to repair the situation even in principle (Since an impression of deep deception had already been made) but this does show how even highly rational agents like large financial institutions can alienate people due to their decisions. That said, maybe the bank had taken into account the customers they were going to lose due to their new fee policy and, because it would still generate more income, they chose to implement it anyways. On the other hand, it's possible they didn't and that possibility by itself is enough to illustrate the importance of having information and engaging in communication.

Telepathy presumably won't be widely practical for some time; although eventually we should be able to broadcast our thoughts directly through the

internet. Most people however probably won't choose to do that for a while. In either case, communication is not a given even where we have the means (In this case technological) to achieve it. Communication rather depends on the active solicitation of a more passive individual by a more assertive individual. Someone has to initiate communication and furthermore in a bidirectional way. The more assertive individual will more often initiate their own sharing as well as their own inquiring. Sometimes an individual might not be equally assertive in both respects but the obligation with both will still be theirs, especially if they can infer the passive nature of other individuals with regards to the circumstances of the communication between them. In both respects then they are also committed to incentivization although in admittedly different ways. With what they wish to share they must succeed in convincing others that this is worth their attention, which must be done through the act of sharing itself, and with their inquiries they must supplement these with some kind of adequate enticement if that already hasn't been established.

Every individual of course is ultimately responsible for incentivizing others to participate in economic exchanges with them. Both sellers and buyers must seek each other out. From this it's also established how important it is to have locations where said exchanges can take place but, while individual buyers and sellers are again mutually obligated to engage each other, there are also special interest groups that emerge now who will have a unique relation and commitment to the welfare of a market. These are the individuals who assume responsibility for the integrity of the marketplaces where exchanges transpire. While various degrees of freedom are possible for all markets, a market can only exist if its venue of exchange isn't completely laissez-faire since marketplaces will always require some degree of structure. There will always be norms of expected behavior then and the responsibility for enforcing these naturally do not fall on random participants in the market but rather to those most invested in the market's welfare – those who have the most capital of course. What this shows is that markets are inescapably plutocratic – just as fishermen have more reason to be invested in ocean ecology, so too individuals and organizations most invested in economy (Governments, financial institutions, leading industrialists and investors, etc) must almost inevitably play a greater role in the administration of markets than others. It would be irrational of them not to of course since their own commitments invest them in such concerns. Conversely, it would simply be absurd if the chairman of a securities and exchange commission were a practicing ascetic. Just as organisms migrate to

places that suit their ecological niche and undergo adaptations to conform to their circumstances, so too we can infer that the underlying nature of marketplaces themselves shape their authorities and, that individuals who assume said responsibilities, will be transformed accordingly. Incentivization then is ultimately the expression of environmental requirements through the medium of individuals. In this sense even freedom itself and the apparently lesser determined aspects of culture and society are themselves preserved in the environmental background that determines incentives.

Needs and desires of course aren't manifest instantaneously but instead gradually and through the medium of the individual participants in an economy. This is why the rationalization of pricing is a dialectical process. Individuals with separate motivations will engage each other in commodity exchanges and, through their interactions, will work out some mutually agreeable price for the commodity being transferred. By agreeable here though I don't mean preferential since obviously coercion and circumstance can impel a seller to sell for less than they would like or a buyer to buy for more than they would like. Even crime though can be said to involve some kind of agreement if it involves something more than brute force or deception – if a victim is being coerced into giving up something rather than having it just taken from them. But such instances are clearly not allowable in a rationalized economy because economy is fundamentally grounded in voluntary exchange. Theft always destabilizes value because it disincentivizes the effort to acquire commodities and the effort expended in generating value (Why acquire anything or exert any effort if it's not going to profit you?) This is why societies with high corruption indexes have inefficient economies; pessimism suppresses the normal incentives to engage in economy and those who contribute to the creation of wealth are inadequately rewarded for their efforts. To maximize wealth creation one has to optimize return on investment; people will be rewarded exactly in proportion to their contributions. In what manner will said contributions be determined? Obviously by the sum of every demand expressed through individuals participating in an economy and in proportion to their own contributions. A dialectical process then that must play itself out through the limits of socialization, environmental pressures, and technological development.

Rational prices are those prices which take into account all price influencing factors, just as much as the state of any physical system expresses, and is determined by, the totality of physical forces exerting influence on it. Unlike

physical states though which are always naturally determined, prices can be inaccurate due to artificial factors. Because a rational price is not simply whatever price a particular exchange involves but rather the price which is most conducive to general economy. A price should promote productivity within an economy in proportion to a value and that value is determined by the totality of demand; so what the commodity can offer to society as a whole then. This fact itself is enough to rationally incentivize everyone engaged in economy, but especially market custodians belonging to the plutocratic order, to promote and support the development of efficient mechanisms for voluntary information exchange. Fortunately we see that is already taking place at the present time but it's best if this is made as clear as possible because individuals and organizations can still act against their own interests here, just as they can elsewhere, due to their own errors. One of the most important factors assisting them in overcoming their own mistakes though is of course the feedback they can receive from all the other participants in the economy.

Chaos Through Disorder

One of the primary values of any law is the fact that it allows people to regulate their expectations. Laws against murder for example, with effective enforcement, allow people to go about their business every day with a reasonable expectation that they won't be murdered. If they didn't have this reasonable expectation though then they'd have to take precautions against said possibilities and that'd involve expending time and energy in things that should otherwise be superfluous. Lawlessness then multiplies inefficiencies. People can no longer devote themselves entirely to positive creative work but rather have to sacrifice some of that to have the security necessary to pursue some smaller portion of their original ambitions. Good laws conversely contribute to a well ordered society and to the conditions necessary to establish efficient markets. More specifically, markets themselves must be kept in good order to optimize their exchange efficiency and to attract their maximum capacity of participants. Without either of these two things, the economic power of a market cannot be fully unleashed. One can consider optimal markets then to have certain characteristics analogous to optimally aerodynamic shapes. Likewise, while not all aircraft will be exactly the same (In accordance with their different functions) they'll still share certain

similarities of form; so too markets will differ from one another according to their functions (Cattle markets versus bond markets for example) but still have fundamental properties in common to the extent that either operates efficiently. As such there's an outer limit to the diversity of efficient markets in general and this can be considered the principle of being well ordered. That is to say, to the extent that said markets are actually able to reduce pricing fluctuations through demand equilibrium.

Because any economy that's even partially organic must almost inevitably develop localized variations due to localized stimuli, for instance as a result of the autonomous motivations of the participants in that economic region and environmental irregularities there, it's feasible that well-ordered (Highly rational) markets and commodity exchanges can emerge independent of a wider prevailing non-rational state. Unless the rationalized regions have a significantly greater advantage with respect to the non-rational areas adjacent to them (Being much better organized for example with greater capital and this more securely controlled) in all possible competitive interactions, they will remain vulnerable to non-rational forces that can overpower and destroy their rationalized condition. A small well-organized city state which was surrounded by a massively populated aggressive region, would potentially not be rationalized to any meaningful extent given the lack of demand equilibrium it had genuinely secured. What's notable here is the fact that any dialectical system, in this specific instance an economy, cannot be properly said to be bounded if there are dialectical influences that can disturb it from outside said boundaries. The true borders of a dialectical system, or at least at an economically practical level, are circumscribed by the sum of all its dialectical connections. For any economy on Earth in the present era then this means the world. The entire planet.

Chaos itself inevitably arises out of states of disorder. Said states can be called the matrices of chaos – distributing it outwards in a radial fashion along all dialectical avenues. Primarily through media, telecommunications, and personal interactions – if we aren't going so far as to include things as extreme as war. What's most significant about this fact though is that local states of disorder can negatively impact highly rationalized areas. Consider for example where revolutions have started due to small isolated incidents. This reveals the catalytic nature of disorder. It only takes a single cue ball to send an entire billiard table into upheaval. What this indicates then is that rationalization cannot secure itself even

while allowing any isolated regions of disorder. Agitations from these always have the potential to instigate broader conflicts. The answer is obvious though as to how this problem can be addressed – instead of allowing disorder to fester, those groups that are most invested in economic rationalization (Nation states and NGOs alike) must take it on themselves to sincerely address the demands of all interest groups who participate in the world economy. Unless efforts are undertaken to rationalize all local regions (Meaning provide them with responsive systems of government and unrestricted access to global markets) then the world’s economic optimization cannot proceed.

The holistic solution to non-rationality furthermore cannot be achieved by a pyramidal kind of top down approach since the desired solution, the equilibrium of demand, will depend on actions responsive to all interest groups in proportion to their participation in the economy. Just as effective governments have proportional representation, so too efficient economies can only be regulated by the full feedback of their participants. Imagine if a corporation tried to organize itself without any consideration for its employee’s needs and desires? Imagine how poorly it would function. Of course we see the opposite in the most successful and dynamic corporations where positive incentivization in their upper echelons overwhelmingly predominates. If the international community is ever going to produce a truly rationalized and integrated economy, it’s going to have to adopt a similar policy of positive incentivization and extend this to all areas of employment. As it is, only a few sectors of employment receive this kind of enticement but, without its full expansion, productivity will remain at inefficient levels. Although resistance to this kind of thinking is predictable, it’s not justifiable, since any possible alternative here would be predicated on the promotion of non-rational elements. If rational employees are the most efficient and desirable, since they will have rational motivations (Which are preferable) then using non-rational (Coercive etc) means to incentivize them will never produce optimal results. This is why the prevalence of slavery for example eroded in a natural and evolutionary way. Slaves require overseers and other forms of capital wasted in systems of confinement; plus they will likely only do the minimal amount of work they need to. So slavery can never be an efficient form of economy. To the contrary, the emancipation and enlightenment of the entire population is essential to achieving optimal productivity. This is obvious from even the most cursory comparison of cultures, societies, and nation states nowadays; those which are healthiest are closest to being universal in their positive distribution of value.

It should be noted that the above considerations are still grounded in pricing conditions since any form of remuneration is always a kind of pricing. As such the rational treatment of employees is an expression of rational pricing on an employee's contributions. Disorder itself is a kind of non-rational pricing since it can only result from the lack of proper incentivization for the institution of order. As such, order cannot have been priced properly. Even legislation can be encompassed within the framework of pricing since rational legislation will likewise have a true demand that is reflected (Although not in a specific form of commodity) by the entirety of the pricing for monetized actions that then leads to the establishment of said legislation. This can be followed back through the chains of causality, all the way to where children are incentivized to develop rational perspectives in school and teachers are incentivized to teach material that promotes rational thinking and values. Opportunities and penalties then are themselves kinds of pricing since they will have values (Degrees of consequence) specifically selected to more strongly incentivize and de-incentivize actions in proportion to the assessed contributions of those. And this too will depend on a general framework of rationalization.

One of the most difficult problems with rationalization though is where highly rational systems and organizations are corrupted by non-rational influences; generally in the form of hierarchical inducement. A complex and orderly machine for example can be used to spread disorder if it is operated in a certain way. Similarly, rationally developed markets can become dominated by non-rational exchanges while still preserving their rational mechanisms. In a sense we could say that these markets have been hijacked for non-rational purposes but it must be admitted that rational systems are often developed specifically for non-rational goals. Why would anyone construct a rational system though? They would only have reason to do so if they valued rationality itself. The problem then is that individuals who create and utilize rational systems do themselves and others a disservice by not following their rationality far enough. If I value rational means shouldn't I value rational ends? Of course. The first commitment already logically contains a general commitment to rationality and, even if someone might wish to argue that there are values independent of rationality, how would they propose to determine these? By rationality? If not then we cannot speak of any meaningful determination at all since it must result from arbitrary (Non-rational) means. If we acknowledge that rationality itself is necessary for determining real values then we

are already admitting that real values will themselves be rational in every meaningful sense.

In light of the above considerations we can also now define the concept of corruption. An individual, organization, or system, can said to be corrupt when it is committed to inconsistent actions. All forms of parasitism in a social or economic context for example are corrupt because they place value on the very things they are injuring. To live off something in a way that jeopardizes it is corrupt; it's simply cancerous and being cancerous is the essence of being corrupt. A corrupt elected official after all is someone who acts against the interests of the very people who put them in office. In a more general sense we can say that any system is corrupt when it contains elements that attack its own vitality (The health and potential of the system as a whole) This includes the health and vitality of all its individual elements too though since said elements are what compose the system in its entirety. A system is therefore free of corruption precisely to the extent that it contributes to the realization of the full potential of its elements. Such a system therefore can be said to have rationally priced its own elements; to have recognized their true value. This gives us the means by which the influence of corruption can be overcome. By the dissemination of rational pricing of course. Corruption is only possible where non-rational motives exist, where some arbitrary end which produces disorder is perceived as a gain. The desire for disorder though can only be the product of disordered thinking. Therefore the intentional perpetuation of disorder is always founded on false perceptions. That is to say, some falsely contrived (Non-rational) ascription of pricing. For example, any criminal who breaks a law undermines the very system which otherwise protects them, and not just against criminal acts equivalent to their own but to all kinds of criminal acts. To transgress a law is reject the authority of the law as a whole (It becomes evident here that revolution can only be justified where authority itself is more harmful to lawful society than individual acts of disobedience)

The importance of a holistic approach to the rationalization of pricing is indicated by the fact that any vector of change (Reform policies for instance) can only have a utility determined by their own internal characteristics. To effectively fight corruption for example one must be free of corruption oneself; the consequence of inconsistency will be to create instability. The contradiction between promoting a corruption free society while acting corruptly will void the effectiveness of what is being promoted. This is why for example effective leaders

always lead by example. If one does not work hard, one cannot expect one's employees to work hard. Here we see another instance of how pricing is rationalized. The employer prices hard work as a genuine value and so practices this value themselves; in accordance with this they contribute to an equilibrium in demand. They are not making demands that they themselves are undermining. Imagine if someone though tried to sell a product and then it was found out that they themselves wouldn't use it even though it would supposedly meet their own needs. What would happen to the price of that product? It would plummet. More generally, the value of everything must be worked out dialectically to determine the true supply and demand state and from this a rational price assigned to it. While perfect equilibrium will be prevented by various factors in fluctuation, including things like technological development, it should fluctuate in something like a relative equilibrium with them. For example, the introduction of better and more capable robotics in society will produce a downward trend in the pricing of the affected forms of manual labor. The important thing though is that information is disseminated publically otherwise rational pricing can't proceed; there simply isn't enough to go on in order to put a rational price on things. This is furthermore to society's disadvantage.

While some individual non-rational actors will seek to maximize their own advantage by trying to control the flow of information, the tendency towards this will constrain the rational pricing of things for society as a whole and so will impede price optimization and economic optimization. If people don't know that a vaccine can actually vaccinate people against a horrible disease for example then the vaccine won't be produced and distributed. So people need to know what is valuable in order to make optimal use of it. Again, the absence of rational pricing contributes to disorder because individuals are constantly having to confront situations where the prices they've perceived things to have don't match the real value they find in them and this inevitably leads to correcting shifts in action. If a large number of people purchase a stock which is suddenly revealed to be vastly overvalued, chaos will erupt. If it had been rationally priced from the beginning though it would have been exchanged in an orderly way. This is clear enough for any mutually honest transaction but of course the problem of dishonesty, of deception, complicates things. However, deception and dishonesty themselves are only valuable through non-rational pricing (No one wants to be on the exploited ends of such exchanges and yet acting exploitively oneself contributes to the establishment of an exploitive environment) Furthermore the larger an institution

is the more it has to lose from non-rational pricing; a government for instance is invested in fair transactions since it would collapse if all its citizens simply stopped paying their taxes. Every non-rational act though has non-rational consequences as it circulates through the dialectical processes of society.

Consistency of valuation is itself something that must be valued in order for rational pricing to proceed. One of the main things needed to incentivize this is a framework of laws in which all relevant pricing information is made universally accessible. This will protect the economy from the various chaotic influences of non-rational interference. Running efficiently as a result of this, the engine of the economy will be unleashed enough to set it on the path towards true optimization. The fast pace of progress in our own era for example is directly related to how widely information is available and the wider opportunities provided to individuals to pursue actions in the framework of highly-rationally priced values. All the elements in society (Individual people, corporations, etc) are able to more correctly perceive values and trends and so can act more efficiently to meet the demands of progress (Working towards worthwhile ends and investing correctly for example) This is what generates wealth. Of course said wealth is only properly distributed when actions are being rewarded in proportion to their rationality, to their service of rational pricing itself and the rationalization of society as a whole. Wealth is precisely that which creates demand equilibrium since everywhere it satisfies individual demands; so a society then is wealthy precisely in proportion to how well it satisfies all its demands.

Conclusions

In response to my earlier question; things should cost whatever their value is in relation to an overall rational pricing framework. Regardless of whether pricing is meant to incentivize or disincentivize purchasing (Contrast older bakery items and cigarettes here) the disparity from how they might otherwise be evaluated is a result of their real value in the broader context. Therefore the broadest possible context will get us the closest we can come to the true values of things and this naturally cannot be accessed unless relevant information on all the available demand conditions is provided. In order for individuals making decisions though to act rationally for the benefit of society and themselves, some minimal level of

rationality must be fostered in them so as to appreciate the merits of rational prices themselves. Every delusional person after all is susceptible to making non-rational decisions as a direct result of their own non-rational values. They can actively work towards ends which have personally negative consequences. One can consider something like heroin addiction to be an extreme case of this. And, just as with the example of heroin addiction, all non-rational pursuits don't simply have negative consequences for the individuals who engage in them but furthermore for society and the economy as a whole. The optimal contributions that each individual could be making are lost as a result of the capital being wasted in non-rational activity or stagnation. Capital here including energy, talent, potential, as well as material goods. The problem of rational pricing then is itself grounded in the non-rationality of the value determining agents.

Demand fluctuation however should be corrected in proportion to the real implementation of a rational pricing framework. Once a thing has been determined to lack real value for example, its demand stabilizes in the vicinity of zero (Depending on how total the absence of value is) Practices and commodities that have otherwise been widespread will simply disappear on their own from markets once they have been priced at zero so no further mechanism is necessary. Rational pricing by itself will reshape the economy into its optimal condition. The only intervention that could be needed is with respect to the exchange mediums themselves; specifically the actual economic markets where transactions are transpiring and, more generally, the relevant laws and enforcement agencies which encompass said exchanges. These too of course will be instituted in accordance with a rational pricing framework, being themselves rational values, and their necessity and the necessity of their sanctity becomes obvious once a rational framework is accepted. In order to maximize economic growth and productivity, rational pricing itself will first have to become preeminent in social policy. This is little more however than finding the most efficient route to a desired destination.

An economy is a system composed of numerous independent individuals in various states of competition and cooperation with one another. For any of these individuals to maximize their own exchanges they will first have to be able to rationally determine the price of things. Since said determinations depend inevitably on the totality of demand, no individual by themselves can even in principle make rational evaluations without exchanging information with other individuals. Already a foundation for cooperation is being laid. From this though it

furthermore follows that it will be in the interest of every individual to have rational markets and rational societies in which they can pursue their own interests; again another and higher threshold of cooperation is reached. With each additional rationalization of society though the interests of a rational individual are themselves fulfilled and from this it follows that all rational individuals are rational precisely to the extent that they are fully cooperative with other rational individuals. The equilibrium of demand that can only be achieved through lawful and honest society (Where there is zero information disparity) is itself the only rationally desirable goal. To desire any other kind of society is to desire one that lacks full optimization and so to desire something less than fully rational. It is the desire to not only be part of something less than it could be but to be less than one's own potential.

The history of not just economics but the whole of nature as we know it attests to a process gradually transcending brute and insentient violence. There is naturally a trend then in evolution for more intelligent forms to emerge out of less intelligent forms. With respect to commodity exchanges and valuation this can only mean an intrinsic trend towards the full rationalization of pricing and that is what we are just beginning to witness in the better parts of the world today. What we have now then is only the choice of whether we will obstruct the fulfillment of an obvious good or whether we will recognize the true opportunity before us and implement the necessary rationalization programs for optimizing our economies. This will in every way result in greater unanimity and fuller equality.

THE TECHNOLOGICAL THREAT TO DEMOCRACY

It almost seems ungrateful to criticize technology. We depend on it more than all our other cultural contributions put together. Whatever good may come from art and philosophy and so on, nothing else is remotely comparable in providing for our comfort. Of course technology isn't a person or lifeform so we have no moral responsibility to it but a resentment of technology does betray a certain sense of ingratitude. In this way, such an attitude is a genuine defect because it obstructs a true appreciation of things. So any criticism of technology should take care to guard itself against meritless enthusiasms. It's easy for us to get carried away here – all of human history attests to our capacity to irrationally contrive monsters.

At the same time, the positive impact technology has had on all our lives makes it tempting to ignore any potential threats it might harbor. Especially ones that don't happen to take the form of ostentatious perils. The dangers of nuclear warfare and bioengineered disasters are, relatively speaking, much easier to avoid. These threats are indisputable and result from well understood manners of jeopardy – human malevolence and negligence. The threat that I identify with technology however is much more intrinsic to the nature of technology itself and as such doesn't result from any sinister application of it. Given that, given how the threat in question is buried within the intrinsic functions of technological progress, it becomes much harder to recognize. But make no mistake – with respect to democracy it is absolutely existential.

Democracy exists because everyone wants to decide matters in their own lives. Ideally, everyone would like total control over their individual fates but, since people have begun living in societies, they've generally accepted the fact that social institutions and rules depend on the spirit of cooperation. In this sense democracy is both practical and idealistic – it gives everyone a say in things while, at the same time, binding individuals to the general will through mutual agreement. Nominally everyone has a vote but nominally the majority decides things. I say nominally because there's always a significant element in any democratic society which is

trying to subvert democracy to their own advantage. Often they succeed. Examining the history of past and present democratic societies with even the most devoted belief in democracy, one will nevertheless find abundant evidence of corruption and treachery among those who exercise power. But despite all its imperfections, democracy has proven itself the only political means by which the people, the masses, can protect their own interests. The less democratic a society is the more exploitation prevails because there's always a proportional decrease in the ability of people to assert themselves politically. Democracy then is extremely important to the majority who don't have large amounts of wealth or powerful political connections with which they could otherwise ensure their own welfare. What a conflict between technology and democracy means then is a conflict between two of our greatest sources of personal advantage and, as such, a conflict whose outcome depends on a higher level of responsibility emerging from the people of the world. If they shrink from this challenge it will only serve to their own ultimate ruin.

So far I haven't clarified what it is about technology that imperils democracy. It's a simple thing really. To understand the nature of the problem though one has to appreciate a couple facts, easily verified. One is that democratic power cannot exist without leverage. No societal power can exist without leverage though. Wherever injustice has been addressed, wherever civil rights have been enshrined in law, wherever oppression has been overcome, it's always been through the force of some greater power exerting itself. Even successful pacifist movements like those led by Gandhi and Martin Luther King were only able to achieve what they sought in so far as they could compel acquiescence. And how did they manage this? Through economic and social pressures. Civil disobedience only works to the extent it can obstruct the desired business of the existing social order. That's its leverage – the threat of continued obstruction. Now I come to the second fact that needs to be understood. Technological progress is currently eroding the leverage of the majority. In a few decades, the masses may not have any say at all.

The ascent of democracy in the modern era begins with the American revolution. The English had an earlier revolution with a similar impetus animating it but this quickly degenerated into Cromwell's dictatorship and produced little of lasting relevance politically. The American revolution on the other hand established something permanent which, however compromised, managed to secure its citizens more powers than they had before. Since then the democratic soul of

American society has been a battlefield over which the forces of liberty and oppression have waged unending war – victories to the former being best exemplified in the expansion of the electorate, labor rights, and social welfare guarantees; victories to the latter meanwhile coming in the form of an increasingly powerful central government dominated by an oligarchic minority and the diminishing powers of oversight the American citizen has had over this. In other democratic societies, similar trends are evident but certainly one finds the clearest expression of what's going on in the internal strife within the United States. If you consider the history of the United States from the 1760s, the years in which a democratic up-swell was building, to the 1960s or there about, one can speak quite confidently of progress and the successes of liberty. Then there's a period of plateau. This would seem inevitable of course because, as a society gets closer to a state of equality and justice, there's less and less room for improvement.

What I see transpiring now however is an erosion of the majority's role in society and this isn't resulting primarily from political pressures but rather economic ones. Technology is making labor superfluous. As a matter of fact, it's not just physical labor that's becoming obsolete but all simple repetitive tasks – even the most highly skilled professions like those of surgeons and lawyers show a susceptibility to automation and, given that robots and computer programs have already proven themselves capable of manufacturing cars and orchestrating huge financial transactions, it seems inevitable that the livelihoods of the working and middle class will be thoroughly eliminated. Fine. Who wants to work a tedious job right? Already talk has begun about a universal basic income and it's not just a good idea – it's a necessity. Soon many people won't have a means to provide for themselves. The amount of jobs that new technologies are going to create is not going to cover a fraction of the millions that are going to be eradicated. Still, what does this have to do with democracy? Well, when the majority of people are reduced to charity for their subsistence (And that's what basic income ultimately is) their leverage in society will be radically decreased. After all, you can't go on strike if you don't have a job. Remembering too the millions of people all around the world who protested the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and how that war went ahead anyways, one should keep in mind here that noise and marching in the streets can alter very little when the establishment has deep stakes involved. So what powers will the people have when they are effectively reduced to beggars? The power to overthrow their governments like the revolutions of the past? Unlikely. A modern state has extraordinary martial resources at its disposal and a disgruntled mob is

swiftly going to find itself outclassed on all fronts. The idea that some kind of underground rebellion could prevail is similarly laughable considering the prevalence of surveillance and the proven abilities of intelligence agencies to infiltrate these kinds of organizations and the media networks who shape public perceptions. What the people are left with then is only their votes and legal rights – the laws which protect these being made by legislators and lobbyists who consistently demonstrate their fidelity to the whims of the oligarchs whenever these conflict with the will of the majority.

The voice of an individual doesn't matter if they have no power. Millions of people starve to death and live their frail lives in nightmarish poverty despite their numbers. The simple fact of being in the majority doesn't amount to anything if said majority has no leverage and, while the majority in the developed world has recently enjoyed a say in their own societies because of how instrumental they've been to their respective industries, they'll soon lose their status as economically useful. What will society look like then? Logically we can infer that the ownership of capital will become increasingly concentrated among a small group of individuals – the more important technology becomes in society the more relative power those who possess and control it will have and this tends to favor a minority of individuals against the majority. The majority also won't be able to climb their way up the economic ladder because hard work and ingenuity will likewise become increasingly redundant given the omnipresence of machine labor and artificial intelligence. Only those who control these will have a real say in things and this means society could in fact become completely bipolar.

Within this century we will very likely reach the point where human effort becomes superfluous to the creation of wealth. As this gradually occurs, the distribution of wealth will increasingly favor those who control the means of production. Democracy requires having an influence in society and this is contingent on being economically relevant. Accordingly, we can see now that humanity is about to confront an extraordinary challenge. Will the majority of its members continue to exercise a say in things? I don't know but I do know one thing – this will be decided in the here and now, while the world still depends on a majority consensus.

UNSONG

Weirdness and Theodicy

If our own world is a kind of shadow or reflection of some transcendental power, a creative force operating towards a definable outcome, then one should be able to discern a great deal about said transcendental power from the details of its creation. Here we don't even need to posit intelligence or design to recognize that the basic nature of a source has a circumscribing influence on its emanations; just as a shadow must acquire its shape from a non-luminous body and a reflection will always contain within itself the image of an environment with formal properties no matter how much that's distorted, so too there must generally be something of the creator within the creation, regardless of how transcendent the creator is. And if, as most forms of theism agree, said creator, said source, is infinite in nature, we should expect a significant amount of weirdness. Because infinity is full of contradictions, full of paradoxes; it encompasses all limits and goes beyond them and negates itself in the process while retaining its eternity. Weirdness then offers a direction towards truth. Where our systems break down, where our explanations are flummoxed, there and only there do we reach the borders of higher realities. In fact, we can borrow from Gödel to summarize the matter. Where our explanations are consistent they cannot be complete. Because the truth does not leave anything out, it must be complete and, being complete, it must then encompass all inconsistencies. In their totality. Meaning said contradictions aren't ultimately reconciled in a process like a Hegelian dialectic but rather they are essential and enduring facets of an ultimate and immortal truth. Meaning the very laws of physics must generate inexplicable things like interference patterns in their elemental material. And so the weirdness endures, *sub specie aeternitatis*.

It's rare for a work of fiction to give much time to such dark realms of metaphysics and rarer still to make these their focus. Scott Alexander's "Unsong" is exceptional in this regard. Beyond its many other merits, most notably a penetrating satirical eye and a stupendous gift for innovative world building that fuses alternative history and Kabbalah, the central worth of the book is really its ability to kindle in the imagination of its readers a zeal for the big questions about life and the universe. Partly this is done through the philosophical debates of its protagonists and partly through the Kabbalistic analysis of real world historical facts but, it's not so much that the reader is offered a convincing accumulation of facts and arguments, rather that an aesthetic appeal is being made. *"Beauty is truth, truth beauty – that is all ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."* Because the value of truth is not limited to its utility but in fact includes an innate desirability; an aesthetic vitality that infuses life with greater meaning. The world is more interesting and vivid when we have an appreciation of the stars and mountains and flowers; recognizing them, the truth of their being, increases the beauty in our own lives. Here science, art, and religion coalesce into a single divine sensibility. Love.

The story that Unsong tells is baroque in detail but simple in its basic structure. It has the same mythopoetic blueprint that one finds in the majority of speculative fiction, the unlikely hero haphazardly being thrust into apocalyptic events and playing a central role in these but, while some people might criticize that choice, it is, in all honesty, the best vehicle for promoting the broader philosophical speculations here. If you took the same ideas and infused them in a story that instead frustrated popular tastes, they obviously wouldn't find as wide a readership. Taking intellectually and spiritually challenging speculations and presenting them through a traditional adventure narrative will always be the most practical way for any type of fiction to disseminate these. As such, the author's artistic choices, which don't even require justification, are in fact justified on pragmatic grounds.

Similarly, the question of whether evil can be justified provides one of the main themes of the book and offers something parallel to the demand for justification that literary critics often impose. In both cases, The Author is put on trial due to the dissatisfactions of the impotent. We mortals often resent the idea that there could be a God whose reasons trump our own suffering and, likewise, there are plenty of readers who will condemn a work of fiction merely because it does not meet their own private demands; rather than shrug indifferently that a novel or series doesn't cater to them, rather than choosing to write their own story which would, they will instead devote a great deal of time and effort to analyzing and critiquing work that fundamentally displeases them. It seems on some level then that they want to hate and that the work they dislike gives them an outlet for their hatred. Better to whine in hell than search for heaven apparently. And while literary criticism shouldn't be conflated with the moral problem of evil, the latter after all is genuinely serious, it's interesting to note that a shared bitterness seems to factor in here. The *wailing and gnashing of teeth* by one is hardly distinguishable from that of the other.

Maybe evil is justifiable though in a way similar to how no work of literature could be created which would fully please everyone. Maybe freedom and the maximization of value lies in the very possibilities of imperfection? The Eden of Genesis after all, while providing everything that a human being could physically desire, is an ultimately unsatisfying place. If Eve wasn't already unsatisfied, how could the words of the serpent have been persuasive and why would Adam himself be tempted to the forbidden fruit? Why desire the knowledge of good and evil unless this is a fundamental spiritual desire that no material gratifications could ever eliminate? A mere curiosity about evil then could take heaven and transform it into hell through sheer ignorance, so it seems in some sense that any spiritual individual or community could only be immunized against evil by, surprise surprise, having some direct experience of it.

“For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as I am also known.” Without ruining the ending of the book, the answer that Unsong offers here basically comes down to the problem of evil arising from the limits of a finite perspective. As our minds enlarge to see the world and all of creation in its infinitude, the transmutation of evil into a means for greater good simultaneously takes place.

The psychological concept of a gestalt is a useful one in this context. Seeing the world as basically good or basically evil comes down to a matter of personal perspective; in fact, this experience is self-revelatory too since how else would you identify whether you were an optimist or a pessimist if not by your attitude to the things around you? But of course it's possible for us to change our perspectives by conscious effort. In the classical example of the duck-rabbit image, one can see it as a duck or as a rabbit or as neither or both. In fact, the Zen solution to this question is to simply take it as a duck-rabbit gestalt and nothing more (Here the monk Ummon made this point regarding his staff) meaning no effort to impose any kind of preference is made. In other words, to accept the hypostatic weirdness of these four mutually exclusive perceptions and embrace this as a fifth one. And so the weirdness reaches its zenith at the threshold before the *doors of perception* where, beyond these, the theodicy of the mystics waits for us.

VIRTUAL HORIZONS

The Legacy of Neuromancer

The future we expect is never the one that's coming. It just doesn't work like that. The reason for this resides in the nature of evolution itself; in the spontaneity of millions and billions adding to an unfathomably complex societal organism that can assimilate the totality of human experience and erupt in whatever converging directions this leads. It's a product of anarchy then; of our adaptability and inquisitiveness. Science fiction forecasts as such are a bit of a futile enterprise.

That's not what Neuromancer was ever really about though. The world that Gibson invented, if anything, was more a hyper-expression of the times in which the book was written; in the post-Vietnam despair arising as America seemed to be slowly rusting away. It's no coincidence that punk culture was in ascendance during this era. Cynicism towards the mainstream cultural establishment will always lead to an increase in radical values and alternative experimentation. That's why the cyberpunk marriage of the outcast mentality and transhuman technologies is so cohesive; the septum rings, hair-spikes, and tattoos of traditional punk are archaic manifestations of an urge that can only complete itself in the obliteration of the human. The human body simply isn't plastic enough for the human spirit. Or, at least, this is true among the ranks of the supremely avaricious and the aspiring dissident; the demigod architects of high-tech and their low-life counterparts.

Which touches again upon the dichotomy that Neuromancer often finds itself addressing; the lives of the extremely rich and poor. The middle-class isn't represented here because the middle-class won't survive in a dystopia for long. The inevitably brutal nature of dystopian systems will maximize risk, consequence, and

power asymmetries; only the hardest will endure and these as either tyrants or scavengers. The absence of real social values and order acts like a centrifuge, breaking down the individuals in society to their basest elements, reducing them to either master or slave. What is a dystopia of course other than rampant predation? And these are exactly the types of ecologies we're given in *Night City* and *The Sprawl*; remorseless techno-jungles pulsing with horrors that swallow up anything insufficiently vicious that stumbles into them.

And this is part of the coldness too that we get in Gibson's main characters. Case, Molly, and Armitage are all dead inside in their own ways: Case, a literal burnout, purged of his one elicited gift, who even when he gets a second chance can only dream of going back to the cowboy addiction that nearly destroyed him; Molly, a woman hollowed into a razorgirl shell who rents her cyborg body to wealthy snuff enthusiasts; and Armitage, maybe the best metaphor for humanity in Gibson's whole oeuvre, a broken ex-soldier seduced by the lies of a creeping machine power and representing within himself a Manichean psychosis that inversely mirrors the bicameral fusion of *Wintermute* and *Neuromancer*. This is a kind of Newtonian action-and-reaction playing itself out between biological and cybernetic natures; where the dawn of one is the twilight of the other.

The central theme providing the undercurrent throughout *Neuromancer* is dehumanization. People as mere shadows of themselves made into the pawns of a controlling artificiality. A few years later this would have its real life analogy in the victory of a computer program over the reigning world chess champion but, upon the book's publication, the realms of thought still belonged entirely to their human authors. Surrendering that to their own automated creations was still nothing more than a Frankenstein-style myth which, however uneasy it made us feel, could be exorcized away simply by closing the novel in front of us. Today the curse is loose though, stalking humanity like an evil force we mocked in our arrogance when we first broke its seal.

Maybe machines will never be truly intelligent. This will be little comfort however to a species that's lost all sense of purpose because it's been stripped of its livelihoods and where knowledge itself is now an undertaking left to the dark authority of proliferating software daimons. A fear of the machine that thinks might be an overly optimistic phobia. What if humanity's replacement will in fact be by an unthinking power? An automated totalitarian system beyond any appeal of

reason or sympathy? Because this is actually what we came from; a Hobbesian state of nature that ruled over us without mercy. It would however give our history a kind of poetic symmetry then.

If life is to triumph in the story of humanity, it must come from the punk half of the cyberpunk equation; a hustle evading the regimes of the mega-corporations that give their clandestine rule the appearance of an open society. When Case finally confronts Neuromancer in the bowels of the Villa Straylight, the weapon his adversary uses against him is illusion. We find ourselves in the same position to be honest; targets of a mass-media hypnosis designed to produce a non-consensual hallucination. A matrix of fraud where the horizon is a projection always devised to keep us from going in any particular direction. To stay jacked in to the simulation handed down to us. But here Neuromancer is one of the few works of literature that cries out for awakening. A vision of a nightmare certainly; one however that will help guard us against the perils of falling asleep.

VITALITY AND CIVILIZATION

The Rise and Fall of Societies

Our history is haunted. As its arduous centuries have accumulated, the silent masses of the dead have continued to grow. Sumerians, Romans, Aztecs, to name only a few; their artifacts and ruins remind us that cultures of great ingenuity and virtue can be driven to extinction. Even in an age as focused on the future as ours, these spectres gnaw at us, and what contributes most to our unease is the fact that we haven't entirely understood what led them to their downfall or whether we can avoid their fate. Because it's only the most naïve among us who believe that our own civilization, with all its emphasis on immediate gratification and short term profiteering, is something with any real claim to permanency. The ancient Egyptians had a continuous system of social organization that lasted for thousands of years; now their temples and mausoleums are little more than tourist attractions for gawking hicks. As such we hardly have any reason to expect something better for our own legacy.

Perhaps we can avoid destruction for a while though? Above all, this would require that our society was educated on the source of its own vitality and that it then be reorganized on that basis. Obviously what we need to do here is to identify the fundamental cause of social decay and then devise effective actions that can be taken in response. Without clarity with regards to the former there's no possibility of the latter so that's where we should naturally begin. And fortunately this doesn't require an unusual level of insight. When we look at dysfunctional organizations, what we always find present is incompetent leadership and, where dysfunction has taken root in any social structure lasting for several generations, this always assumes the form of a culture of decadence prevailing at the top of the hierarchy. When those who have power prioritize their own gratification at the expense of the welfare of society, the flow of rejuvenation within said societies dwindles and the destructive force of entropy begins to prevail in every aspect of culture and economy. To illustrate this we can analyze social structures using the framework of a communications system; other frameworks of course could be employed to highlight different things but, for the present purposes, this is sufficient. Because the issue is really one of signalling. Social structures are grounded in cooperation after all since they can only be justified on the basis of mutual benefit; people joining together for the common good. When those in positions of eminence however no longer act in accordance with this principle, they signal to the rest of society that the system the latter live under now is one governed by fraud and, the inevitable result of this is that, from top to bottom, its members lose faith in it.

Every social enterprise then depends ultimately on the integrity of its leadership and their personal commitment to the welfare of society as whole. Many examples could be produced to illustrate how our own age fails in this respect but perhaps citing only one common practice will be enough. Today, no amount of mediocrity will preclude someone from being given the highest political offices, provided they're born into the right political dynasty. Blame here can't be levelled at any one nation or segment of the political spectrum either; George W. Bush and Justin Trudeau for example are both individuals who, had they not been members of prominent families, could have never become the leaders of their respective nations. There's no evidence of any political vision or inspirational power in either one of them but propped up by public relations teams and the huge apparatuses of their respective parties, they're made acceptable to the public. In fact their personal lack of leadership qualities is part of what makes them appealing to their most eminent backers; so totally dependent as they are on those who elevated them to positions of power, they're easily used as tools by these without any fear they might become unmanageable and start making important decisions on their own. Now contrast this kind of nepotism with the culture that existed at the beginning of the Roman Republic; when the consul Lucius Junius Brutus was confronted with the fact that his two sons had participated in a plot to overthrow the new republic, he had both of them put to death despite the suffering this caused him. Whatever our thoughts on the severity of that action, this proves at least that Brutus placed the welfare of society above his own personal interests. A commitment that doesn't seem to be mirrored in the ruling classes of our own time.

To strike directly at the root of the problem, it's the absence of sacrifice in the personal conduct of those who dominate a social hierarchy which leads to the decay of a society. For any form of leadership to be effective in the long term, it must have an inspirational quality; the more admirable those who exercise political power are, the healthier a society is. The willingness to make personal sacrifices for the benefit of the common good, more than any other virtue, is what produces this among a people with any moral substance. It's shameful, to say the least then, that in a society where people volunteer to put themselves at risk as a matter of profession by becoming firefighters and paramedics, that such courageous individuals should then be ruled over by plutocrats and politicians who rise to their respective positions through relentless selfishness and cowardice. Our political systems could hardly do more to incentivize a poverty of virtue if they were deliberately constructed with that purpose solely in mind. The solution though is simple. Create a new system which incorporates the importance of personal sacrifice into its selection criteria. Eliminate the power of money completely from politics and then establish trials and ordeals by which those who seek political office will prove their character. Only by doing this can we begin to undo the damage that's been unleashed by years of unfettered political corruption and so ensure the longevity of our societies.

Civilization now is in a state of mortal jeopardy. The permanent destruction of democracy and cultural vitality is being orchestrated by international capitalism and each day the vampiric power of the latter drains strength from the former. What the world needs then more than anything is a movement to restore the principles of liberty and justice to their proper places of sacred pre-eminence. No sacrifice is too great if it means achieving this.

WAKE UP. TIME TO DIE.

Deckard and K: Postmodernism and Post-postmodernism

Postmodernism is a dead end. If you don't accept the postmodernist account of things, that's the obvious conclusion but, even to do otherwise, (And especially where postmodernism is most fully embraced) means abandoning any narrative about progress or idealism. What defines postmodernism is its rejection of the defining values of modernity and, as its name implies, nothing much beyond that. It's fundamentally a critical stance. You can call its own projects "constructions" if you wish but postmodernism remains, at its core, deconstructive. Of course, like every summary, this simplifies things and leaves out significant details but we're fortunate here in that one film, *Blade Runner*, provides an excellent artifact for the contemplation of the postmodern. Even better, its sequel has, quite organically it appears, furnished an artifact whose contemplation points the way beyond said postmodernist predicament. And both these insights are obtained through the consideration of each film's protagonist. And so this essay will proceed.

DECKARD

Long regarded as an exemplar of postmodernist cinema, it's nevertheless still remarkable how many of its standard tropes *Blade Runner* contains. Because more so even than the unique thematic content surrounding the dilemma of the human/replicant distinction, the structure of the story is entirely postmodernist. The plot begins when Deckard, a retired police detective (Who used to "retire" rogue replicants) is forced back into service due to a group of his former prey making their way to Earth and the current police administration being unable to dispose of them. Aside from the linguistic irony here, the situation is further made postmodernist by the fact that it references the popular detective fiction of early and mid-twentieth century America but then transports it into a science fiction setting. Another postmodernist element in evidence is the key fact that the protagonist, contrary to the affirmative trend across modernity to uphold the self (Via stream-of-consciousness, self-improvement, personal innovation, etc) is coerced into returning to an old profession; something symbolically at odds with the modernist focus on progress. Later too, the philosophical uncertainties around

“what it means to be human,” infect Deckard with doubts regarding his own sense of humanity and so the line between a living and free agent versus a deterministic machine are blurred even further. Add to this the fact that Deckard ends up, in the course of events, shooting a female replicant in the back (A deconstruction of the heroic) falling in love with a female replicant (A deconstruction of desire) and being saved from death by the “villain” who defeated him (A deconstruction of morality and choice) and you have an extraordinarily deep presentation of postmodernist trends in a single film. Probably even the most profound in cinema.

And the relationship between Batty and Deckard is amazing for how well it encapsulates the modernist/postmodernist conflict. Batty is the personification of futurism itself in both its aspects of limitlessness and vitality. Even his taste for violence here fits within the modernist paradigm. And like modernism, he kills his god, or creator, out of frustration with the artificial mortality he’s been cursed with. Because Batty wants to live forever and devour the sensual experiences of the world; unlike Deckard, who’s content to live a dreary life with highlights that include eating noodles in the rain and drinking at his piano in the gloom of a bachelor apartment. Batty is the modernist anti-hero, fulfilling many aspects of traditional heroism in an affirmative way, where as Deckard is the postmodernist non-hero, reluctant to participate in events at all and indifferent to the dystopian tendencies of the world around him. Deckard is saved from total deadness here though by Batty who, like a promethean figure imparting a spiritual flame, gives Deckard a renewed sense of vitality by personal example. Here postmodernism is saved from total self-deconstruction by the lingering elements of modernity; something that is true of our own era more generally.

K

Villeneuve’s sequel to Scott’s masterpiece is itself a masterpiece and one of the rare instances in cinema where such has occurred. Of note are the several instances of parallelism that connect the two movies. Like Deckard, K is an isolated figure whose love interest is even less human than he is. K is similarly ambivalent towards his work as a blade runner but exceptionally good at it. Both of them are also saved by their principle antagonist during the course of the plot and both of them are plagued with epistemological uncertainties arising from the enigmatic nature of dreams and memory. Couple this with broader plot parallels (Deckard

and K engaging in extended sequences of data analysis, Deckard and K seeking assistance with evidence by visiting a bazaar, Deckard and K acting in the shadow of a visionary architect they have little or no direct involvement with) and it becomes obvious that Blade Runner 2049 is a commentary and variation (The latter in an almost musical sense) on its predecessor.

What distinguishes K from Deckard in the end however is motive. Deckard was acting out of self-interest right up until the end with no wider sense of obligations; the basic condition of a human being absorbed in the postmodernist predicament. K however reaches the point in his own story eventually where he has nothing left to gain. Not only is he stripped of the hope he gained thinking that he had a special destiny, but he cannot even return to the comforts of his old existence by the time this realization occurs. In what may be one of the cruellest plot developments in a major Hollywood movie, K has to not just helplessly witness his love interest being destroyed in front of him, but then he later, after undergoing complete disaster on all fronts, suffers the epiphany that his love interest probably was just a simulation anyways and all his feelings were based on a fraud. Or at least the thought is implanted in his mind. But this is precisely where K differs from Deckard and where his choices illuminate a path beyond postmodernism's plight. With nothing left to gain personally and no fateful sense of imperative, K nevertheless decides to rescue the captured Deckard. Why? We might say it's because K believes in the cause of the future replicant uprising but that itself doesn't explain anything because why believe in that even?

Here K's connection with Dr. Ana Stelline, the secret child of Deckard and his love interest Rachel from the previous film, comes into play. What K has, despite being "merely" a replicant, is empathy. Ana's memories were implanted in him and so he feels the consequences of Deckard's fate, her father, from her perspective. Where the Deckard of the original film was significantly devoid of empathy, as is highlighted in his brutal killings of replicants and, as such, preserved the multiplicity of values like replicant, human, etc in a supposedly irreducible "otherness," – K is the very inverse of that; a synthesis of machine and human, male and female, that ultimately finds confidence and purpose in a single trivial goal. To reunite a daughter with her father. And that's how postmodernism is transcended. Not by the devaluation of all things as artificialities but by their mutual revaluation as inherently meaningful. An epiphany that is maybe best encapsulated with the following motto: Wake up. Time to live.

WHY MORAL INNOVATION IS IMPOSSIBLE

Being moral ultimately means subscribing to the primitive belief that people should generally care about other people. Such a simple world view naturally lacks the capacity to contain the immensities of intellectual sophistication intrinsic to other world views, where the dignity and rights of other people are easily explained away. Morality as such suffers from the same poverty as common sense – from the inability to deny the obvious.

That people of different sexual traits and ethnicities and skins colors, and even personal wealth, are not inherently inferior or superior to one another is obvious, fine, but to proceed from this recognition as if it were actually something which should be put into practice is where morality betrays its naiveté. To the contrary, the really ingenious thing to do is to proclaim human equality as an unassailable and sublime truth while simultaneously developing a system of complex rationalizations which allow for actions completely to the contrary. In this way all men can be created equal even while some of them only count as three fifths of a person. Amazing! Those of us who are too stupid to devise these kinds of clever elaborate justifications though can only marvel helplessly at such masteries over logic. Sadly though not everyone has the aptitude to become a media pundit or some other similar manner of apologist.

Which brings me to the main focus of this essay – the assertion already stated in the title. To clarify further, what I mean here by a moral innovation is any kind of superior development of the concepts in morality that'd amount to recontextualizing the basic premises encompassed by these so that they could be adopted into some more comprehensive world view. Morality conversely cannot be dissolved into something else because it is itself the explicit and sufficient ideal that it aspires to achieve. Contrast this say with classicalism and neo-classicalism in art. Classicalism for example wasn't itself a genuinely self-conscious movement but rather a distant retrospective characterization of certain perceived ancient values – and neo-classicalism then was a sensibility that recognized something like an imperative to return to said values as the aesthetics necessary to cultural vitality. Morality though already has its general aims laid out quite clearly, that people should consider the welfare of all members of society without bias, and weighing this down with further ideological baggage just impedes it.

To make morality something ornate and nuanced then is, intentionally or not, to sabotage it, to reduce it through decoration to something garish and superficial. Morality moreover is not something that can make itself impressive because this kind of vindication through magnificence is utterly hostile to its own concerns and so can only lead it into hypocrisy. It wouldn't make sense after all for a world view supposedly concerned with the tribulations of the masses to articulate itself in an awesome manner or one favorable only to an elect few. To the contrary, genuine morality will concern itself with the conspicuous and brutal actualities that people are confronted with outside the privileged few. As I say these things, I am of course conscious of the fact that I am toeing the line of transgression here. If anything can preserve me from insincerity in my statements though it is maybe only that discussions already permeated by intellectual fixation require an intellectual response as a result of their own focus.

In any case, true morality is what most directly confronts us with the stark realities of our hypocrisies – how we profit from the miseries of others in truth and how we console ourselves with lies. To enter into the higher theaters of academia then is to already make things fertile for obscurantism, for evasiveness, for dishonest rationalization and pleading excuses and political shruggery. The shallowness of any puddle after all can only be disguised as long as you muddy the waters enough. Morality then best makes its necessity apparent by a revelation of the raw truth of suffering. Morality is demanded by the distress of the innocent, the infirmities of the innocent, the overwhelming injustice that has dominion over so many innocent lives. And by their corpses. The wreckage of families and communities casually slaughtered in wars grounded in pure profiteering. If the horrible and inescapable facts of the unnecessary misery perpetuated by the existing social order cannot sway someone then they simply don't have a conscience to be swayed. No intellectual argument will change that.

The foundation for a moral world as such must consist in something like the simple disclosing of evidence. Photographs then before theory and personal testimony above political analysis. Unveil the horror. Meat corporations for example go to great lengths to keep their slaughtering procedures out of the forefront of public consciousness because they correctly realize that their business model would be jeopardized if people had to cope with the truth. So too the abattoirs of global capitalism depend on their disguising to survive. Because people don't want to believe they're complicit in anything.

Any improvement of morality then that seeks to heap more innovative rhetoric on it rather than to simply reaffirm and highlight the obvious has no hope of success. If you hang enough coats on a person and on a scarecrow it becomes difficult to tell the difference – as such when the proponents of morality employ layers of theory to justify themselves, as the prevailing social order of capitalism does, they simply make it more difficult to distinguish between the two. And they cannot efficiently oppose capitalism at the level of critique either since the more intellectual said critiques are the smaller their scope of impact. Consider how effective mainstream political propaganda and commercials are in contrast – this is because they keep their messages as simple and visceral as possible. That is how to reach people. At least, that is how to reach the masses in their current state of consciousness. Obviously it is contrary to the

true objectives of morality to reinforce superficiality but, in order to stimulate the moral awakening of the masses, that obviously has to begin with a direct engagement of them at their current level of preoccupation. If you want to reprogram a computer you will have to give it inputs in its existing programming language. The only difference here is that morality must seek to deprogram the masses rather and thereby allow them to realize their own individuality without any external constraints. Again, the inflation of rhetoric here in the form of any ideological novelty is always the imposition of new constraints – to be a true moral individual instead is to simply be a chain cutter for the shackled.

Capitalism survives because of perceived necessities but the two entwined serpents that most prominently define it, neo-liberalism and neo-conservatism, have already disproven themselves for previously mentioned reasons. As I said earlier, innovation is impossible here because morality as it exists is already sufficient in itself. Either you care about other people in a non-discriminatory way or you don't and if you do care about them in this way then you're moral. Capitalism conversely is not sufficient in itself because its proponents retain desires incompatible with the basic tenets of this. If you're not willing to prostitute your grandmother without mercy, to reduce her to capital and to exploit her as such, then in your heart you are not a true capitalist. The well spring from which all forms of capitalism ultimately emanate is an indifference to misery and destruction, a capability then to shatter human beings with as little unease as one would shatter rocks for the ore inside them. Because in capitalism everything is reduced to materiality and so disposable as such, without even the slightest trace of ethical concern. It is why, for example, capitalism has brought us to the threshold of ecocide.

Capitalism is self-refuting because even its own proponents cannot wish to become capital themselves. No one wants to be utilized in a purely material way. So capitalism is inescapably and unsalvageably flawed since it can never be fulfilled comprehensively – every capitalist is against the total implementation of capitalism and will certainly rebel against it should it threaten to absorb them as they have tried to absorb others. Morality conversely, true morality, is grounded in the basic dignity of every person and so *can* be implemented universally. From this it can be acknowledged that morality is the only consistent basis for social order – for civilization itself. One only has to look at the rhetoric which dominates the political discourse in (Nominally) democratic countries to see that they always have to resort to moral concepts to gain popular appeal. What they manage to do though is invent false dichotomies, universal healthcare vs burdensome tax increases for example, which seem to make one moral ideal hostile to another. This is achieved through selective fact citing and the distortion of reality that provides – ignoring things in the broader context that resolve such apparent contradictions. Capitalism meanwhile is blatantly and intrinsically inconsistent given even elementary consideration but retains an immense appeal precisely because it conforms exactly to specific prevailing delusions.

Capitalism is a sickness but how is any sickness overcome? Not by the invention of new cures if an old cure already exists. At least, that's a terrible way to practice medicine. Morality in fact is already an adequate cure for capitalism and so doesn't need to be reinvented. But it can't be forced on people – the failure of this manner of treatment for social ills is evident from previous revolutions where morality was proclaimed and then imposed in mutilated forms. The

patient rather has to willingly subscribe to the treatments on their own initiative and to achieve this the only thing that can be done is to make the reality of the existing sickness evident – to expose the atrocities of capitalism then and how it is the nature of capitalism itself to incessantly generate these. But that's simple. Atrocities are inevitable as soon as people are reduced to disposable commodities. Which is the very culmination of capitalism – to transform everything into an exploitable resource. Morality quite emphatically says no to this; it says that we shouldn't feed this disease and that there are straightforward alternatives.

The solutions to the problems of today depend less on new answers than they do on asking a single primordial question – What choices will best serve society as a whole? In this piecemeal way, morality will triumph over capitalism.

FAVORITE BOOKS AND AUTHORS

Philosophy books ranked in roughly descending order. Regarding poetry, only the authors are listed since my familiarity with their work mostly comes from individual poems in anthologies and compilations. Also I've refrained from including poets who didn't write in English.

PHILOSOPHY

Tractatus Logico Philosophicus – Ludwig Wittgenstein

The Sickness Unto Death – Soren Kierkegaard

The Dao De Jing – Lao Zi

The Monadology – Gottfried Leibniz

On Certainty – Ludwig Wittgenstein

The Discourses of Livy – Niccolo Machiavelli

The Present Age – Soren Kierkegaard

Meditations – Marcus Aurelius

Ecce Homo – Friedrich Nietzsche

The Roaring Stream – Zen Compilation

The Prince – Niccolo Machiavelli

Philosophical Investigations – Ludwig Wittgenstein

Meditations on First Philosophy – Rene Descartes

Zen Flesh, Zen Bones – Zen Compilation

The Social Contract – Jean Jacques Rousseau

Civilization and its Discontents – Sigmund Freud

FICTION

Dubliners – James Joyce

The First and Second Jungle Books – Rudyard Kipling

The Happy Prince and Other Tales – Oscar Wilde

Trainspotting – Irving Welsh

Stories of Your Life and Others – Ted Chiang

The Remains of the Day – Kazuo Ishiguro

Washington Square – Henry James

The Sprawl Trilogy – William Gibson

1984 – George Orwell

The Great Gatsby – F. Scott Fitzgerald

The Picture of Dorian Gray – Oscar Wilde

Heart of Darkness – Joseph Conrad

Neverwhere – Neil Gaimen

Schild's Ladder – Greg Egan

Paradise Lost – John Milton

Stardust – Neil Gaimen

David Copperfield – Charles Dickens

Old Yeller – Fred Gibson

Starship Troopers – Robert Heinlein

All the Pretty Horses – Cormac McCarthy

Of Mice and Men – John Steinbeck

A Canticle for Leibowitz – Walter M. Miller, Jr.

The Fables – Aesop

POETRY

William Blake

T.S. Eliot

Carl Sandburg

John Donne

Robinson Jeffers

Ezra Pound

Thomas Hardy

Sylvia Plath

Lord Alfred Tennyson

Mark Strand

William Butler Yeats

Robert Frost

John Keats

Emily Dickinson

William Wordsworth

Dylan Thomas

BIBLICAL BOOKS

Genesis

Ecclesiastes

Judges

1 Kings

2 Kings

Isaiah

Ezekiel

Zephaniah

Matthew

Mark

Luke

John

Acts

1 Corinthians

James

Revelations

SHAKESPEARE PLAYS

The Merchant of Venice

Macbeth

Timon of Athens

Hamlet

Julius Caesar

FAVORITE MOVIES

1917 – Sam Mendes
8 ½ – Federico Fellini
A Beautiful Mind – Ron Howard
A Dangerous Method – David Cronenberg
A Man for All Seasons – Fred Zinnemann
A Quiet Passion – Terence Davies
A Scanner Darkly – Richard Linklater
A Separation – Asghar Farhadi
A Serious Man – The Coens
Adaptation – Spike Jonze
Aguirre, The Wrath of God – Werner Herzog
Akira – Katsuhiro Otomo
Aliens – James Cameron
All About Eve – Joseph L. Mankiewicz
American Graffiti – George Lucas
Apocalypse Now (Redux) – Francis Ford Coppola
Apocalypto – Mel Gibson
Bad Lieutenant, Port of Call New Orleans – Werner Herzog
Belly – Hype Williams
Bladerunner (Final Cut) – Ridley Scott
Bladerunner 2049 – Denis Villeneuve
Calvary – John Michael McDonagh
Casablanca – Michael Curtiz
Casino – Martin Scorsese
Castle in the Sky – Hayao Miyazaki
Children of Men – Alphonso Cuaron
Chinatown – Roman Polanski
Contact – Robert Zemeckis
Cowboy Bebop: The Movie – Shinichiro Watanabe
Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon – Ang Lee
Days of Heaven – Terrence Malick

Donnie Darko – Richard Kelly
Django Unchained – Quentin Tarantino
Dr. Strangelove – Stanley Kubrick
Drive – Nicholas Winding Refn
Elizabeth – Shekhar Kapur
Fantasia – Various (Produced by Walt Disney)
Field of Dreams – Phil Alden Robinson
Fight Club – David Fincher
Flight – Robert Zemeckis
Full Metal Jacket – Stanley Kubrick
Gangs of New York – Martin Scorsese
Gattaca – Andrew Niccol
Ghost in the Shell – Mamoru Oshii
Goodfellas – Martin Scorsese
Good Will Hunting – Gus Van Sant
Heat – Michael Mann
I Am Love – Luca Guadagnino
In the Loop – Armando Iannucci
Inception – Christopher Nolan
It's a Wonderful Life – Frank Capra
Jarhead – Sam Mendes
JFK – Oliver Stone
Jiro Dreams of Sushi – David Gelb
Juliet of the Spirits – Federico Fellini
Juno – Jason Reitman
Killing Them Softly – Andrew Dominik
Kingdom of Heaven (Original Cut) – Ridley Scott
Koyaanisqatsi – Godfrey Reggio
Late Spring – Yasujiro Ozu
Legend – Ridley Scott
Lincoln – Steven Spielberg
Lost in Translation – Sophia Coppola
Lust, Caution – Ang Lee
M – Fritz Lang
Malcolm X – Spike Lee
Manchester by the Sea – Kenneth Lonergan
Memento – Christopher Nolan

Network – Sydney Lumet
Nightcrawler – Dan Gilroy
No Country for Old Men – The Coens
No Maps for These Territories – Mark Neale
O Brother, Where Art Thou? – The Coens
Once Upon a Time in Hollywood – Quentin Tarantino
Only Lovers Left Alive – Jim Jarmusch
Ordinary People – Robert Redford
Paprika – Satoshi Kon
Paterson – Jim Jarmusch
Patton – Franklin J. Schnaffer
Princess Mononoke – Hayao Miyazaki
Roma – Federico Fellini
Roman Holiday – William Wyler
Roman J. Israel, Esq. – Dan Gilroy
Sanjuro – Akira Kurosawa
Seven Samurai – Akira Kurosawa
Shutter Island – Martin Scorsese
Sicario – Denis Villeneuve
Snatch – Guy Ritchie
Solaris – Steven Soderberg
Spring, Summer, Fall, Winter... and Spring – Kim ki-duk
Starship Troopers – Paul Verhoeven
Take Shelter – Jeff Nichols
The Believer – Henry Bean
The Best Offer – Giuseppe Tornatore
The Big Lebowski – The Coens
The Big Short – Adam McKay
The Cell – Tarsem Singh
The Departed – Martin Scorsese
The Devil's Advocate – Taylor Hackford
The Drop – Michael R. Roskam
The East – Zal Batmanglij
The Fifth Element – Luc Besson
The Godfather Part II – Francis Ford Coppola
The Great Beauty – Paolo Sorrentino
The Hidden Blade – Yoji Yamada

The Hours – Stephen Daldry
The Hudsucker Proxy – The Coens
The Master – Paul Thomas Anderson
The Matrix – The Wachowskis
The New World – Terrence Malick
The Nightmare Before Christmas – Henry Selick
The Player – Robert Altman
The Prestige – Christopher Nolan
The Price of Everything – Nathaniel Kahn
The Remains of the Day – James Ivory
The Right Stuff – Philip Kaufman
The Royal Tenenbaums – Wes Anderson
The Salt of the Earth – Wim Wenders, Juliano Ribeiro Salgado
The Shawshank Redemption – Frank Darabont
The Third Man – Carol Reed
The Thin Red Line – Terrence Malick
The Town – Ben Affleck
The Tree of Life – Terrence Malick
The Twilight Samurai – Yoji Yamada
The Wages of Fear – Henri-Georges Clouzot
The Wolf of Wall Street – Martin Scorsese
There Will Be Blood – Paul Thomas Anderson
Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri – Martin McDonagh
Tombstone – George P. Cosmatos
Training Day – Antoine Fuqua
Trainspotting – Danny Boyle
Unforgiven – Clint Eastwood
Up in the Air – Jason Reitman
Vanilla Sky – Cameron Crowe
Waking Life – Richard Linklater
Walk the Line – James Mangold
Whiplash – Damien Chazelle
Wittgenstein – Derek Jarman
Youth – Paolo Sorrentino

HONORABLE MENTIONS

12 Angry Men – Sydney Lumet
12 Years a Slave – Steve McQueen
2001: A Space Odyssey – Stanley Kubrick
28 Days Later – Danny Boyle
A Clockwork Orange – Stanley Kubrick
A Few Good Men – Rob Reiner
A Fistful of Dollars – Sergio Leone
A History of Violence – David Cronenberg
A Star is Born – Bradley Cooper
A. I. Artificial Intelligence – Steven Spielberg
Almost Famous – Cameron Crowe
Amadeus – Milos Forman
American Psycho – Mary Harron
Annihilation – Alex Garland
Annie Hall – Woody Allen
Andrei Rublev – Andrei Tarkovsky
Arrival – Denis Villeneuve
Badlands – Terrence Malick
Baraka – Ron Fricke
Basquiat – Julian Schnabel
Beetlejuice – Tim Burton
Black Dynamite – Scott Sanders
Black Swan – Darren Aronofsky
Big Fish – Tim Burton
Blue Jasmine – Woody Allen
Blue Velvet – David Lynch
Boyhood – Richard Linklater
Boyz in the Hood – John Singleton
Braveheart – Mel Gibson
Brazil – Terry Gilliam
Burn After Reading – The Coens
Chariots of Fire – Hugh Hudson
Charlie Wilson’s War – Mike Nichols
Cinderella Man – Ron Howard

Citizen Kane – Orson Welles
Dances with Wolves – Kevin Costner
Dark City – Alex Proyas
Dazed and Confused – Richard Linklater
Demolition Man – Marco Brambilla
Do the Right Thing – Spike Lee
Doctor Strange – Scott Derrickson
Double Indemnity – Billy Wilder
Dune – Denis Villeneuve
Dunkirk – Christopher Nolan
Dreams – Akira Kurosawa
Eastern Promises – David Cronenberg
Edge of Tomorrow – Doug Liman
Edward Scissorhands – Tim Burton
Eraserhead – David Lynch
Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind – Michel Gondry
Ex Machina – Alex Garland
Eyes Wide Shut – Stanley Kubrick
Fallen – Gregory Hoblit
Falling Down – Joel Schumacher
Fargo – The Coens
Fitzcarraldo – Werner Herzog
Forrest Gump – Roger Zemeckis
Fracture – Gregory Hoblit
Fugitive Pieces – Jeremy Podeswa
Gandhi – Richard Attenborough
Gone Baby Gone – Ben Affleck
Gone Girl – David Fincher
Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai – Jim Jarmusch
Gladiator – Ridley Scott
Grizzly Man – Werner Herzog
Hidden Fortress – Akira Kurosawa
High Fidelity – Stephen Frears
Hell or High Water – David Mackenzie
Hot Fuzz – Edgar Wright
Howl's Moving Castle – Hayao Miyazaki
Hunger – Steve McQueen

I Heart Huckabees – David O. Russell
In Bruges – Martin McDonagh
Inside Llewyn Davis – The Coens
Inside Man – Spike Lee
Interstellar – Christopher Nolan
Jackie Brown – Quentin Tarantino
Jacob's Ladder – Adrian Lyne
Jurassic Park – Steven Spielberg
Kagemusha – Akira Kurosawa
Knight of Cups – Terence Malick
Knives Out – Rian Johnson
La Dolce Vita – Federico Fellini
La Grand Illusion – Jean Renoir
La La Land – Damien Chazelle
Lars and the Real Girl – Craig Gillespie
Late Autumn – Yasujiro Ozu
Leviathan – Andrey Zvyagintsev
Lust for Life – Vincente Minnelli
Mad Max: Fury Road – George Miller
Manhattan – Woody Allen
Maps to the Stars – David Cronenberg
Margin Call – J.C. Chandor
Michael Clayton – Tony Gilroy
Midnight in Paris – Woody Allen
Minority Report – Steven Spielberg
Modern Times – Charlie Chaplin
Moneyball – Bennett Miller
Moonrise Kingdom – Wes Anderson
Mr. Holland's Opus – Stephen Herek
Munich – Steven Spielberg
My Left Foot – Jim Sheridan
Mystic River – Clint Eastwood
My Neighbor Totoro – Hayao Miyazaki
Nausicaa of the Valley of the Wind – Hayao Miyazaki
North by Northwest – Alfred Hitchcock
On the Waterfront – Elia Kazan
One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest – Milos Forman

Paths of Glory – Stanley Kubrick
Pi – Darren Aronofsky
Porco Rosso – Hayao Miyazaki
Predator – John McTiernan
Primer – Shane Carruth
Raging Bull – Martin Scorsese
Rain Man – Barry Levison
Ran – Akira Kurosawa
Rashomon – Akira Kurosawa
Rear Window – Alfred Hitchcock
Requiem for a Dream – Darren Aronofsky
Rescue Dawn – Werner Herzog
Rounders – John Dahl
Saving Private Ryan – Steven Spielberg
Schindler’s List – Steven Spielberg
Se7en – David Fincher
Sexy Beast – Johnathan Glazer
Shun Li and the Poet – Andrea Segre
Singing in the Rain – Gene Kelly and Stanley Donen
Silence – Martin Scorsese
Silver Linings Playbook – David O. Russell
Six Degrees of Separation – Fred Schepisi
Sling Blade – Billy Bob Thornton
Snow White – David Hand and others
Solaris – Andrei Tarkovsky
Somewhere – Sophia Coppola
Spirited Away – Hayao Miyazaki
Split – M. Night Shyamalan
Starred Up – David Mackenzie
Stranger Than Fiction – Marc Forster
Sunset Boulevard – Billy Wilder
Sunshine – Danny Boyle
Synecdoche, New York – Charlie Kaufman
Syriana – Stephen Gaghan
Taxi Driver – Martin Scorsese
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles – Steve Barron
Terminator 2: Judgement Day – James Cameron

The American – Anton Corbijn
The Big Sleep – Howard Hawks
The Book of Eli – The Hughes Brothers
The Bourne Identity – Tony Gilroy
The Color of Money – Martin Scorsese
The Conformist – Bernardo Bertolucci
The Conversation – Francis Ford Coppola
The Corporation – Mark Achbar, Jennifer Abbot
The Dark Knight – Christopher Nolan
The Dark Knight Rises – Christopher Nolan
The Death of Stalin – Armando Iannucci
The Deer Hunter – Michael Cimino
The Descendants – Alexander Payne
The Equalizer – Antoine Fuqua
The Fighter – David O. Russell
The Fountain – Darren Aronofsky
The Ghost Writer – Roman Polanski
The Godfather Part I – Francis Ford Coppola
The Good Shepherd – Robert De Niro
The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly – Sergio Leone
The Grand Budapest Hotel – Wes Anderson
The Green Mile – Frank Darabont
The Hobbit – Arthur Rankin Jr. and Jules Bass
The Ides of March – George Clooney
The Informant! – Steven Soderbergh
The Last Unicorn – Arthur Rankin Jr. and Jules Bass
The Legend of Bagger Vance – Robert Redford
The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou – Wes Anderson
The Machinist – Brad Anderson
The Maltese Falcon – John Huston
The Man Who Wasn't There – The Coens
The Mule – Clint Eastwood
The Pursuit of Happyness – Gabriele Muccino
The Shape of Water – Guillermo del Toro
The Silence of the Lambs – Johnathan Demme
The Social Network – David Fincher
The Sweet Hereafter – Atom Egoyan

The Treasure of the Sierra Madre – John Huston
The Triumph of the Will – Leni Riefenstahl (For technical merits only)
The Truman Show – Peter Weir
The Valley of the Bees – Frantisek Vlácil
The Witch – Robert Eggers
THX 1138 – George Lucas
Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy – Thomas Alfredson
The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring – Peter Jackson
Twelve Monkeys – Terry Gilliam
Unbreakable – M. Night Shyamalan
Under the Skin – Johnathan Glazer
V for Vendetta – The Wachowskis
Vertigo – Alfred Hitchcock
Wag the Dog – Barry Levison
Wall-E – Andrew Stanton
What Dreams May Come – Vincent Ward
Who Framed Roger Rabbit – Roger Zemeckis
Willow – Ron Howard
Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory – Mel Stuart



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