

**POLITICS AND THE AESTHETIC ANIMAL:  
ARISTOTLE AND ADORNO**

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## **Abstract**

This study examines the neglected role of other animals and art in Aristotle's classic conception of the human being, and argues that the work of T.W. Adorno can be drawn upon to recover this conception's neglected promise. By reading Aristotle's oft-cited claim that 'the human being is by nature a political animal' in light of his works on biology and poetics, I find that Aristotle displaces ideas concerning the role of human being in the cosmos prominent in the Ancient Greek world, binding the self-understanding of human beings to other animals and the arts. This self-understanding can be summarized as follows: 1) Aristotle recognizes that humans are not the only political animals, and provides the rudiments of a theory concerning how nonhuman politics might be possible; and 2) Aristotle's theory of nature is unintelligible without artistic metaphors that suggest the creative power of the arts to produce what we understand to be human, not simply in terms of revealing natural human capacities, but in creating these capacities in the first place.

Though largely unappreciated by his descendants, detractors, and even Aristotle himself, I argue these insights can be recovered through Adorno's critical theory. Adorno enables us to grasp the creative power of art in the construction of the human being and the distance it can place between humans and other animals while at once allowing us to see how a turn toward the repressed possibilities upon which the emergence of the human depends is also a turn toward animality. In this sense, the promise of humanity and its legacy concerns less a defense of the classical humanism being eroded by the vicissitudes of history, than the possibility of uncovering the paths not followed by this tradition that might inform posthuman subjective possibilities more able to confront the challenges of the present. In this way, Adorno enables the theorization of an aesthetic animal, the subject of a radically transformed society.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### *A Sketch in Triptych*

In *The Time Machine* (1895), H.G. Wells describes the feeling of time travel as “excessively unpleasant”: one is hurtled through time in a “helpless headlong motion” as if riding a “switchback,” gripped by a “nightmare sensation of falling” and “horrible anticipation” of “an imminent smash.”<sup>1</sup> The world in which Wells’ time traveler finds himself proves worthy of these premonitory sensations, for it is a world wherein the working class, driven into a troglodytic existence, has returned to prey on its erstwhile oppressors. In Wells’ future the poor finally eat the rich, though history is ironic enough to avoid the rudeness of cannibalism—they have, in this distant future, become different species.

While there is much that might be said of this tangle of ideas, what I wish to extract here is the idea that socio-political domination is bound up with nature, and that ‘time travel’ might reveal the transformations undergone by humans in relation to other animals—that the natural or even permanent appearance of humanity in any single image might, through the juxtaposition with others, reveal history through their frayed edges. With Wells, then, we might become time travelers in order to glimpse the three images of humanity, which, together, form the triptych that I claim intimates something of the transformation of the self-

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<sup>1</sup> H.G. Wells, *The Time Machine*, ed. Nicholas Ruddick (Peterborough: Broadview, 2001), 76-77.

understanding of human nature through history, and its relation to socio-political domination. If we have the stomach, then, we might leap:

Venice, circa 1550. Tintoretto's *The Creation of Animals* depicts part of the creation story found in the Book of Genesis. An anthropomorphic God is suspended above the earth, as if having leapt into the air: the upper-half of His body bent forward, His right hand extended. It is an active, theatrical pose—perhaps too much so, for a God who need only speak for it to be so. He is dressed in a blue robe and red cloak, and around His body is a kind of aura of light, delineating His separation and independence from the world of His creation, and which appears arranged around Him. There is a clear distinction between land, sky, and sea, and each is teeming: beasts of the field, birds of the air, fish of the sea. All appear to be moving at His behest, in straight lines even; they are ordered in a world and occupy a particular place in it according to their kind in the manner designated by their Creator, who stands apart from them.

Beneath this image another stirs, as if the first were a kind of palimpsest, for Tintoretto based the composition of this piece upon a painting completed only some thirty years earlier in the same city: Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne* (c. 1523). Here it is Bacchus who is suspended in mid-air, having leapt from his chariot towards Ariadne, who is dressed in a blue robe and red cloak. In his wake is a procession of other figures, including animals, creatures half-human and half-animal, and others who at a glance could be either god or human. Unlike the

order built on the clear symmetry of the positioning of the animals and the prominence of their Creator in Tintoretto, Titian gives us here an image of disorder, of unruliness—not quite *chaos*, for Bacchus does appear to occupy a position of authority among his horde, but his position appears relative and unstable. Confronted with this procession, Ariadne’s fate is also unclear: will she be recruited by this mob, or even made its Lord? Or will they enslave her, or tear her apart and devour her, as they appear to have done a calf whose remains they parade around as trophies? The image, shorn of other knowledge of her story, does not say.

In Tintoretto we see the dominant interpretation of the human-animal distinction as it is found in the Christian tradition. Though, strictly speaking, no human appears in the painting, insofar as “man” was made in the image of God and it is this special relation to God that sets him apart from other animals, we might see humans as occupying an analogical position to God in the painting, as creatures who, made in the image of God, share in His dominion over animals. Humans may, like animals, be *in* the world, but their relation to God means that they are not *of* the world: the realization of their properly human nature extends beyond the world of animals, and toward the eternal and divine. This division of human from animal through divine proximity strips the animal of the possibility of making moral claims. At best, the mistreatment of the animal can be seen as wrong due to what it does to the human agent involved: that the human either

violates divine law or fails to rise to its semi-divine stature when it mistreats others—these others do not matter in their own right.

Yet this image draws upon another, very different image: the world of Greek mythology as it is captured by Titian. Here the line between human, animal, and god is far from clearly drawn, and we have no reason to believe it is stable. The remains of an animal are being bandied about—so it is not a world without violence—but other animals occupy different positions, and there is no indication that one is fundamentally different from another. That is, there is no evidence that a human could not occupy the position of an animal, or an animal, the position of a human, and the gods and other creatures appear to circulate between these two categories, occupying one and then the other as they desire. Thus the relation here between human and animal takes on different shapes particular to context: the animal might represent a foe to be subdued, or a potential friend whose allegiance must be secured through various rites; what matters is how the relation with the animal might secure or threaten one's own status as human and so define the kind of human one is.

Despite the apparent incongruity of these images, their historical and geographical proximity betrays their hidden unity. This image of an unruly separation between human and animal, where each appear to be continuous with the other in some important way, lies beneath the image of orderly separation according to the design of the Creator, and is never quite excised by the latter.

The active and theatrical pose of a God whose word should be all-powerful, whose bodily gestures are always already superfluous to His mind, is a Bacchanalian tic, the shudder of myth within a monotheism that would exercise its ban, yet nevertheless feel compelled to dress in its garb. Indeed, not only does Tintorello's Christian God wear the robes and cloak of Ariadne, but even the anthropomorphic representation of God itself seems to undermine his alleged separation from, and superiority to, the world of created things.

As I will develop below, it is the philosophy of Aristotle that stands between these two images of the human and animal. The manner in which Aristotle formulates the human-animal distinction undermines that found in the earlier world of poetic myth illustrated by Homer, the tragedians, and even to an extent Plato, inaugurating a new relation between humans and animals based on natural potentials stretching up toward the divine. That Aristotle establishes this identity of the human being as the most divine through a conception of nature dependent upon aesthetic representation and metaphor is the return of mythology repressed, which, in preserving the socio-political domination that ordered Aristotle's world, finds expression in Aristotle's hierarchical conception of capacities that claims some humans to be more human than others. This manner of dividing and relating human and animal, its political consequences, and the role played by art therein, I call the *Aristotelian problematic*, and it is

through it that Titian and the world of poetic myth appear as past, and Tintoretto and Christianity as future.

It is thus to Aristotle that those thinkers that claim the Christian tradition to have been exhausted turn—Nietzsche, Heidegger, and those working within their legacies—in trying to re-think the human-animal distinction and the role of art therein. They do so not as a return to Aristotle, but his overcoming, attempting to excavate the root of the metaphysical tradition culminating in Christianity and strive for, in the case of Nietzsche, the re-birth of an aristocratic animality to rival the greatness of the displaced world of poetic myth, or in the case of Heidegger, the emergence of an aristocratic height more lofty than even Aristotle and the Christians imagined. Yet both of these tendencies overlook the place of art in the Aristotelian conception of nature they would overcome, and hence misrecognize the promise of the Aristotelian problematic, while failing to escape the violence and domination it also reproduces. In order to grasp the promise of Aristotle's philosophy Aristotle must be seen not as the origin of a tradition but as a messenger from its future: we need a way to re-contextualize the possibilities made available by Aristotle, one that would allow us to free ourselves of the obstacles that prevent Aristotle himself from directly providing these answers. Put differently: we must be time travelers, and we require another stop to proffer our last image and so take stock of the promise held in the Aristotelian problematic:

Prague, 1915. Gregor Samsa awakes within the prose of Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* to find himself an insect, a kind of giant beetle, to be worried over and hidden, as the object of disgust, before finally succumbing to his ill-treatment. Far from fanciful or fantastic, Kafka's description of Gregor's plight can be understood as a report on the state of the human subject of modernity: no longer stretching up toward the divine and so elevating itself above other animals, or caught in a frenzy circulating between animal and divine, humanity is no longer as it was envisioned by Tintoretto or Titian. Rather, in a world where domination has taken on the shape of bureaucratic regularity and murder and suffering have become processes to be managed, the human being can no longer hide that which it would repress beneath a beautiful veneer. Just as Schoenberg quizzically mused that it was only after the First World War that people seemed to have acquired an ear for his music,<sup>2</sup> so perhaps it is only within the world as it was established following the Second World War that we have acquired the sensibility for Kafka, and so the possibility of recognizing the place of humanity—that promise of history as the escape from nature—in domination.

The horrors of modernity brought terribly to fruition in Auschwitz and Hiroshima make it no longer possible to divide human from animal in the Christian manner, nor do the rituals that regulated their circulation in the world poetic myth still have force. We are faced now with the terror of slipping back

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<sup>2</sup> Arnold Schoenberg, "How One Becomes Lonely," in *Style and Idea*, trans. Leo Black, ed. Leonard Stein (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 51.

into the maw of nature, of living as animals, and any attempt to theorize the possibility of the good life and its politics must begin from this historical position. It is the work of Theodor W. Adorno, I contend, who offers us the surest guidance in this situation, and through which we might theorize the possibility of art playing a moral and political role in re-aligning the relation between human and animal such as to enable life to live free of domination. It is this promise, the promise of life lived free of domination introduced and betrayed in the Aristotelian problematic to which Adorno might speak. How this is so demands some attempt at justification, by way of a cursory overview of the role the human-animal distinction and its relation to art has played in political theory.

### *Humans, Animals, and Art in Political Theory*

The history of political thought in the West has been frequently characterized by an attempt to pair theories of politics with what we might call ‘philosophical anthropologies’: theories of what a human being fundamentally is that shape what is understood to be possible, or at least probable, and thus serve as guides to theories of politics. If the human being is such and such a creature, so the argument goes, then its life ought to be organized in such and such a fashion. However, the amazing growth in the last century of the technological capacity of humans to both perpetuate destruction on an ever-greater scale, and to manipulate life at every level, have served to call into question what we

understand to be human and its possible vocation, and consequently its place in political theory. Though Dryzek, Honig, and Phillips claim in their introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory* (2008) that political theorists “share a commitment to the humanistic study of politics,” thus placing some version of humanism at the heart of political theory, they note that this shared commitment comes with “considerable disagreement over what [it] means.”<sup>3</sup>

Concerning this “considerable disagreement,” most broadly we might isolate within contemporary political theory three over-arching positions with respect to “humanism,” understood not simply as the promotion of human rights around the globe, but as the theoretical underpinnings of such a project. The first, and easily largest position, concerns those who understand the vocation of politics to be to establish the best framework for humans to be human, one that enables activities that promote the flourishing of natural capacities, while protecting the space for this flourishing in a regime of rights. While this position encompasses liberals, communitarians, deliberative democrats, and civic republicans in a way that might overlook important differences between these respective positions, I make the association here not to neglect these differences but simply to highlight their common humanism, and to this end it is worth

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<sup>3</sup> John Dryzek, Bonnie Honig, and Anne Phillips, “Introduction,” in *The Oxford Handbook to Political Theory*, eds. John Dryzek, Bonnie Honig, and Anne Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4. I thus interpret “humanistic” here to refer not simply to methods of textual analysis or reflection upon current and historical events characteristic of those disciplines found in the Humanities, as opposed to more empirically inclined methods found in the sciences, but to normative and speculative ideas concerning humanity, for the ‘humanistic’ tradition has for the most part always insisted on their inseparability.

noting the role philosophical anthropologies play among certain prominent theorists within this category.

For instance, not only does the early work of MacIntyre and Nussbaum illustrate this humanist position in terms of the promotion of humanist politics, but each are entirely rooted in philosophical anthropologies from which their political programs are an expression: for them, politics is nothing if not the practices through which humanity might flourish, and its prescriptions are entirely oriented to this end.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, thinkers as different from these Aristotelians as they are from each other, such as Fukuyama and Habermas, also rely on particular conceptions of human nature and dignity in order to promote particular political aims, which in their cases concern the political consequences of biological engineering.<sup>5</sup> Perhaps most stridently, Kateb has also taken up the banner not only of a revitalized conception of human dignity, but an explicit philosophical anthropology, behind which he rallies to theorize not only the human good, but that of the planet as well.<sup>6</sup> Though both MacIntyre and Nussbaum have in more recent works revised the more ecstatic elements of their anthropocentrism, they have done so in order to expand the notion of human dignity and the moral consideration bound to it to other kinds of beings, not to

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<sup>4</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984); Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Martha C. Nussbaum, "Human Functioning and Social Justice," *Political Theory* 20.2 (1992): 202-246.

<sup>5</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *Our Posthuman Future* (New York: Picador, 2002), Chs.8 & 9; Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, trans. William Rehg, Hella Beister, and Max Pensky (Cambridge: Polity, 2003).

<sup>6</sup> George Kateb, *Human Dignity* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2011). Cf. Michael Rosen, *Dignity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012).

displace the fundamental importance or even centrality of their conceptions of humanity for political theory.<sup>7</sup> Thus, for the aforementioned thinkers, *anthropos* remains the measure, even if *anthropos* is acknowledged as being constituted through its relation not only to itself, but to other animals.

In contrast to the humanist position which might be said to define the mainstream of political theory, we have what might be called the ‘post-humanist’ position, descended from the antihumanism of thinkers such as Althusser, Foucault, and Deleuze. Unlike the variations on humanism found among the members of the aforementioned group, post-humanists deny the necessary centrality of humanity as a concept, focusing instead on the ways in which humans are entwined with non-human entities, including the myriad agencies of animals, machines, and systems that inform and destabilize the concept of the human and the possibility of promoting its self-same ends.<sup>8</sup> For post-humanists, it is possible to speak of conditions that give rise to what we call humanity and with it humanist aims, or a “human predicament,”<sup>9</sup> but the integral stability of the concept of humanity and its humanistic promotion is considered suspect, if not rejected outright. For post-humanists, then, philosophical anthropology is an antiquated relic of the history of political thought which serves only to obstruct

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<sup>7</sup> See Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (Chicago: Open Court, 2002); Martha C. Nussbaum, “Beyond ‘Compassion for Humanity’: Justice for Nonhuman Animals,” in *Frontiers of Justice* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2006).

<sup>8</sup> Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Rosie Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013); Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> William E. Connolly, *A World of Becoming* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), Ch. 4.

more creative ways of understanding our politics and how it relates to the material universe.

The last position I want to outline in contemporary political theory relative to humanism is a trend emerging in some sense from the post-human position: what is being called by some “agonistic humanism.” Rather than seeing politics as an expression of natural human capacities or directed toward necessarily humanistic ends, as the humanists, or rejecting humanism outright, as the post-humanists, “agonistic humanism” recognizes that defining the human is itself a political act: “humanism is,” Honig claims, “implicated in political divisions it claims to transcend.”<sup>10</sup> In this sense, Honig might be seen to formulate more explicitly the kind of *practical humanism* Rancière invokes against the *theoretical humanism* condemned by Althusser’s antihumanism.<sup>11</sup> For Rancière, humanism refers to a set of politically contested concepts that both dominator and dominated attempt to appropriate and so marshal to their own aims as they struggle against one another.<sup>12</sup> Rather than reject philosophical anthropologies, then, agonistic humanists concern themselves with locating the political or rhetorical function of such anthropologies, and so their value as political practices, rather than make ontological claims concerning their correctness or lack thereof. Practical or ‘agonistic’ humanism, then, strives toward an

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<sup>10</sup> Bonnie Honig, *Antigone Interrupted* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 17.

<sup>11</sup> See Louis Althusser, “The Humanist Controversy,” In *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings*, ed. François Matheron, trans. G.M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2003), 253.

<sup>12</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Althusser’s Lesson*, trans. Emiliano Battista (New York: Continuum, 2011), Ch.4.

appropriation of humanism that remains mindful of the anti-humanist and post-humanist critiques concerning the political constitution of the concepts of humanism, and so preserves the concept of humanity while cancelling its foundational status.

While these three broad positions do indeed constitute “considerable disagreement” concerning the place of the concept of humanity and humanistic approaches to politics, it is interesting to note a trend running through each of these positions concerning a re-evaluation of the concept of humanity and the humanistic commitments to nature. Not only does agonistic humanism allow for the theorizing of a different division of what is considered human and animal, while post-humanism seeks to understand how in a sense humans are always already subtended by inhuman forces, even Kateb’s revitalization of philosophical anthropology and his insistence that human stature is something fundamentally different than that of an animal is done in order to endow humanity with the stewardship of the natural world and the planet on which it flourishes.<sup>13</sup> These positions can thus be seen to be connected not merely in their relation to the place they see humanity occupying relative to politics and political theory, but through their acknowledgement that this place must involve a changed understanding of the relationship between human beings and the natural world.

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<sup>13</sup> Kateb, *Human Dignity*, 5; 17; 23; 115; 122.

Of those attempting to explicitly reformulate this relation, we might identify two broad camps. The first is made up of those who see it necessary to formulate a more expansive conception of humanity such as to render human beings morally responsible to other forms of life, especially certain animals. Again, though the most prominent approaches vary significantly between the utilitarian view advanced by Singer, the modified version of the capacities approach championed by Nussbaum, and the rights-driven approach formulated by Donaldson and Kymlicka, their respective positions are united through their attempts to show an important identity between humans and certain animals, which ought thus to endow the latter with analogous basic rights and privileges to those enjoyed by humans.<sup>14</sup> In attempting to expand the conception of humanity, personhood, or selfhood in this manner, these authors are in agreement that the change humanity needs is one that can be accomplished through political reform, and that the kinds of conscious-raising necessary for such reforms to gain popular appeal are more or less in line with how one might go about gaining support for any kind of political reform, even if they acknowledge the vastly greater scope of animal rights. In this sense, these authors appear to be in agreement with a generalized version of Habermas's famous critique of Adorno: that the philosophy of the subject and of "consciousness" has been exhausted,<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: Random House 1990); Nussbaum, "Beyond 'Compassion for Humanity'"; Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, *Zoopolis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>15</sup> Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, Vol.I, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1984), 386.

and that the question that most urgently concerns humanity is not, in fact, how humanity has been constituted through the domination of nature, but rather concerns the structural possibilities for the democratic production of consensus on substantial issues, such as animal rights, in this case.

It is against this general notion that the conception of humanity can simply be expanded by fiat in order for violence against other animals to wither that I would re-introduce Aristotle and Adorno into this debate. In downplaying the role of violence and the domination of both other animals and other humans in the evolution of human constitution and its ongoing reproduction, approaches that would simply expand the concept of humanity fail to address the violence at the heart of the human subject and its society, attempting to alleviate the suffering of some while neglecting its sources and so its continuation through the oppression and domination of others. It is a central contention of this study that a re-reading of Aristotle might illustrate the way in which this conception of humanity was formulated, and that a reading of Adorno might indicate how this conception is reproduced and thus how it might be transformed. To this end, I advocate a return to the philosophy of consciousness whose exhaustion has been announced by Habermas, in order to theorize a possible transformation of the subject, even if Adorno himself, did not, so they say, “tell stories about a ‘new

subject.”<sup>16</sup> If domination is not simply oppression in the sense of external control suffered by one individual or group by another, but concerns a psychological dimension whereby the oppressed internalize their oppression such as to naturalize it and obliterate even the ability to imagine other ways of living,<sup>17</sup> then the transformation of society based on violence to animal others cannot be separated from subjective transformation.

In this respect, the second broad trend concerning the reformulation of the human-animal relation appears to offer more promise, though it too is hampered by significant shortcomings. Works in this trend by thinkers such as Agamben and Derrida have attempted to show the manner in which what we call human has depended on a corresponding conception of ‘the animal’ whose separation from the human is produced and maintained through systematic violence and domination, thus placing a focus on the production of the human that is often taken for granted by those thinkers identified in the first trend noted above.<sup>18</sup> While this attempt to incorporate the idea that the human is itself a rather precarious concept into the question of our relation to other animals, along with the attempt to trace the history of the theoretical underpinnings of this

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<sup>16</sup> Jürgen Habermas, “Theodor Adorno: The Primal History of Subjectivity—Self-Affirmation Gone Wild,” in *Philosophical-Political Profiles*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983), 104.

<sup>17</sup> Alkis Kontos, “Domination: Metaphor and Political Reality,” in *Domination* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 219.

<sup>18</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The Open*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004); Jacques Derrida, *The Animal that therefore I Am*, trans. David Wills, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008); Jacques Derrida, *The Beast & the Sovereign*, Vol.1 & II eds. Michel Lisse, Marie-Louise Mallet, and Ginette Michaud, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009; 2011).

distinction, are to my mind welcome theoretical innovations in our understanding of the political import of the human-animal distinction, the manner in which these innovations are made draw heavily on the work of thinkers such as Nietzsche and Heidegger.

As I shall attempt to show below, both Nietzsche and Heidegger misconstrue the manner in which the human-animal distinction has been inherited in the West by overlooking important aspects of the work of Aristotle. While all recognize the importance of Aristotle's influence on this question, they do not sufficiently appreciate Aristotle's writings on biology or on poetics, both of which, I argue, should be seen to modify Aristotle's more famous statements on human capacities and their relation to politics. If Aristotle can be shown to offer a more nuanced appraisal of the political nature of human beings, one that might include other animals, as he does in his *History of Animals*, and nature itself can be shown to depend on artifice, then the reversal of the Aristotelian tradition attempted by Nietzsche and Heidegger is without the force it might otherwise be thought to have, and those drawing too closely upon them might likewise fail in their attempts to overcome Aristotle.

In returning to the Aristotelian problematic we gain a more nuanced understanding of the human-animal distinction: we find that much of what is human is also found in other animals, and that drawing and ordering this distinction is found to be heavily dependent upon the arts. There are three

important consequences to be drawn from these insights. The first is that if the arts can be seen as serving an integral role in how the human-animal distinction is drawn, then the recent resurgence in the interest of the relation between art and politics acquires a whole new dimension, related as it is to the kinds of philosophical anthropologies that have been employed in the history of political thought, and thus divergent literatures in political theory might be found to relate to each other in new ways. Secondly, and perhaps more urgently, this insight reveals an important potential aid or obstacle in the democratic consensus building necessary for the success of the animal rights and liberation movements. If the arts play a part in constructing the subjectivity that informs the moral and political decisions involved in supporting these movements, then an important dimension of both the movement's success and the persuasiveness of its theory are being neglected—a neglect which can only be remedied through a return to the philosophy of consciousness which attempts to grasp how subjects are produced in ways that are not effectively addressed through the focus on the formal socio-political structures these theorists tend to adopt.

Thirdly, in the light of the Aristotelian problematic, the argument stating 'the animal' is something like the *ur*-subject of domination, that is, that people oppress and dominate each other in the same way they oppress and dominate animals, that we see the oppression of humans by one another worsen when oppressors see the oppressed as animal rather than human, and consequently if

humans come to treat animals better they will treat each other better, to be unfortunately too simple to describe the historical record.<sup>19</sup> The Aristotelian problematic, as we will see, comes to displace the view of humanity found in the world of poetic myth—the world of Titian’s *Bacchus and Ariadne*—in a way that serves to undermine its stratifications with an egalitarian vector which it ultimately betrays. In studying this displacement and betrayal, we find that the human-animal distinction can be drawn in a number of different ways that would legitimate different human-animal and human-human relations which are not inherently part of trajectories of liberation or domination. Or more bluntly: humans are quite capable of relating to other animals compassionately while oppressing other humans. Derrida acknowledges this when he notes—in an address on the work of Adorno—that the Nazis not only related Jews, Gypsies, and homosexuals to animals, but that the Nazis also *loved* their animals, “even to the point of vegetarianism,” as in the case of the *Führer* himself.<sup>20</sup> Thus, a more nuanced appreciation of the human-animal distinction and its relation to morality and politics is necessary, one that acknowledges how different ways of drawing the human-animal distinction have political consequences that are not predictable from their outset, and consequently require the arts to mold and

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<sup>19</sup> This argument is commonly repeated today, though its sources appear to be as old as Pythagoras. See Richard Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 7.

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Derrida, “*Fichus*,” in *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 181.

shape them. Unfortunately, though, Derrida himself does not go on to develop this point further in his other writings on animals.

It is Adorno, I argue, who provides this nuanced re-evaluation of the human-animal distinction, while also providing in his writings on aesthetics something like a practical moral and political guide to the construction of a genuinely posthuman subject. Though Adorno's writings on aesthetics are well-known, he produced no treatise on 'the animal' and appears to have made little substantial attempt to study them. And yet, images of different animals appear provocatively throughout his writings, marking the points at which humanity falters—the points at which the cracks in its veneer become visible, and a different set of subjective possibilities are intimated. The animal is for Adorno what is nonidentical to the human; it is those possibilities repressed and excluded from human constitution in the different instantiations of its drive for self-preservation since the time when Aristotle's conception of the human being formulated its systematic difference from and superiority to the animal.

In this sense, Adorno provides the combination to the lock forged by Aristotle, a way of appropriating the promise of the Aristotelian problematic that displaced the world of poetic myth without becoming trapped in the logic of violence and domination that animates both. It is this promise, the promise of new subjective possibilities, which are invoked in the term *aesthetic animal*. An aesthetic animal would be a subject constituted through an aesthetic education

that might bring about a different relation between animal senses or bodily comportment and human reason, one for whom self-preservation is no longer the point around which all else must gravitate. Such a subject, of course, would demand a qualitatively different form of society, one likewise no longer constituted through violence and domination. Only in such a society, one wherein the relations between humans have been radically transformed would the radical transformation of human-animal relations raised by the animal rights and liberation movements become a concrete possibility.

#### *A Forecast*

Toward this theorization of an aesthetic animal, my argument proceeds in four parts. The first concerns how some of the more prominent among the recent attempts to theorize the relation between art, aesthetics, and politics resonate with recent attempts to re-think the human-animal distinction and its legacy in the history of political thought in the West. I argue that despite numerous differences between these works and their proponents, they might nevertheless be found to fall within a paradigm of thinking defined by Nietzsche on the one hand, and Heidegger on the other. This Nietzsche-Heidegger paradigm, at least on the questions of the relations between art and politics and humans and animals, take Aristotle as something of the primordial father who must be overthrown, and their contributions to these questions can be understood as

attempts to overturn the Aristotelian problematic, though the paths each would open in this overturning lead in different directions. Thus a survey of this literature and their various connections to Nietzsche and Heidegger illustrates how Aristotle has been understood to stand at the nexus point between art and its relation to politics, and how we define the human and its relation to the animal; however, it is a certain Aristotle who stands there, one who is already in a sense the reflection of his interlocutors critiques. If it can be found that the Aristotelian problematic provides resources for understanding these questions Nietzsche, Heidegger, and their progeny fail to adequately develop, then their attempted overturning of the Aristotelian problematic is without the force they would give it.

The second and third parts of my argument thus attempt to establish a more nuanced understanding of Aristotle's contributions to questions concerning the relations between art and politics and the human and the animal through an elaboration of the Aristotelian problematic. Part II focuses on the human-animal distinction and its relation to politics: specifically, how Aristotle's manner of conceiving this distinction displaced its formulation in the world of poetic myth, and how his oft-cited claim that the human being is a naturally political animal must be understood in the context of his biological writings, which claim that humans are one of *many* different kinds of political animals. I attempt here to give a general formulation of what Aristotle understands to be animal—that is, the unity he finds in the great multiplicity of animal life—and in what ways

humans must themselves be understood as kinds of animal, continuous with other forms of animal life in a wide variety of important ways. I then turn to an account of what Aristotle does claim to be uniquely human, and how the capacities that serve to mark humanity out from other forms of animal life are not equally distributed among all humans, thus making some individuals more human than others.

In Part III the other side of the Aristotelian problematic is examined: the relation between art and politics and how this relates to the human-animal distinction. Here I argue that Aristotle's conception of nature depends upon a host of metaphors drawn from the arts, without which it is not intelligible. These metaphors point, I claim, to a fundamental *aporia* in Aristotle's thinking: the relation between nature and artifice. If Aristotle's conception of nature is unintelligible without artifice, then artifice is necessary to the nature that will distribute the capacities that will define human and animal, both in terms of the instruments that will allow nature to flourish, and nature as such. Thus nature is artificial twice over: what is called nature is already the reflection of human artifice (1), and this nature requires additional artifice in order to be what it is (2). Consequently, the natural ends of a human being and the natural capacities it requires to meet them must themselves be seen as products of the arts, an insight I argue can be found in Aristotle, especially his *Poetics*, but goes unrecognized, for the insolubility of the *aporia* of nature and artifice in Aristotle means that he

does not acknowledge (1). While Aristotle demonstrates in his *Poetics* the vital importance of art for politics through its role in bringing to fruition and harmony the various natures that compose humanity, if nature really is a reflection of artifice, then it is to a particular mode of artifice—the ways of doing particular to his own society—that art serves to reconcile its participants. Art thus becomes the means to present artifice as nature, and so both creates hierarchical divisions between human beings and reconciles them to one another.

Despite the violence and domination concealed in the Aristotelian problematic, Aristotle at once offers important insights that go unrecognized if this problematic is simply or abstractly overturned. Chiefly among these are the ideas that other kinds of animals can be political, and therefore that other subjective possibilities might be politically drawn upon that are not, strictly speaking, human; that a life of leisure and beautiful activity shorn of the dictates of self-preservation is highest; and that art is political in that it might serve a role in producing both these other subjective possibilities and a life of leisure and beauty. I argue in Part IV that the work of Theodor W. Adorno enables the theoretical recovery of these insights, and so the promise found and betrayed in the Aristotelian problematic. I begin by attempting to sketch out the relation between Adorno and Aristotle and so illustrate the challenge Adorno's theoretical innovations offer to Aristotle's conception of humanity, which I then develop through an examination of Adorno's own uses of the concept of humanity and its

related terms. Adorno's critique of philosophical anthropology and the nonidentical place of animality in human constitution gesture toward a subjective transformation of the human being into a different kind of animal, the subject of a qualitatively different kind of society. Thus Adorno can be seen to ironically revive the Aristotelian idea of aesthetic education, one in which the arts are marshaled not to the cultivation of the human and so the repression of the animal, the forced reconciliation of the subject to violence presented as natural, but rather to the liberation of human animality and the creation of a nature that has never existed. It is through Adorno, then, that the Aristotelian problematic might be appropriated and surpassed, and against this idea of new life dawning, the shadow of an aesthetic animal might be glimpsed.

## **Part I: Art, Aesthetics, and the Human-Animal Divide**

### *Introduction*

Aesthetics as a field of academic inquiry leads a somewhat precarious and vagabond life, one whose political ties are not always obvious. As the formalized study of art and of beauty, it has traditionally been a subfield of the discipline of philosophy, though the object of its study has enabled it to make a home for itself within such fields as Art and Art History, English, and Film Studies, and its fortunes have to an extent waxed and waned with those of its hosts. However, at its inception aesthetics was defined in more expansive terms than its various academic hosts tend to define it today. Aesthetics, derived from the Greek *aisthesis*, concerned human perceptions and sensations. According to the formulation first given it by the German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten midway through the 18<sup>th</sup> century, aesthetics is a kind of “feminine” alternative to reason—a “sister” of logic operating not at the cognitive *peak* that is reason, but at the *lower* level of sensation. It is as this sensual complement to reason that it has been claimed that aesthetics “is born as a discourse of the body”<sup>21</sup> : while the divinity of reason allowed it to extend beyond parochial bodily concerns, aesthetics was left to manage the more earth-bound of human affairs.

In terms of its politics, aesthetics has been linked with the ascendance of the European bourgeoisie, with Eagleton claiming that in contrast to the

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<sup>21</sup> Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 13.

commanding force of absolutism, the bourgeois order is one in which sentiments, habits, and affections form the substance of its bond. That is, power in the bourgeois order is *aestheticized*: it is lived in the sensibility of our unreflective customs.<sup>22</sup> The modern construction of aesthetic artifacts, as pieces of social life that can in some way represent or capture some key feature of it, is thus for Eagleton deeply related to “the construction of the dominant ideological forms of modern class-society.”<sup>23</sup> Whether or not Eagleton is correct concerning the place of aesthetics in the development of bourgeois rule in Europe is not an immediate concern of the present study. Rather, the point here is to note that if it is at least possible that aesthetics is tied to gender hierarchy, class power, and the more general subordination of the body to the mind, then the political side of aesthetics begins to come into focus. In this light, the claim that “our understandings of political life are informed by our aesthetic sensibilities”<sup>24</sup> seems quite plausible, and if this is indeed the case, then one might also voice concern about the degree to which such aesthetic sensibilities may inform our political life and decisions without our knowing it, potentially for ill.<sup>25</sup> At any rate, insofar as aesthetics concerns these different forms of power and the order in which these forms of

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<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Davide Panagia, *The Poetics of Political Thinking* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 2.

<sup>25</sup> *Especially for ill*, Kateb might say, though he does acknowledge both the complexity of “aestheticism” and the possibility of a “democratic aestheticism.” See George Kateb, “Aestheticism and Morality: Their Cooperation and Hostility,” in *Patriotism and Other Mistakes* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

power operate, aesthetics seems to be intimately related with at least a few of the more well-established concerns of political theory.

Much of the recent resurgence in work on the relation between art, aesthetics, and politics has come from contemporary European thinkers, and has taken on a diversity of forms. While an exhaustive treatment of thinkers concerned with the nexus of art, aesthetics, and politics is not possible here, it is worth noting a persistent concern among some of the thinkers who make this nexus an object of consideration: that is, the problematic status of categorization, especially with respect to the possibility of creating something new, and the political consequences of such innovation. For instance, Alain Badiou's recent contributions to the philosophy of art and aesthetics and their relation to politics have endeavored to map different forms the relation between art and philosophy has taken, and to suggest a new version of this relation, while also offering theoretical criteria that might evaluate art.<sup>26</sup> In stark contrast to Badiou's attempt to broadly rethink these categorizations, Gilles Deleuze has written on the relation between art and politics less as discreet categories under the general umbrella of philosophical inquiry, but as variations on processes of "becoming." For Deleuze, the artistic practices that constitute painting or writing are caught up in different kinds of processes of becoming that can blur, alter, or otherwise

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<sup>26</sup> For Badiou's formalization of past versions of the relation between art and philosophy, along with an explication of his own innovation of art as a "truth procedure," see Badiou's *Handbook of Inaesthetics*. Trans. Alberto Toscano (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 2-9. For Badiou's criteria concerning how "greatness" might be evaluated in art today, see *Five Lessons on Wagner*. Trans. Susan Spitzer. (London: Verso, 2010), 130-132.

subvert lines of categorization and so create new spaces for thinking and desiring.<sup>27</sup>

Different again is Jean-François Lyotard's understanding of politics, art and aesthetics: for Lyotard art and aesthetics have come to serve functions counter to one another. While art has historically been ambiguous enough to both facilitate the identification between common people and their rulers, and to offer them a chance to dream, to change their lives and to transform the world—a function Lyotard sees as having been shared with politics—the promise art once made has been submerged beneath the conceptual domination of aesthetics. Aesthetics is for Lyotard the handmaiden of culture subordinated to industry, for like industry, aesthetics reduces the radical promise of an artwork to conceptual categories, taming it through classification and compelling it to circulate as a commodity, ready for consumption. For Lyotard, in order for art to escape the conceptual domination of aesthetics and potentially contribute to an experience

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<sup>27</sup> While the themes of becoming and creation, and artistic examples of these, run through all of Deleuze's works, arguably the most sustained attempts at examining processes of becoming in terms of artistic practices can be found in Deleuze's *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. Trans. Daniel W. Smith (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2003), and co-authored with Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*. Trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986). While artistic and political procedures are not discreet categories onto themselves for Deleuze and Guattari (indeed, Deleuze and Guattari will write: "in no way do we believe in a fine-arts system; we believe in very diverse problems whose solutions are found in heterogeneous arts. To us, Art is a false concept"), insofar as Bacon's innovations in painting or Kafka's "minor literature" serve to scramble and re-articulate the dominant codes that structure flows of desire, these artistic processes of becoming can be seen simultaneously as forms of what Deleuze and Guattari call "micropolitics," that is, the re-articulation of dominant, "macropolitics." See Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. Trans. Brian Massumi. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 300; 208-231.

that does not enforce subservience to the dominant order, art must strive towards the *sublime*, an experience beyond all aesthetic classifications.<sup>28</sup>

While each of these thinkers approaches the possibility of artistic innovation, novelty, and the political status thereof from markedly different perspectives, the major concerns of all of these perspectives might be seen reproduced in the work of Rancière, Nancy, and Agamben, all of whom link these concerns to the constitution of the human and its relation to the animal. Below I will argue that Rancière, Nancy, and Agamben forge a relation between art, aesthetics, and politics that reverses the priority of practices with respect to what is understood to be the human being, or properly human life. That is, unlike previous notions of art, aesthetics, and politics which see these as outgrowths of what human being or human life properly is—“the discourse of the body” mentioned by Eagleton—Rancière, Nancy, and Agamben all locate priority in artistic, aesthetic, and political practices: the human being for them is not the creator of art, but art is the creator of what we call human being—an imagined reversal of the Aristotelian tradition I call the ‘posteriority of the human being.’

I then turn to consider Heidegger and Nietzsche on art and its relation to the human being, arguing that this posteriority of the human owes its formulation to their forceful articulation of the priority of art. I argue that the posteriority of the human is a correlate of the priority of art articulated by

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<sup>28</sup> See Jean-François Lyotard, “A Few Words to Sing” in *Music/Ideology: Resisting the Aesthetic*, ed. Adam Krims (Amsterdam: G+B Arts International, 1998), 15; 22; and *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time*. Trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 113; 115; 120; 128.

Heidegger and Nietzsche, the consequence of this being that a number of influential thinkers who have subsequently taken up the question of human and its relation to other animals can be seen to fall somewhere between Heidegger and Nietzsche. These thinkers, while not exactly Heideggerians or Nietzscheans in any direct sense, continue to theorize human life in the terms provided by Heidegger and Nietzsche, that is, as an artistic creation, an idea that is mistakenly understood to be a fundamental break from its conception in the history of Western thought, especially from the tradition inaugurated by Aristotle. I argue that this debt to Nietzsche and Heidegger, rather than break with Aristotle, serves instead to keep the posteriority of the human within the bounds of the tradition inaugurated by Aristotle, for on the one hand the human is brought closer to the animal through practices of domination (Nietzsche), and on the other, the human capacity for art is what serves to separate it from animals in a way more fundamentally than even Aristotle himself conceived (Heidegger). These poles ought to be seen as radicalizations of the Aristotelian tradition, not its overcoming.

## Chapter Two: The Posteriority of the Human

Jacques Rancière, Jean-Luc Nancy, and Giorgio Agamben all attempt to think a break with the inherited tradition of Western thought and its most dominant way of conceiving the human-animal distinction through a reversal of the priority between human and art: rather than art being the expression of innate human capacities, what we call human is itself an artistic invention—that is, the human is posterior to art. In this chapter I outline the manner in which each of these thinkers conceives of this reversal by looking at the way they formulate the relation between art, aesthetics, and politics and where in this relation they see the place of the human being.

### *Rancière*

Rancière's interpretation of aesthetics differs from both the tradition of aesthetics begun in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and its current disciplinary uses in that aesthetics is for him the particular way of thinking about art that marks the transformation of the fine arts as a plurality of distinct *arts* to “art” in the singular—*art* as a unified field of appearance holding together a variety of otherwise disparate works. In Rancière's sense, Baumgarten's inaugural work on *aesthetics* can be seen as the beginning of a break in a particular regime of sensibility—a particular way of seeing, hearing, and otherwise sensing the world—and the place of the objects that will become “art” therein. For Rancière, art requires a specific form of

thought capable of recognizing the objects proper to it in order for it to exist.<sup>29</sup> When the fine arts were identified as a plurality, Rancière holds that both the way of doing these arts (*poiesis*), and the way of being affected by this doing (*aisthesis*), were related and regulated by a rule of representation (*mimesis*).<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, this order of representation was linked together through a certain idea of human nature. That is, for Rancière, the harmony of active *poiesis* and passive *aisthesis* depended upon a certain view of human being as a social creature, whose activity giving shape to matter was necessarily limited by the particular place it occupied within the community (and more broadly, the cosmos).<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*. Trans. by Steve Corcoran (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 6. Rancière will often call these forms of thought “regimes of identification.” On the three particular “regimes of identification” Rancière sees in the Western artistic tradition, see Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*. Trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2007), 20-25.

<sup>30</sup> Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 7. “Mimesis” should not be understood here simply as a relation of resemblance between copy and model, but “a way of making resemblances function within a set of relations between ways of making, modes of speech, forms of visibility, and protocols of intelligibility.” See Rancière, *The Future of the Image*. Trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2007), 73.

<sup>31</sup> On the relation between the representative regime of the arts and human nature, see also Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Ian McLeod. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). Though it appears Rancière specifically has Aristotle in mind as the originator of the regime of representation, insofar as the regime of representation is a hierarchical division of the arts held together by a certain understanding of human nature, Derrida’s inquiry suggests that this regime persists at least as far as Hegel’s philosophy of art. In brief, Derrida argues that the “great philosophies of art,” (9) such as those of Kant and Hegel and possibly Heidegger as well, all exclude the frame from their discussions (23). Yet, not only is the frame what makes possible a certain way of recognizing and experiencing a given work of art, but frames can also be included in the work or be works of art on their own, thus troubling the distinction between what is and is not art, and hence the manner in which the decision that marks their divide is made. This decision on what is and is not art is made by aesthetic judgment, which Derrida suggests shares a relationship to the human body analogous to that of the work of art to the frame. That is, the human body provides the measure that defines the proportions that structure the beautiful (140)—it both makes aesthetic judgment possible and structures the judgment, yet is not formally included in the discussions of aesthetic judgment by the philosophers in question. In this manner aesthetic judgment implies a practical anthropology (107)—or, put otherwise: anthropology serves as the supplement to aesthetics. Derrida’s argument here seems to corroborate Rancière’s distinctions insofar as we understand the relation between

Thus, the aesthetic break that marks the failure of these distinctions between the fine arts and the manner they are to perform their roles also accompanies a discord between activity and sense, form and matter, and the place of human nature.<sup>32</sup> Human nature under the aesthetic regime is either *lost* or it is *to come*, but its present seat is necessarily vacant, for the experience of the sensible found in art has in the aesthetic regime become un-moored and set adrift, heterogeneous to its old place in the social order. This “aesthetic suspension” of the rule that joins *poiesis* to *aisthesis* and regulates their relation is for Rancière the principle of a revolution more profound than hitherto political revolutions insofar as it marks a revolution of “sensible existence itself,”<sup>33</sup> not simply a revolution in the form of the state. But if aesthetics marks a transformation of sensible experience that ought to be considered revolutionary, and this revolution ought to be considered “more profound” than the transformation of a state, does this transformation of sensibility have any direct political import, and if so, what might that be?

In order to understand the relation between aesthetics and politics Rancière is attempting to set out, it is important to get a better idea of what art means under the aesthetic regime of identification, and how it relates to Rancière’s particular understanding of politics. For Rancière, art in the singular

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aesthetics and anthropology Derrida is describing to be part of what Rancière calls the “regime of representation”—what Rancière calls the “aesthetic regime” is the disarticulation of artistic practices from the anthropological measures that characterized the regime of representation.

<sup>32</sup> Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 8; 12; 14.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

is “the framing of a space of presentation by which the things of art are identified as such.”<sup>34</sup> That is, art is a way of dividing space and time such that the objects which occupy this space and this time are recognized as works of art, irrespective of ways of doing and making or other artistic hierarchies.<sup>35</sup> Art in the singular relates to politics for Rancière not because of its content or its intent, but because these operations of dividing space and time overlap with what Rancière understands as politics. Formulated generally, politics is for Rancière the “framing of a particular sphere of experience,” or the “reconfiguring [of] the distribution of the sensible which defines the common of a community.”<sup>36</sup>

For Rancière politics is thus not the art of governance or the pursuit of power, but the contesting of the barriers that shape experience and form the contours of what is counted as a legitimate political subject and legitimate political activity. By contesting these barriers, politics seeks to introduce new subjects and new actions into the life of a community, and as such is a form of activity Rancière calls *dissensual*. *Dissensus* is the gap in the order of the sensible through which people relate meaningfully to each other and themselves, and is contrasted with *consensus*, the agreement between sense and a particular regime of meaning.<sup>37</sup> Politics, as a dissensual practice introducing new subjects and their activities into a community, attempts to make visible to that community

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>35</sup> Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 22-23.

<sup>36</sup> Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 24-25.

<sup>37</sup> Jacques Rancière, *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. Ed., Trans. Steven Corcoran (London: Continuum, 2010), 144.

what has previously been invisible, heard what has previously gone unheard, and in so doing transform the relations of meaning that constitute that community. In contrast, consensual practices—to which Rancière gives the name *police*—attempt to reduce the political gap, to incorporate the unseen and the unheard into the established regime of meaning, and in so doing make partners of the new subjects introduced by political intervention.<sup>38</sup>

In light of these definitions, the dissolution of the barriers separating the various fine arts into *art* in the singular marked by aesthetics also marks a transformation in the relationship between art and politics. Art in the singular, as the space of presentation wherein artworks can be recognized as such, like both politics and the police, directly concerns the division of the sensible.<sup>39</sup> Insofar as art, politics, and the police all operate on this same field, the old distinction between art for art's sake and politically motivated art collapses, as what makes art political concerns not its content or its intent but the manner in which it divides the sensible.<sup>40</sup> Art that seeks to make seen the unseen and heard the unheard, *dissensual* art, is at once political art, whereas art that would unify sense and meaning is *consensual* art—the art of the police. The politics proper to the aesthetic regime is thus not really a *politics* at all, but a kind of *metapolitics*,

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<sup>38</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, 43; 71-72.

<sup>39</sup> “I call the distribution of the sensible the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it [...] The distribution of the sensible reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed” (Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 12).

<sup>40</sup> Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 19.

for it is not simply another of the many political interventions undertaken by political works of art, but concerns the possibilities of art as such, and thus the possibility of political works of art in the first place.<sup>41</sup>

Aesthetics for Rancière thus marks the end of the plurality of the fine arts, the end of the regime of representation under which this plurality was unified, and the end of the conception of the human being which had served to underwrite this regime. However, the new relation between art and politics that it inaugurates, and the possibilities framed therein, are deeply ambiguous. While this ambiguity in Rancière's theorizing is not necessarily a fault, it does raise certain questions about possible directions for art and for politics, given this change in their relationship. For instance, the dissolution of the regime of representation, as previously mentioned, entails the dissolution of the conception of human being tied to this regime, and Rancière, in his more direct moments, will even write that the aesthetic state "is the moment of the formation and education of a specific type of humanity."<sup>42</sup> But what might this "specific type of humanity" look like?

In his early critique of Althusser, Rancière argues that humanism cannot be reduced to the philosophical concept of an "absolute origin" criticized by his mentor, but that humanism must also be understood as a "practical political ideology." To this end, the word "man" must be grasped in the sense it has been

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<sup>41</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, 133.

<sup>42</sup> Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 24.

used by workers in the class struggle, that is, as a rallying call enabling the *independence* of workers from the image of themselves presented by the bourgeoisie to be transformed into the *autonomy* of producers.<sup>43</sup> The political deployment of the word “man” discussed here agrees with Rancière’s later insistence that the “fictions” constructed by politics, art, and other forms of knowledge enable certain forms of saying and doing, shaping the ways in which boundaries are drawn and respected, altered, or transgressed.<sup>44</sup> Along these same lines, Rancière will argue, against Aristotle and the tradition drawing upon him, that politics “is not a fixed given resting on an anthropological invariable”<sup>45</sup> and that democracy is the division of “nature” which “breaks the link between natural properties and forms of government.”<sup>46</sup> Yet, Rancière also writes that “Man is a political animal because he is a literary animal,” that is, that his capacity as a political animal depends upon his being diverted from his “natural” purposes “by the power of words.”<sup>47</sup> It would appear then, that the “specific type of humanity” made possible by aesthetics is simply one capable of recognizing that what we call “humanity” is always a situated political and artistic operation, broadly configured by aesthetics. What is called “human” or “man” for Rancière

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<sup>43</sup> Rancière, *Althusser’s Lesson*. Trans. Emiliano Battista (New York: Continuum, 2011), 85; 90. While Rancière acknowledges that “humanism” as a discourse on the nature of “man” was also used by the bourgeoisie to argue for the dependence of proletariat upon bourgeois, Rancière’s point here is that “man” served a rhetorical function in each of these competing vocabularies, and thus that there is not *one* humanism that must be rejected; rather, humanism itself is a site of contestation.

<sup>44</sup> Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*, 39.

<sup>45</sup> Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*. Trans. Julie Rose (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), 4.

<sup>46</sup> Rancière, *Hatred of Democracy*, Trans. Steve Corcoran (London: Verso, 2006), 54.

<sup>47</sup> Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics*, 39.

is not prior to politics or even to art; rather, what we call human is always constructed by art and by politics—the human is a specific relation of experience, a certain way of dividing the sensible, made possible by aesthetics, which thus serves the role of the transcendental condition of the possibility of the human.

### *Nancy*

Another version of this posteriority of the human being can be found in the work of Jean-Luc Nancy. According to Nancy, what we call “human” begins with the first instances of “art,” which he locates in the cave paintings at Lascaux. Art “is the beginning itself” that makes possible the self-recognition that constitutes the human being as *homo sapiens*—the animal that knows—and yet remains between the human and itself, and so inaugurating the human being’s uncanny relation to itself as “self outside of self, the outside standing for *self*, and [...] being surprised in face of self.”<sup>48</sup> Thus for Nancy human being is *homo monstrans* before it can be *homo sapiens*, and the artistic gesture that inaugurates the human and its uncanny relation to itself at once makes possible the recognition of those others both *similar*, a society of fellows—other human beings—and *familiar*: the plethora of animal life.<sup>49</sup> This priority of art over the constitution of the human and human knowledge suggests the necessity of rethinking the relation of art to the philosophical tradition of the Western world, for as Nancy conceives it,

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<sup>48</sup> Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Muses*. Trans. Peggy Kamuf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 69; 71.

<sup>49</sup> Nancy, *The Muses*, 69-71.

painting was never “a copy of the Idea”; rather, the Idea, that form of forms, was not something to be found in the heavens, but in the caves.<sup>50</sup> Plato’s progression out of the cave is thus a false ascension, for the truth would not exist “out there” somewhere, independent of human minds, but is in fact the condition of possibility for human thought that humans have given to themselves.

What the discovery of Lascaux makes possible is thus a movement beyond the “ontotheological” tradition, which conceives of art as an image expressing a pre-existing Idea, to what Nancy calls “vestige-art.” Vestige-art recognizes that art is not the presentation of a pre-existing idea, but is rather what we call the effects of a sensibility through which we recognize ourselves and our world: it is “smoke without fire, vestige without God.” “Aesthetics” in Nancy’s formulation is then the domain where this sensibility is reflected upon,<sup>51</sup> and Ideas, or the conceptual realm, are fabrications of thought that follow these effects and are shaped by them. But what might this re-imagined relation between art and thought mean for politics?

Like Rancière, Nancy holds that what is political about art is not its representation of society (its content); rather, what makes art political is its manner of forging relations between people.<sup>52</sup> For Nancy, the political “gesture,” not unlike Rancière’s conception of politics, is always an intervention which takes

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<sup>50</sup> Nancy, *The Muses*, 78.

<sup>51</sup> Nancy, *The Muses*, 96-97.

<sup>52</sup> Nancy, *Multiple Arts: The Muses II*. Transl. Leslie Hill and James Gilbert-Walsh. Ed. Simon Sparks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 24.

as its goal the breaking of a dominant order, the separating of that which is bound.<sup>53</sup> Politics so defined thus necessarily presupposes a social bond, and it is the task of fastening this bond that Nancy assigns to a certain form of art: literature. The writing of literature is a form of art that relates people in the bond that politics takes as its object; thus, literature is the condition of possibility for politics, even if their respective functions remain opposed. These two functions, that of fastening, and that of separating, remain incomplete—attempts at their complete integration or dissociation are what characterize totalitarian regimes. Only where the tension between literature and politics is maintained and their distinctness allowed to be can there be democracy, which exists at the limit where unity and separation touch.<sup>54</sup>

Though Nancy does not say so directly, perhaps vestige-art is most appropriate to this democratic relation sketched between politics and art. Art shorn of its ontotheological apparatus is non-totalizing art, art that does not seek to subsume its other in the social bond it ties, for vestige-art recognizes no greater pre-existing “Idea” to which this other must conform. The “subject” of this democracy, that is, the particular experience of humanity tied up with vestige-art, Nancy calls a “passerby”: one who fits the word “man” only imperfectly, for the vestige, the trace to which she is tied, does not identify her

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<sup>53</sup> Nancy, *Multiple Arts*, 24. One will note, however, that Nancy does not dissociate politics from power as completely as does Rancière. As mentioned above, Rancière rejects the notion of politics as power, while for Nancy politics seeks only to redistribute power on an equal basis, thus allowing Nancy to formulate the goal of politics as “the exercise of equal power or of equality as power” (*Multiple Arts*, 24).

<sup>54</sup> Nancy, *Multiple Arts*, 33.

with the image of what “man” properly is, but is part of a more scattered “common.”<sup>55</sup> Thus for Nancy, what we understand to be human is shaped from the possibilities given in art: art caught up in the ontotheological trajectory of Western thought produced human being as the metaphysical “man-image,” but now that this tradition has run its course, post-metaphysical vestige-art makes possible different kinds of human being, kinds more suited to the democracy Nancy envisions—not “*l’homme*,” but “*les gens*.”

### *Agamben*

The priority of art and aesthetics receives a somewhat different treatment in Agamben. For him, the Christian theological tradition has bequeathed an understanding of speech and life bound together in such a manner that life is *produced* in speech, in the word. The poet is the one who undertakes this production, producing life in language by tying a knot of signification with grammar, giving life a particular shape and in so doing making it accessible, though at the cost of rendering what is beyond this shape inaccessible. Life is *accessible* through poetry in that only life expressed in grammatical language, language that can be written, can be known and reflected upon and as such is distinguishable from animal life and so properly human.<sup>56</sup> Life is at once *inaccessible* through poetry in that poetry is for Agamben the “experience of the

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<sup>55</sup> Nancy, *The Muses*, 99.

<sup>56</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *The End of the Poem: Studies in Poetics*. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 68.

letter,” and the letter itself “has its place in death.”<sup>57</sup> That is, the sign erected by poetry enabling its recognition is at once a barrier between the human life it makes possible and the animal life it leaves behind. Human life is the life made possible through poetry, a life that lives the death of itself as an animal. It is for this reason that Agamben writes of the changes wrought by poetry being at once “anthropological changes” as decisive for the individual who experiences them as was “for the primate, the liberation of the hand in the erect position or, for the reptile, the transformation of limbs that changed it into a bird.”<sup>58</sup> The human is thus in this sense for Agamben a particular shape given to life through poetic creation.

Agamben also finds artistic modes of expression and their categorization to lie at the basis of the Western understanding of “personhood.” Following the medieval philosopher Boethius, Agamben notes that the word “person” designates not only the juridical and moral category of “person,” but also the masks (*personae*) used in the performances of tragedies and comedies in ancient Greece. This insight leads Agamben to draw the conclusion that the modern conception of the person is closely related to the development of tragedy and comedy, even to the point of being able to say that “the moral person-subject of modern culture is nothing but the development of the ‘tragic’ attitude of the

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<sup>57</sup> Agamben, *The End of the Poem*, 71.

<sup>58</sup> Agamben, *The End of the Poem*, 94.

actor, who fully identifies with his own ‘mask.’”<sup>59</sup> This mask of the “person” is referred to elsewhere by Agamben as that which contains the species so as to make possible its identification, a process he takes to be “the original sin of our culture.”<sup>60</sup>

As a translation of the ancient Greek *eidos*, Agamben holds the original meaning of “species” to be “that which makes visible”; however, through the development of certain forms of visibility, namely, comedy and tragedy, that which makes visible comes to be hidden by another kind of making visible, the mask of personality, which ultimately enables the identification and categorization that sacrifices its uniqueness. The politics, if any, that Agamben sees as being potentially capable of responding to such a situation in which the unique or the special is hidden by the formal identity issued in categorization is perhaps what Agamben calls “the first politics,” the seeking of a relationship with the *impersonal* aspect of others which remains inaccessible to us on our own.<sup>61</sup> Practicing such a politics means to live a life in which a tension is maintained between the personal and impersonal—between that mask we wear so as to be known and identified and the aspects that exceed identity. Such a life Agamben

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<sup>59</sup> Agamben, *The End of the Poem*, 20. One is reminded here of Stanley Cavell’s question of whether or not what we call “human” (or in this case, “person”) can be thought of as something like a “guise” that “we” could don at one point in time in order to play practical jokes—or accrue certain benefits—but that after a long period of “inhabitation” we became unable to shed these guises. See Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 380.

<sup>60</sup> Agamben, *Profanations*. Trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Zone, 2007), 59.

<sup>61</sup> Agamben, *Profanations*, 16.

calls “poetic.”<sup>62</sup> Thus we see that for Agamben, artistic practices are prior to what we call either human being or personality, and that politics appears to be coextensive with these practices: poetry is what makes possible a human life distinct from animal life, and it is only by a kind of return to or appropriation of poetry that a life that resists the pernicious aspects of identification—which have themselves been adopted from other artistic forms—can be resisted.

### *The Posteriority of the Human*

This posteriority of the human being to art and politics, or put differently, this notion that what is called human being is an invention of artistic and political practices and not the origin of these practices, is understood by each of the aforementioned thinkers to be a break from the received conception of the role and relation of art and politics to human being. Rather than conceiving of art and politics to be expressions of human nature and hence bound by the limits of human nature, if the human being is an artistic or political invention, then artistic and political practices are without anthropological foundation and thus without the direction or limits they were previously thought to have. Though Rancière’s “aesthetic regime,” Nancy’s “vestige-art,” and Agamben’s “poetic life” differ in the manner in which they outline the history of art in the West and thus the particular reasons they see as leading art to these respective points, all share

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<sup>62</sup> Agamben, *Profanations*, 14.

this notion that the human is a fabrication of art and politics, and that this notion is contrary to the inherited ways of conceptualizing this relation. In this way their concerns are continuous with those of Badiou, Deleuze, and Lyotard, who seek in their reflections on art—again despite numerous particular differences—the possibility of thinking something new and heterogeneous to the inherited conceptual apparatus of Western philosophy. That is, what these thinkers see as new or the consequences of something new in the re-evaluation of aesthetic categories and the relation between art and politics is what I have called the posteriority of human being, or the *priority* of art and politics to human being. In order to understand how the posteriority of the human being relates to the priority of art as it is formulated by Heidegger and by Nietzsche, I now turn to an examination of these thinkers.

## **Chapter Three: The Priority of Art:**

### **Heidegger and Nietzsche**

I have argued that in their work on art, aesthetics, and politics, Rancière, Nancy, and Agamben all attempt to initiate a break with the ways in which this relation has been conceived in the history of Western thought in a manner that would also entail a new conception of the human being and so the possibility of a re-thinking the human-animal distinction. In the following I will argue that this thread I have highlighted in their work runs along a conceptual horizon set out by Martin Heidegger and Friedrich Nietzsche. Irrespective of the occasionally explicit use the aforementioned thinkers make of Heidegger and Nietzsche, their collective concern with the manner in which inherited categories disclose certain possibilities available to thinking, and the attempt to rethink the vicissitudes of these categories through mediations on art and aesthetics resulting in the reversal of their relation of priority with what we call human being, are deeply influenced by Heidegger and Nietzsche.

Furthermore, I will argue that this debt to Heidegger and Nietzsche owed in this relation between art and human being actually serves to perpetuate ways of thinking about the human being that remain very much within the inherited conceptual apparatus of the West—namely, one that sees the human being's capacity for art and for politics to fundamentally set it apart from other animals, or that casts the relationship between human and animal in terms of domination.

Even as an *invention* of artistic and political practices, human being in this conception remains fundamentally distinct from animals in its very status as an invention—it remains that being that is radically *un-natural*—unlike animals, whose invention through artistic practice serves only as a figure to human thinking, and remains by and large unrelated to the life of the animal.<sup>63</sup> In order to flush out the way in which the priority of art to the human has taken its shape in Heidegger and Nietzsche, I will examine Heidegger’s essay “The Origin of the Work of Art,” and Nietzsche’s *The Birth of Tragedy*, along with his late writings collected in *The Will to Power*, before developing in greater detail the way in which their way of thinking about human being has influenced recent theorizations of the subject.

### *The Origin of the Work of Art*

Due to the notorious complexity of Heidegger’s famous essay, rather than attempt a more holistic reading of the piece here, I will focus instead on establishing the particular way in which it serves to outline the priority of art to the human that has been taken up by thinkers previously mentioned. Towards

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<sup>63</sup> I say here “by and large unrelated” insofar as the artistic practices that serve to fix an image or figure of an animal in human imagination presumably do nothing to change the way that animal understands its activities: I know of no evidence to suggest the image of the beaver on the Canadian nickel has changed the way a beaver attempts to make a dam or seek food. However, we cannot quite say “completely unrelated” insofar as the possibility of that animal, say again, the beaver, might be protected from human encroachment and thus capable of going about its activities is very much related to the manner it has been fixed artistically in human imagination. The beaver, artistically and politically invented as a Canadian national symbol, enjoys a capacity to pursue its life activities very different from that of the cockroach or the rat, which at the time of this writing have not been taken as national symbols.

this end the essay will be examined in terms of the relay between three major points it attempts to convey: 1) that an artwork is something irreducible to its status as a sensible object; 2) that this irreducibility concerns the way in which an artwork provides access to the Being of beings, that elusive play of light and shadow through which what is *is* and what is not *is not*; and 3) that the artwork's privileged access to Being serves to fix sensible objects in their being, including the artist herself; thus, the things we encounter, and even the very world that provides the possibility of this encounter, is itself made possible through the artwork. In this sense it is not the world that gives birth to art, but art that gives birth to the world and everything in it. However, this thesis does not for Heidegger serve to de-center the notion of the human being by making it simply one being among others; rather, Heidegger uses the relation of art to Being as one that serves to set human being apart from animal being in an even more radical sense than that conceived in the tradition of Western metaphysics.

Heidegger notes near the beginning of his essay that works of art are *things*, like coal or logs, which can and in many cases are treated just as these other things, but unlike a log or a lump of coal, artworks exceed their "thingly" character: they make public something other than themselves.<sup>64</sup> For Heidegger we know things as perceived unities of what we are given through our senses, the

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<sup>64</sup> Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993), 145. For Heidegger, "things" are "Lifeless beings of nature and objects of use" (147). As works of art are neither naturally given nor simply pieces of equipment meant for use, they are not simply things.

Greek *aistheton*, or object of sense.<sup>65</sup> Through sense-perception concepts are generated in order to grasp the thing, to bring it into “the greatest possible proximity to us.”<sup>66</sup> Concepts are constructed and refined like tools according to the particular object they are set to grasp; for grasping art, aesthetics names form and content the tool-concepts of choice. However, the basis of these concepts in human sense-perception—the *aisthesis* of aesthetics—ensures the failure of their task, for rather than grasping what makes the artwork art in the first place—that which exceeds its “thingly” element—what is grasped is nothing more than the grasping itself.

That is, sense-perception reports beings only as *objects* of sense-perception to a *subject* of sense-perception, which, in the case of art, attempts to categorize the relevant information as either part of an artwork’s form or its content. As indicated above, sense-perception is only really capable of generating concepts, and so when confronted with the question of what a thing *is*, its only response is to reply with a new concept. In this manner objects are known and categorized under increasingly fine conceptual layers, all of which describe the thing in terms of sense-perception, never in terms of why there is something available to sense-perception in the first place. In this way, the attempt to grasp what makes the artwork art through the conceptual apparatus of form and content (aesthetics) is for Heidegger a kind of grand question begging, for this

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 151.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 152.

very approach to art necessarily presupposes the answer to the question it asks, and in the process reduces the being of art to its sensible unity, to the “thingly” element that it was said to exceed.

What exceeds the “thingly” element of a being for Heidegger is its very fact of being a being, its disclosedness as a being and consequently the manner in which its being is given, its *Being*. A being can only be a thing insofar as the possibility of being a thing is disclosed in its Being—the being that is can be a thing only through the certain manner in which Being is disclosed. But the artwork is more than a thing, and so, insofar as the conceptual apparatus of form and content reduces the artwork to a thing, the artwork must be interrogated not through form and content but according to its Being, according to the possibilities disclosed to it as a being, if one is to know what the artwork really is. Thus for Heidegger the artwork’s exceeding of “thinghood” opens up “in its own way the Being of beings”<sup>67</sup>—it points toward the manner in which Being is disclosed that allows for a being be what it is. In pointing toward the Being of beings, and thus, toward possibilities not disclosed in the “thingly” character of a being, the artwork communicates the Being in excess of the thing, the Being of a being that is not grasped by sense-perception, but that makes possible the “thingly” character of the thing in the first place. In this way, the artwork can

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 165.

show not only how things come to be things, but plays a role in fixing beings in their being—that is, in making beings what they are.

Thus, for Heidegger, “the sculpture of the god” is not a representation of the god, not a heuristic aid to communicate what he looks like, but rather the sculpture “lets the god himself be present and thus *is* the god himself.”<sup>68</sup> Similarly, “[t]ree and grass, eagle and bull, snake and cricket first enter their distinctive shapes and thus come to appear as what they are”<sup>69</sup> through works of art. The artwork is thus for Heidegger not like other things, for through it the Being that discloses the possible beings available to sense-perception as things is itself disclosed. In order to have access to the beings we are not, and indeed to have access to ourselves as beings, we need a path or opening—a clearing wherein the encounter between ourselves and beings, or an encounter with ourselves as beings, is possible. For Heidegger, it is the “workly” character of the work of art that makes this encounter possible, for “to be a work means to set up a world,” and to hold open “the open region of the world,” wherein all things find their respective places.<sup>70</sup>

Heidegger contrasts the opening of the world through the work with the “undisclosed and unexplained” of “the earth.”<sup>71</sup> Though the work opens up a world and keeps it open, making possible the event of meaning that is the

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 172.

appearance of beings in its clearing, the earth is like the shadow cast by the light of this world—it resists all attempts to penetrate it and remains closed off and remote. The “strife” caused by the opposition between the open world and the closed earth initiated by the work makes it possible for beings to be: the clearing of the world provides beings with a space for appearing, and the sheltering and concealing of the earth gives definition to the clearing, allowing for the distinction of one being from another necessary for a being to be. The earth is the unintelligible against which an intelligible world can be defined, and both come to be through art. Art establishes beings as beings; it is what gives them their fixity or definition, their truth. It is for this reason that Heidegger writes that art “is truth setting itself to work”<sup>72</sup>: for truth in the Greek is *aletheia*, the unconcealed, and it is precisely the work of art that opens the world of unconcealment and initiates the “strife” in which it will fix beings in their being.

While Heidegger also writes that “the workly character of the work consists in its having been created by the artist,”<sup>73</sup> the artist should not for this reason be seen as the origin of the work, for the origin is “that from which and by which something is what it is and as it is.”<sup>74</sup> What makes a work of art what it is is not the effort or intention of the artist, but the truth of the beings that appear and are fixed in their beings in the artwork. Thus, it might be said that the artwork is actually the origin of its creator, the artist, insofar as the artist is only

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 143.

really an artist and creator through the truth that is founded and happens in the artwork; or as Heidegger writes, the work “makes the creators possible in their essence.”<sup>75</sup>

In this manner Heidegger transforms the terrain of philosophical reflection upon art—his castigation of aesthetics and its fundamental concepts for obscuring the truth of art, and especially his reversal of the priority of artist and work, continue to reverberate in the work of thinkers like those noted above. Yet while Heidegger seeks in his reversal of the priority of artist and work to move beyond or behind the aesthetic tradition of Western metaphysics, insofar as this reversal leaves the human being, as the interpreter of Being, utterly distinct from the animal, it does not displace the place of privilege human being occupied as the author-creator of the work in this tradition. The opening of the world in which the being of beings becomes possible is denied to all but humans: as Heidegger writes, a “stone is worldless. Plant and animal likewise have no world,”<sup>76</sup> and “[w]here there is no language, as in the Being of stone, plant, and animal, there is also no openness of beings.”<sup>77</sup>

This claim represents a revision of the thesis Heidegger put forward in the lecture course he gave in 1929-30. There Heidegger claims that the animal is

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 196.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 198.

“poor in the world,” leaving only the stone worldless.<sup>78</sup> However, despite Heidegger’s insistence that no hierarchy between species can be maintained, and that “every animal and every species of animal as such is just as perfect and complete as any other,”<sup>79</sup> the fact remains that humans alone are thrown into the clearing of Being in such a manner as to have access to beings as beings, and thus are capable both of penetrating and controlling things in their very being, and of being gripped and attuned in their own being. Thus, “no animal can become deprived in the same way as man,”<sup>80</sup> and consequently only he must shoulder the burden of his freedom.<sup>81</sup> In this way, the earlier Heidegger had already radicalized the distinction between humans and other animals found in the history of Western thought. Without language or a world, animals are left without a path to Being and consequently access to beings as beings: they remain sheltered or concealed by the earth, and apprehend beings only as things, never as beings.

Insofar as human being is the interpreter of Being, and art is a principle vehicle through which this interpretation is possible, art must therefore be seen as a key distinguishing feature between human and animal. Though art fixes the being of both human and animal in their respective beings, for Heidegger only human beings can ever have access to their being, for only through (human)

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<sup>78</sup> Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. William McNeill and Nicholas Walker (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 177.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

language is this access possible: both “language itself” and “the essence of art” is poetry, and the essence of poetry is “the founding of truth,” the “unconcealment of beings as beings.”<sup>82</sup> Heidegger’s manner of inquiring after art according to its being—as opposed to the aesthetic categories of form and content rooted in sensibility—actually serves to widen the gap between human and animal as it tended to be formulated in Western metaphysics seen to descend from Aristotle. Human being is no longer defined in terms of a certain kind of labor, or a certain kind of speech, but according to possibilities that are fundamentally of a different order than those of animals—those of the order of Being. As Heidegger writes: “Being [...] is a call to man and is not without man.”<sup>83</sup>

This emphasis on the unique importance of “man” should not be interpreted as *humanism*, however—at least not in the strict sense of making the human the central concept of knowledge and origin of its actions and history. As Heidegger writes in ¶ 9 and ¶ 10 of *Being and Time*, *Dasein* is prior to psychology, anthropology, or biology<sup>84</sup>—we can attribute characteristics to “man” or reflect on his essence only in the terms given through a specific relation to Being. Indeed, the two main sources of traditional Western anthropology from which humanism springs, Greek philosophy and Christian theology, have according to Heidegger forgotten the question of Being, and thus fundamentally

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<sup>82</sup> Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” 199; 206.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>84</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 71.

err in their attempts to given an account of man's essence.<sup>85</sup> Put more starkly in a later essay, Heidegger writes: "the highest determinations of the essence of man in humanism still do not realize the proper dignity of man." Man is not simply an animal with language, but the "Shepherd of Being" and the guardian of its truth, a being endowed with a dignity of an entirely different register than those of animals.<sup>86</sup>

While Heidegger's concern that the categorial distinctions of Western metaphysics hide more primordial possibilities, along with his reversal of the priority of artist and work, can be seen in the work of contemporary philosophers such as Badiou, Deleuze, Lyotard, Rancière, Nancy, and Agamben, it must now be asked: does the proximity of the aforementioned thinkers to Heidegger mean that they too, in their attempts to reformulate the way in which the human is thought to relate to art, serve to widen the gap between human and animal in the same manner that Heidegger does? While a comprehensive answer to this question would require an examination of each of these thinkers independently, for the purposes of this study it suffices to recall the role of sensibility in certain of these thinker's works. Heidegger's repudiation of sensibility as a return to the metaphysics of subjectivity is clearly not shared by all of the aforementioned thinkers, and consequently, despite the proximity to Heidegger these thinkers all share, one might expect a degree of variety in their positions concerning how

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>86</sup> See Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1993), 233-237.

exactly humans might relate to animals. That is, they cannot be considered straightforwardly “Heideggerian” in all aspects. Yet if it is the question of sensibility that can be said to separate some of these thinkers from Heidegger, an account of this sensibility seems in order if we are to better understand the horizon within which these thinkers labor. That is, it must be recognized that there is more than one sun illuminating the terrain: we must also look to the work of Nietzsche in order to understand this posteriority of the human.

### *The Birth of Tragedy*

Like Heidegger, Nietzsche attempts to break through certain inherited conceptual structures into something more primordial, and also like Heidegger, Nietzsche understands the human to be posterior to art, that is, the product of art and not its origin. However, unlike Heidegger, Nietzsche’s manner of conceiving the relationship between the human and art does not serve to further the distance between the human and the animal. By conceiving of the relationship between human and art in terms of aesthetic sensibility Nietzsche leaves open the possibility of a relation between human and animal joined with sensibility, as opposed to one wherein human being stands opposed to animal being, separated by the abyss of Being. However, as I will attempt to show, the possibility of human and animal joined through sensibility does not for Nietzsche preclude the possibility of one dominating the other.

In Nietzsche's first major work, *The Birth of Tragedy out of the Spirit of Music* (1872),<sup>87</sup> Nietzsche argues that the Greek gods Apollo and Dionysus represent the opposing poles by which Attic tragedy, and indeed all art, ought to be understood.<sup>88</sup> Apollo represents for Nietzsche the power of the image and the arts based around image fabrication (including the linguistic arts), while Dionysus represents the more primal, "imageless art of music."<sup>89</sup> The Apolline and the Dionysiac find their origin not in human activity, but rather, they "erupt from nature itself, *without the mediation of any human artist.*"<sup>90</sup> Apollo, god of the image and the principle of individuation, is locked in continual strife with Dionysus, god of music and the principle of dissolution: through their strife the objects in the natural world come to be distinct, individual objects, and are again destroyed, dissolving and so returning to "the womb of Primordial Unity."<sup>91</sup> Thus, the conceptual opposition of subject and object serves only to obscure any understanding of aesthetics, for the individual subject, "can only be considered the opponent of art and not its origin."<sup>92</sup> That is, subject and object are epiphenomena of the Apolline and the Dionysiac, which spring forth independent of human aims; to understand art one must understand this most primordial of

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<sup>87</sup> Republished in 1886 as *The Birth of Tragedy: Or Hellenism and Pessimism*.

<sup>88</sup> "We shall have gained much for the science of aesthetics when we have come to realize [...] that the continuous evolution of art is bound up with the duality of the *Apolline* and the *Dionysiac*," which are themselves "eternal truths." See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, ed. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs. Trans. Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 14; 89.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

oppositions, and likewise, the art form that for Nietzsche represents its pinnacle: Attic tragedy.

The genius of Attic Tragedy for Nietzsche is its ability to capture the primal creative strife of Apollo and Dionysus in the rise of the tragic hero and his or her spectacular destruction.<sup>93</sup> In combining both poetry (spoken by the principal characters) and song (sung by the chorus), Attic tragedy offers a glimpse of the individual in all his glory while at the same time demonstrating his ultimately illusory character, as just another *appearance*, a superficial instantiation of the more primordial, pre-individual, and eternal Will that remains unaltered by the destruction of the individual. In this way, Nietzsche argues that tragedy teaches a doctrine of cultic mysteries that can be summarized as: 1) “everything which exists is a unity”; 2) “individuation is the primal source of all evil”; and 3) art is “the joyous hope that the spell of individuation can be broken,” and so unity can be restored.<sup>94</sup> However, these teachings are, in one sense at least, a lie: art may promise the restoration of unity, but this unity can itself only be found in death and destruction. To live a human life is for Nietzsche to live an individual life, and thus tragedy finds expression for this primordial unity within the individual. Tragedy’s Dionysiac element provides a way for its audience to feel the “original

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 52-53. Though it cannot yet be discussed at this point in the study, it must be noted here that Nietzsche’s religious interpretation of tragedy and its origins explicitly denies its link to Athenian democratic practices and politics generally. Nietzsche refers to the notion that the chorus was a symbol of the authority of the *demos* over indulgent kings as an *artistic cliché*, and that the “purely religious origins” of tragedy “preclude the entire opposition between prince and people, and indeed any kind of political-social sphere” (37).

pain at the heart of the primordial unity,”<sup>95</sup> as in music, while its Apolline element pulls the audience out of this “orgiastic self-destruction,”<sup>96</sup> and deceives it into living another day. In this manner tragedy overcomes the wisdom of Silenus, by weaving a system of myth that invigorates and sustains a form of human life that for Nietzsche remains as yet unrivaled,<sup>97</sup> for it manages to channel the most primordial of creative wellsprings into individuality.

Thus human being for Nietzsche is not the origin of art, but rather, both human being and art are products of more primordial forces. Attic tragedy dramatically mirrors the strife of these primordial forces, and in so doing makes possible the noblest of human lives. While Nietzsche and Heidegger appear to be in agreement in this respect, Nietzsche’s emphasis on sensibility—the sensuality of the Dionysiac revel, the pleasure of the intoxicated frenzy, and the *feeling* of oneness and “original pain”—serves to set him apart from Heidegger. Whereas Heidegger sees the sensibility of aesthetics as always already colonized by the metaphysics of subjectivity, Nietzsche sees the sensibility of aesthetics as prior to the conceptual apparatus of the subject and thus a possible escape route from subjectivity; for Heidegger, sensibility offers no such possibility. Aesthetics for Nietzsche is pre-individual, and thus to be a “true aesthetic listener”<sup>98</sup> is to be

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 108.

oriented toward that which exceeds one's individuality in a particular manner—the manner of myth and of action born of aesthetic sensibility.

Unlike Heidegger, who sees the origin of all art in poetry, for Nietzsche poetry is born from music, and poetic images seek to imitate music.<sup>99</sup> The downfall of Attic tragedy comes when the link between Apolline poetry and Dionysiac music becomes severed by Socratic philosophy: Socrates exploits the ambiguity of the Greek *logos* (both “speech” and “reason”) to submit the poetic speech of Apollo to rational reflection. In transforming poetic speech into rational speech, Socrates manages to shift the wellspring of speech from music to reflection, and in so doing, replaces Apollo by installing *himself* as the “deity” in opposition to Dionysus. In this manner, Socrates destroys the link between tragedy and the primordial creative strife of the world, and in so doing, destroys Attic tragedy.<sup>100</sup> In isolating the wellspring of myth—*music*—in this manner, the death of tragedy marks the beginning of the end of Greek greatness, for Nietzsche holds that action “requires one to be shrouded in a veil of illusion,”<sup>101</sup> and that without myth “all cultures lose their healthy, creative, natural energy.”<sup>102</sup> From music is born poetry and the weaving of myth, which gives life meaning and makes the great deeds of action possible. It is as the possibility of being the creator of new myth-making music that the young Nietzsche praises Wagner;

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 33-35.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 108.

however, only so much can be expected from Wagner the myth-maker. Only the “true aesthetic listener” can, shrouded in myth, possibly act in a manner that might oppose the theoretical view of “Socratic, critical human beings”<sup>103</sup> and thus hope to rejuvenate German culture.

Irrespective of its relation to the rejuvenation of German culture, Nietzsche’s emphasis on a pre-individual aesthetic sensibility in this project is important to the present study insofar as it makes possible a different sort of relationship between human and animal than that set out by Heidegger or the history of Western metaphysics against which Heidegger opposes himself. Heidegger understands the relation between human and art in terms of the access to Being art makes possible to human being as a being who dwells in language, and thus transforms the gap between human and animal conceived in Western metaphysics into an abyss that would hide their common corporality. Nietzsche, on the other hand, emphasizes the particular possibility art holds for human beings as the making possible of an experience of pre-individual aesthetic sensibility—an experience that brings human being closer to animal being, not farther from it. Aside from a few remarks about music transforming the listener into a satyr,<sup>104</sup> however, Nietzsche does not in this work examine the implications of his aesthetic views in terms of the human-animal divide. In order to draw out

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 41-42.

these implications, then, we must turn to Nietzsche's late work, *The Will to Power*.

### *The Will to Power*

As virtually any Nietzsche scholar will make abundantly clear, the first thing to note about *The Will to Power* is that it is not a work of Nietzsche's at all.<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, I draw on it here for two main reasons: in the first place I wish to demonstrate a certain continuity between Nietzsche's early and late thought. By "continuity" I do not mean that Nietzsche's thought remains unchanged over the course of his life, I mean only that the philosophical concerns at the heart of *The Birth of Tragedy* remain concerns for Nietzsche even in his last writings, and while it is possible that Nietzsche's views on many of these subjects change, certain formulations do indeed remain the same. The second reason for focusing on *The Will to Power* is that it provides the most concise collection of Nietzsche's views concerning the human-animal divide. While this conciseness is to some extent an editorial fabrication, the point I wish to make does not depend on Nietzsche's authorial intentions (i.e., on the status of *The Will to Power* as a work composed by Nietzsche). Rather, I will argue that some of the notes collected in *The Will to Power* allow a connection to be made between the views on aesthetics expressed in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and Nietzsche's views on the human-animal

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<sup>105</sup> See Mazzino Montinari's «*La volonté de puissance*» *n'existe pas*, trans. Patricia Farazzi and Michel Valensi, accessed July 7, 2012, <http://www.lyber-eclat.net/lyber/montinari/volonte.html>.

divide, and how Nietzsche's thought makes possible a certain kind of reproach between human and animal being, without, however, doing away with the domination that has traditionally characterized this relation.

Consistent with *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche will continue to hold that art and questions of aesthetics really concern what type of human being they make possible,<sup>106</sup> and that art is the means through which the shape of human being in his day might be opposed: art is the “*countermovement*” to decadent religion, morality, and philosophy.<sup>107</sup> Likewise, Nietzsche continues to affirm that individuals are themselves instantiations of greater, pre-individual forces,<sup>108</sup> and that “the further development of art” remains tied to the antagonism between the two “natural artistic powers” of the Dionysiac and the Apolline. The Dionysiac is for Nietzsche the urge to unity that overflows the individual in a kind of passionate and painful, and sometimes even destructive affirmation “of the total character of life,” while the Apolline remains tied to the individual and his perfection in a given order.<sup>109</sup> Art, Nietzsche writes, is “an intoxication with life, a will to life” and “the great means of making life possible, the great seduction to life, the great stimulant of life”<sup>110</sup>; thus, the greatest works of art will at once be

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<sup>106</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche. *The Will to Power*. Trans. Walter Kaufman and R.J. Hollingdale. Ed. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage, 1968), §804.

<sup>107</sup> Nietzsche, *WP*, §794.

<sup>108</sup> “The isolation of the individual ought not to deceive us: something flows on *underneath* individuals” (Ibid., §686).

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., §846; §1050.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., §851; §853.

the highest affirmations of life, which, given the corruption of the Apolline by Socratic decadence, Nietzsche finds in “the *tragic-Dionysian* state.”<sup>111</sup>

Unlike in *The Birth of Tragedy*, however, Nietzsche will in his late writings explicitly link this state of excitation compelled by art to animality. Art now “reminds us of states of animal vigor” and excites “animal functions”—it fosters an aesthetic state wherein “animal well-being and desires” are blended together.<sup>112</sup> Thus the pre-individual aesthetic sensibility lauded in Nietzsche’s earliest work is now found to be a kind of animal sensibility, an awakening of pre-individual instincts, and the Dionysiac man, the true aesthetic listener opposed to the Socratic decadent, is found to be an animal. Unlike Heidegger then, art is not that through which human being stands apart from the animal, but that which makes the animal reverberate in the human; art is a means of bringing human being into a relationship with a more primal sensibility than that that would be tamed by Socratic reason.

Nietzsche seems to be led in this direction through his development of the notion that art must affirm life in its most encompassing totality, for if human life is but a small piece of this totality, affirming life *as such* means an extension of this affirmation beyond the human, and toward other forms of life. However, it is not simply a matter of affirming life as something common in both human and animal alike, for Nietzsche also writes that “[t]he animal functions are, as a

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., §853.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., §802; §801.

matter of principle, a million times more important than all our beautiful moods and heights of consciousness” and that consciousness itself can only be considered something other than a superfluity when it makes itself into a tool of these animal functions.<sup>113</sup> Thus Nietzsche urges his readers to “think less highly of all that is conscious” for the “conscious, purposive” aspects of human beings “are only the smallest part of us.”<sup>114</sup> In this manner, what we call human is nothing like the crown of creation or the point to which all the natural world strives. Rather, Nietzsche insists that the human “as a species does not represent any progress compared with any other animal” and “the individual human being is in precisely the same case as the lowest worm.”<sup>115</sup>

Yet while Nietzsche’s re-formulation of the relation between what is human and what is animal serves to radically undermine the dominance human being has exercised over the animal, it does not undermine dominance as such. That is, the problem with the human dominating the animal for Nietzsche is that the human, like the figure of Apollo under the sway of Socrates, has become *weak*, disconnected from all that made him strong. The creativity that made human being the kind of creature that might dominate the world in the first place was its own particular arrangement of animal instincts, its ability to cultivate and control a multitude of contrary drives and impulses.<sup>116</sup> Only by reconnecting

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid., §674.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., §676.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., §684; §759.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., §966.

Apollo with Dionysus, the human with the animal, can primal creativity be channeled into a new form of life not weighed down by what we call human.

However, the experience of animal sensibility made possible through art, the Dionysiac feelings of pleasure and intoxication, are for Nietzsche the same as the “exalted feeling of *power*.”<sup>117</sup> It is the feeling of power that Nietzsche seeks to gain through aesthetic experience, a feeling that might spur the human animal to create new forms of life, over and against the old. It is for this reason that Nietzsche defines his first problem as “the *order of rank of different kinds of life*.”<sup>118</sup> If the necessary consequence of Nietzsche’s insistence that human life does not represent progress over animal life is that all species evolve together “in utter disorder, over and against each other,”<sup>119</sup> and that each of the drives that compose a given species is “a kind of lust to rule” that would install its own perspective as the norm, then it is no wonder that Nietzsche compares the body to an aristocracy.<sup>120</sup> For Nietzsche, the turn to animal sensibility is less about escaping domination than it is about creating the possibility for a new kind of domination. That is, the possibility of overcoming human being and inventing new forms of life is for Nietzsche at once a question of inventing new forms of domination that might support this new life.<sup>121</sup> Whereas the history of Western

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., §800.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., §592.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., §684.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., §660.

<sup>121</sup> This dimension of Nietzsche’s thought goes dramatically underdeveloped in Vanessa Lemm’s *Nietzsche’s Animal Philosophy: Culture, Politics, and the Animality of Human Being* (New York: Fordham

philosophy to which Nietzsche opposes himself conceived of the human as the natural ruler of the animal, Nietzsche seeks to forge a new relation with the animal in order to rule over the merely human—the hierarchy that has existed between human and animal for thousands of years is reshaped, but the hierarchy itself remains. In this sense, while Nietzsche’s truly aesthetic listener may be an animal, this animal is destined to rule over others as the *Über-mensch*: that which stands *over* and apart from the human being.

In this way, while both Heidegger and Nietzsche see themselves as overturning or overcoming a tradition of Western metaphysics and a particular relation between humans and animals begun with Aristotle and culminating in the Christian tradition, they do so in a way that appears to offer little hope for the amelioration of the plight of animals and their domination by humans. In the case of Heidegger, concepts such as *Dasein* and his use of *poieisis* open an abyss between human and animal being much more profound than that which exists in the Christian and Aristotelian traditions, and though Heidegger does not himself

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University Press, 2009). For Lemm, the shape and development of human life is defined in terms of the antagonism between human and animal life: where humans have defined themselves against their animality or sought to deny this animality “a productive role,” so they have dominated and exploited each other (5). Nietzsche’s philosophy, in attempting to give human animality “a creative role in the constitution of social and political forms of life,” moves “beyond the political domination of life,” striving for “an overcoming of domination toward freer forms of social and political life” (5). While I agree with Lemm that animality is key to Nietzsche’s conception of creativity, Lemm assumes an equal capacity for this creativity among different individuals that is completely absent in Nietzsche. Without this equality, it is difficult to see the “promise” of the overhuman (2) as anything other than the establishment of a new socio-political order where the distance between overhuman and human is every bit as great as human and animal in the present order. See Malcolm Bull, *Anti-Nietzsche* (London: Verso, 2011), 40; 153. For a farther reaching critique of Nietzsche than is possible here, see Geoff Waite, *Nietzsche’s Corps/e* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996).

advocate a kind of hierarchy between humans and animals, it is difficult to see how ideas of moral duty or even concern for animals could be derived from the possibilities of Being wherein the respective places of human and animal being are so utterly alien to each other. An ethic of asymmetrical care for the other would be needed, but again, I do not see how such an ethic can be derived from an ontology that places so low an emphasis on sensibility.

In Nietzsche's case, on the other hand, sensibility is lauded, even a pre-individual sensibility that allows for a continuity between humans and other animals, but this sensibility and the possibilities for individuation it discloses are spurred on by a feeling of power and the supposedly inherent drive to express this power in the mastery and domination of others. While it is possible to imagine an order wherein this power is expressed in a manner that ameliorates the plight of some animals, the amelioration of the plight of some can in Nietzsche's formula only be bought with the domination of others. How then, we must ask, has this paradigm defined between the poles of Heidegger and Nietzsche served to inform other work on the topic? To this question I now turn.

## **Chapter Four: Art, Aesthetics, and Animality:**

### **Between Heidegger and Nietzsche**

After this long march through key selections of Heidegger's and Nietzsche's thoughts on the relation between art and human being, it is now possible to more clearly formulate the way in which recent work on the relation between art, aesthetics, and politics relates to a certain conception of human being and its relation to animal being. It was argued above that these recent thinkers are tied together by certain Heideggerian threads—namely, the concern with inherited concepts obscuring more primordial possibilities and a reversal of the priority of art and artist; however, it was also acknowledged that this proximity to Heidegger was not without important deviations, such as the continued emphasis on sensibility. Nietzsche's understanding of the posteriority of the human in terms of a pre-individual sensibility makes it possible to understand how most of the aforementioned thinkers (Deleuze, Lyotard, Rancière, and Nancy) continue to reserve an important place for sensibility in their thought, despite their reversals of the priority of art and artist. Moreover, Nietzsche and Heidegger's direct linking of art and aesthetics with the human-animal divide makes explicit what remains under-theorized in the recent aforementioned works: the crypto-anthropology smuggled into these discussions on art, aesthetics, and politics that remains consistent with the trend in the history of political thought in the West to

attempt to answer theoretical questions concerning politics with philosophical anthropologies.

Just as the different ways in which these recent thinkers have thought the posteriority of the human can be traced back to Heidegger and Nietzsche, so the influence of Nietzsche and Heidegger can be seen in a number of recent attempts to reformulate the relation between human and animal. To this extent, we might even see Nietzsche and Heidegger as the two opposing poles defining the spectrum of positions along which these recent thinkers can be distributed.

Closer to the Nietzschean pole, there is an attempt to re-animalize the human being, to think of the human-animal divide in terms of sensibility, whereas those closer to the Heideggerian pole attempt to think this divide in terms of language and being. This opposition between the sensible dissolution of the human being on the one hand, and the ontological elevation of the human being on the other, form the theoretical horizon in which these recent thinkers toil. To give some flesh to these general statements and offer particular examples of the way in which Heidegger and Nietzsche have to a significant extent defined the horizon of inquiry concerning the human-animal divide and its relation to art and aesthetics, I will survey below work on the human-animal divide done by Foucault, Agamben, Deleuze, and Derrida.<sup>122</sup> Again, while significant differences

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<sup>122</sup> In calling my examination of these thinkers a “survey” it should be clear that this list is not meant to be exhaustive; however, it is nevertheless worth making a note about a thinker whose omission from this list may seem particularly questionable: Hannah Arendt. Not only has Arendt been influential in shaping what we understand to be human and its relation to politics in the twentieth century, but she has also been called

can be seen to animate each of their respective approaches to the problem in question, all can nevertheless be characterized as lying along a spectrum extended between the work of Heidegger and Nietzsche.

### *Foucault*

Closer to the Heideggerian pole we might find—despite his own praise of Nietzsche and association with “French Nietzscheanism”<sup>123</sup>—Michel Foucault’s early work on the concept of “man.” In *The Order of Things*, Foucault provocatively argues that “man” is “a quite recent creature” who did not exist prior to the 18<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>124</sup> and who may soon be erased “like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea.”<sup>125</sup> For Foucault, the view of “man” as the timeless origin of the human world is a kind of anthropological myth or fiction, and that instead “man” should be understood not as a cause of this world, but as an effect of it. More specifically, Foucault argues that “man” was “the effect of a change in

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both a “Nietzschean” and the first liberal Heideggerian, thus apparently making her an ideal candidate for inclusion in this survey. However, in *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), Arendt writes that the “immediate source of the art work is the human capacity for thought” (168). If for Arendt art is something made by humans and so dependent on their innate capacities, then she, unlike the other thinkers I will examine, is not a theorist of the posteriority of the human and the priority of art, and can thus not be considered Nietzschean or Heideggerian in the ways I am examining here. See George Kateb, “The Adequacy of the Canon,” in *Patriotism and Other Mistakes*, 384; and Slavoj Žižek, *In Defense of Lost Causes* (London: Verso, 2009), 121.

<sup>123</sup> See Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *French Philosophy of the Sixties: An Essay on Antihumanism*. Trans. Mary H. Cattani (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), 68.

<sup>124</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage, 1994), 308.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 387.

the fundamental arrangements of knowledge,”<sup>126</sup> that he appears at a particular moment when life, labor, and language come to be understood in the terms of a knowledge that demands a unifying subject in order to make sense. “Man” serves a kind of rhetorical or axiomatic function in the epistemological transformations that the sciences undergo in the 18<sup>th</sup> century; “he” is invented in order to facilitate their modes of inquiry. Consequently, when the modes of inquiry that required the term “man” in order to operate again undergo a transformative shift, the resulting new modes of inquiry may—as Foucault speculates—no longer require the term “man.”

While the notion that “man” is little more than an invention, fiction, or myth dependent upon the particular ways in which people speak, think, and know at particular moments in history is consistent with the posteriority of the human as it appears in both Nietzsche and Heidegger, what brings Foucault here closer to Heidegger is the particular emphasis he places on language and being, which serves to accentuate the distance between the human being and other animals. As the effect of a certain arrangement of knowledge, “man” exists only as a term within a certain kind of discourse, a certain way of speaking, thinking, and knowing. Insofar as Foucault holds that “[t]he verb is the indispensable condition for all discourse,” and that “[t]he entire species of the verb may be reduced to the single verb that signifies *to be*,” then it is really the relation to

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

being that structures discourse, and hence determines what appears as “man.”<sup>127</sup> Like Heidegger, Foucault sees the relation to being as what ultimately separates the human from the animal, for without a relation to being, “men, like certain animals, would have been able to make use of their voices well enough, yet not one of those cries hurled through the jungle would ever have proved to be the first link in the great chain of language.”<sup>128</sup> In this light, it is perhaps unsurprising that Foucault will add that “Man is a mode of being.”<sup>129</sup>

While it might be tempting to argue that Foucault’s “antihumanism,” that is, his attack on anthropology, is also a kind of anti-anthropomorphism that could enable a reconciliation between the human and other animals, such a gesture appears to run counter to Foucault’s direction in *The Order of Things*. For Foucault, anthropology has played “a constituent role in modern thought,” and continues to weigh on the thought of his day as an obstacle to thinking the being of language, for the being of “man” and the being of language have never in Western culture been able to coexist.<sup>130</sup> Bringing thought back “to the possibilities of its earliest dawning”<sup>131</sup> through an awakening of thought from its *anthropological slumber* is for Foucault a gesture towards the being of language—one that is profoundly indifferent to the languageless life of animals. Foucault advocates the destruction of the anthropological order, like Heidegger,

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 93-94.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 322.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 340; 339.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 341.

to rediscover “a purified ontology or a radical thought of being,”<sup>132</sup> which, as in Heidegger, remains in a realm radically different than anything that might be experienced by an animal.

Foucault’s later work on bio-power, however, appears closer to the Nietzschean end of the spectrum. Here Foucault’s analysis of the *Classical Age* emphasizes the methods by which power is invested in the subject it creates, in the forms of what he calls an “anatomy-politics of the of the human body,” which centers on the body as a machine which must be disciplined in order to optimize its capacities, and a “biopolitics of the population,” which works by means of regulatory controls concerning the “species body” and its biological processes, such as propagation, birth, mortality, health, etc.<sup>133</sup> Thus, Foucault argues, power comes to be articulated in terms of fostering life and disallowing it to the point of death, as opposed to what he calls the ancient right of sovereignty “to *take* life or *let* live.”<sup>134</sup> It is in this sense that Foucault can write that “modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question,”<sup>135</sup> for not only do the life processes of “modern man” become subject to political regulation in a way that Foucault sees as new, but this particular method of exercising power—of fostering life or disallowing it to the point of

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 342.

<sup>133</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley. (New York: Vintage, 1990), 139.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 143.

death—is the kind of power humans have traditionally exercised over animals, especially in their domestication.

If, as Foucault writes, bio-power concerns itself with “distributing the living in the domain of value and utility” in order to “qualify, measure, appraise, and hierarchize,”<sup>136</sup> then it is human-animal relations that have served as its model. That is, bio-power is the application of methods of cultivation and domestication to human bodies that were previously reserved for animal bodies. Moreover, though Foucault does not make it explicit, the rallying point that he opposes to bio-power and specifically the normalization it advances through the concept of “sexuality,” addresses itself to this terrain in which the human is considered a kind of animal. Advocating strategies of resistance around *bodies and pleasures* concerns the sensibility the human being shares with the animal, not the language of being whose dream of a “purified ontology” opens a chasm between the human and other animals.<sup>137</sup> Insofar as the early Foucault articulates his thought in Heideggerian terms, and the later Foucault articulates his thought in more Nietzschean ones, Foucault’s thought can thus be seen to move along the spectrum lying between Heidegger and Nietzsche, while remaining all the while within the paradigm they define.

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 157.

## *Agamben*

Agamben's development of Foucauldian bio-power and bio-politics serves to swing the pendulum away from Nietzsche and back towards Heidegger. While Agamben maintains with Foucault that the politicization of life is of decisive importance for understanding modernity and the machinations of power in the present, Agamben gives a new twist to Foucauldian bio-power by interpreting it in the terms of ancient Greek philosophy. For Agamben, the distinction between two different ancient Greek words for life, *bios* and *zoe*, indicate the way in which the life proper to the human being lived in the *polis* (*bios*), was considered to be separate from the "bare life" humans share with other living beings (*zoe*). However, like the concealing (*lethe*) necessary for the un-concealing (*aletheia*) of truth, Agamben asserts that the apolitical "bare life" of *zoe* is necessary in order for the political life of *bios* to define itself, and as such, *zoe* ought to be considered the constitutive "outside" of *bios*. *Zoe* is related to *bios* in that it is the outside against which *bios* maintains its own sphere, a relation Agamben calls a "relation of exception," wherein "something is included solely through its exclusion."<sup>138</sup>

What is of decisive importance for modernity then is not so much the inclusion of life in the political sphere—as Agamben's formulation of the relation between *bios* and *zoe* purports to show that life was always already included in politics through its exclusion—but that the way in which politics relates to life has

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<sup>138</sup> Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 18.

changed. Rather than occupying the margins of politics as its constitutive outside, Agamben claims that through a process whereby the exception has become the rule,<sup>139</sup> “bare life” has come to coincide with the political sphere, allowing for the exclusion and the inclusion, the inside and the outside that characterized the mutually constitutive terms of *bios* and *zoe*, to “enter into a zone of irreducible indistinction.”<sup>140</sup> This zone of indistinction that engulfs politics and life marks a transformation in the way in which political power is exercised, in that the ancient form of distinguishing between living beings in order to define political subjects fails to operate. In this manner, the zone of indistinction that is becoming characteristic of modernity also troubles the human-animal distinction. However, while in *Homo Sacer* Agamben devotes little time to this problem beyond noting the exceptional existence of the “wolfman,”<sup>141</sup> in *The Open: Man and Animal*, the problem, as its subtitle suggests, occupies center-stage.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Though the term “process” is here rather vague, it can be inferred that this “process” refers primarily to a series of innovations in the Western legal tradition that culminate for Agamben in the laws surrounding the definitions of sovereignty and the state of exception in the Weimar Republic, and later, in the Third Reich. Apart from *Homo Sacer*, see Agamben’s *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>140</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 9.

<sup>141</sup> A being who, neither human nor animal, dwells in both the world of *bios* and *zoe*, without properly belonging to either and thus exists as a kind of exemplar of this zone of indistinction where the old division fails to operate, and perhaps more ominously, serves as an example of a body that is stripped of its status as a legal subject, though remaining biologically human. See *Homo Sacer*, 105-106.

<sup>142</sup> The relation between *Homo Sacer* (1995) and *The Open* (2002) can perhaps be understood by a phrase from the former: “What constitutes man as a thinking animal has its exact counterpart in what constitutes him as a political animal” (*Homo Sacer*, 182). Whereas *Homo Sacer* concerns itself with the vicissitudes of the Western legal tradition in constituting man as a political animal, *The Open* concerns itself with the vicissitudes of the Western philosophical tradition in constituting man as a thinking animal. In this sense, these two works are opposing sides of the same coin.

Like the “relation of exception” existing between *bios* and *zoe* that allows for *bios* to define itself as an “inside” opposed to the “outside” of *zoe*, so Agamben writes in *The Open* that the human being is capable of opposing itself to other living things only by first externalizing or locating “outside” an animal life that is actually a part of itself. That is, in order for the human being to define itself as the “inside” opposing a world of animal life “outside,” it must continually separate itself from the animal life that is part of the human being.<sup>143</sup> Insofar as this process of separation is responsible for anthropogenesis—the becoming human of the living being—Agamben holds that this process is what is proper to human life as such: *homo sapiens* “is neither a clearly defined species nor a substance; it is, rather, a machine or device for producing the recognition of the human.”<sup>144</sup> For Agamben, it is this very process of continually separating itself from the animal and then recognizing itself in the animal that makes the human being what it is as a distinct kind of being—the human being is thus a process: it is, more than anything, an *anthropological machine*.

While Agamben’s use of terms like “process” and “machine” seem foreign to Heidegger’s thought, it is important to note that the process responsible for articulating the separation between what is human and what is animal and hence the process responsible for generating the human in the first place is “first

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<sup>143</sup> Agamben, *The Open: Man and Animal*, trans. Kevin Attell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), 15-16.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

philosophy.”<sup>145</sup> Thus, defining the human in terms of its separation from the animal depends in Agamben, as in Heidegger, on the philosophical operation of separating something in life that can be related to being, and something that cannot, and to the former kind of life is assigned the predicate “human,” while the later comes to be known as “animal.” Insofar as the human is thus a certain way of relating to being and beings, how we understand the human cannot be divorced from “the epochal destinations of being,” which according to Agamben, locate the present at a juncture where philosophy has ended, and thus the anthropological machine is “idling.”<sup>146</sup>

The idling of the anthropological machine, its inability to draw the distinctions between human and animal that had historically constituted its operations, like the zone of indistinction in which bare life and politics are mired, presents itself as the most pressing danger of our time. Not only does Agamben hold that the total inability to distinguish between human and animal would render them and the concepts that underwrite our lives unthinkable, but Agamben even speculates that concentration and extermination camps are a response to this condition: they are “an extreme and monstrous attempt to decide between the human and the inhuman.”<sup>147</sup> However, Agamben’s own attempts to respond to this condition also seem to follow along Heideggerian paths.

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 22.

In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben writes that insofar as the paradigm of sovereignty that comes to structure the relation of exception and so ultimately make possible the zone of indistinction between bare life and politics is derived from the Aristotelian conception of potentiality,<sup>148</sup> a “new and coherent ontology of potentiality” is needed in order to formulate a political theory “freed from the aporias of sovereignty.”<sup>149</sup> That is, ontology is the key that will unlock the conceptual chains foisted upon the present by its past. In contrast, Agamben writes in *The Open* that the animal lies beyond being, and thus letting the animal be would be “to let it be *outside of being*.”<sup>150</sup> To let the animal be *outside of being* would be to refuse the conceptual capture through which the animal is constituted as the “outside” against the “inside” of the human, and thus, to refuse the constitutive operation of the human being—of the *anthropological machine*.

It is difficult to say if this *being outside of being* is for Agamben the same as thinking a new ontology, or if his exhortation to “risk ourselves” in the “central emptiness” that “within man [...] separates man and animal” is a more poetic intervention.<sup>151</sup> In the first case Agamben appears to place his hope in a new ontology, while in the second he seems to oppose something closer to *poiesis* to the *techne* of human constitution, yet both cases appear to point in a direction that Agamben explicitly rejects: a new constitution of the human. Agamben

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<sup>148</sup> *Homo Sacer*, 46.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>150</sup> *The Open*, 91.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

holds in *The Open* that arresting the anthropological machine means no longer seeking new, more “effective” or “authentic” articulations of the human.<sup>152</sup> However, if ontology, as first philosophy, is “the fundamental operation in which anthropogenesis [...] is realized,”<sup>153</sup> then it would appear that “a new and coherent ontology of potentiality” would also be the re-constitution of the human. However, even if Agamben’s gesture in *The Open* toward a being outside of being is interpreted as a poetic renunciation of ontology, recall that Agamben writes that “[a]nthropological changes correspond, in language, to poetological changes” and that the poet is “he who, in the word, produces life.”<sup>154</sup> In other words, it appears that to seek refuge from ontology in poetry is still to produce the very thing one had hoped to avoid in the flight from ontology: a new constitution of the human being which turns upon potentials particular to him as a being fundamentally distinct from animals. In this manner, it would appear that the escape routes Agamben would follow out from this most pressing of dangers turn in upon themselves like so many of Heidegger’s *Holzwege*.

### *Deleuze*

Back toward the Nietzschean end of the spectrum can be found the works of Deleuze that address themselves to the human-animal distinction; however, even Deleuze’s Nietzscheanism is not without certain Heideggerian inflections. Like

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 79. Unlike Heidegger, Agamben makes no distinction here between ontology and metaphysics.

<sup>154</sup> *The End of the Poem*, 96; 93.

Nietzsche, Deleuze concerns himself with the pre-individual, the forces from which individuation springs, the forces capable both of constituting individuals temporarily and of “dissolving and destroying” them.<sup>155</sup> For Deleuze, individuation is accomplished through intensity; consequently, the creation, transformation, or destruction of an individual depends upon the varying degrees of intensity of which that individual is composed. Nietzsche’s concepts of “the will to power” and the “eternal return” are for Deleuze terms that describe this play of intensity or *intensities* that compose this Dionysian world of anarchic dissolution and transformation. While the will to power is “the flashing world of metamorphoses, of communicating intensities,” the eternal return “is the being of this world”<sup>156</sup>; that is, the eternal return expresses “the common being of all these metamorphoses.”<sup>157</sup>

Unlike animals, humans possess the woeful capacity to privilege their own temporary constitution as individuals as something unique to the world or even self-caused, and thus engage in what Deleuze calls “a specifically human form of bestiality”: stupidity (*bêtise*).<sup>158</sup> The specifically human form of animality is thus a kind of error, an inability to grasp the world as it is. If the goal of philosophy is

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<sup>155</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 38.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

then to obstruct this stupidity,<sup>159</sup> then philosophy sets as its task the thinking of the powers of individuation, and in so doing, philosophy aims to free the human being of the vanity of the predicate “human.” Deleuze appropriates Nietzsche’s philosophy in order to replace the I and the Self by “an undifferentiated abyss” and think “the individuating factors which consume them and which constitute the fluid world of Dionysius.”<sup>160</sup> These “individuating factors” are “immediately and essentially” related to “univocal being,” as this univocal being is for Deleuze the being of the individuating factors themselves. Individuation is accomplished through the play of intensities (the will to power), and the being of these intensities (the eternal return) is the being that “expresses in a single meaning all that differs.”<sup>161</sup> Through his concern with the being of the factors of individuation and his definition of the human in terms of its relation to this being, Deleuze advances a theorization of the human-animal divide that gives a distinct Heideggerian spin to Nietzschean concepts.<sup>162</sup>

In his later work with Guattari, Deleuze will again take up thinking the human-animal relation, and once again, this attempt will remain decidedly between the twin poles of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Deleuze and Guattari reject

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<sup>159</sup> See the portion of Deleuze’s interview with Claire Parnet, “R as in Resistance.” Cited in Charles J. Stivale, *Gilles Deleuze’s ABCs: The Folds of Friendship* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), Ch. 5.

<sup>160</sup> Deleuze, *Difference & Repetition*, 258.

<sup>161</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 254.

<sup>162</sup> Heidegger, for his part, also did interpret Nietzsche’s concept of the will to power in metaphysical terms, writing that it “constitutes the basic character of all beings.” See Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Volumes One and Two*, trans. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper and Row, 1991), 3.

the notion that the fine arts can be used to differentiate between human and animal: “music,” they write “is not the privilege of human beings.”<sup>163</sup> Not only do other animals participate in music, but their participation in music cannot be clearly associated with their species: there are musician birds, mammals, and insects, but not every bird, mammal or insect is a musician. Even painting, which would appear to be a more distinctly human activity, cannot serve as the basis for a clear-cut distinction between animals and human beings, due to the ways in which hormones can “induce their colors and lines.”<sup>164</sup> In all, Deleuze and Guattari conclude that “one cannot draw a symbolic boundary between the human being and animal. One can only calculate and compare powers of deterritorialization.”<sup>165</sup> If we understand the term “deterritorialization” to indicate a process by which a form is dissolved through the freeing of the intensities it had previously bound, then here too, the factors of individuation that serve to separate human beings from other animals concern varying degrees of intensities.<sup>166</sup> Fixating upon the forms of human and animal being as opposed to the intensities that flow beneath them and how these relate to each other is to be in a sense hypnotized by epiphenomena—it is *stupidity*.

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<sup>163</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 309.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

<sup>166</sup> Deleuze and Guattari frequently oppose the term “deterritorialization” to “reterritorialization,” which is the process by which flows of intensities become blocked and bound, and hence come to constitute new forms. These terms run parallel to Nietzsche’s use of the terms Dionysiac and Apolline.

Thus, in the interest of thinking about animals and how they relate to human beings in terms of a play of intensities, Deleuze and Guattari categorize animals into three different types. The first kind of animal is the individuated animal, the family pet with its own personal history that “belongs” to a person in their capacity as person, an appendage to the stasis of family life: these animals “invite us to regress, draw us into a narcissistic contemplation.” The second kind of animal is the “State animal.” These animals are those that figure in divine myths, defined in terms of characteristics or attributes used to classify people and from which “series or structures, archetypes or models” can be extracted. Lastly, Deleuze and Guattari write of “demonic animals” that always appear as a pack or a multiplicity. These animals spread by contagion as opposed to heredity, cutting across the previous distinctions with their capacity to engulf them like an epidemic.<sup>167</sup> While the first two kinds of animals represent different ways of reterritorializing intensive flows, the first by way of the family, and the second, by way of the state, only those animals falling under the last category represent the freeing of intensities and the dissolution of established forms, and consequently, it is to these animals we must look in order to overcome stupidity.<sup>168</sup> The

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<sup>167</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 241.

<sup>168</sup> Again, it is important for Deleuze and Guattari to recall that these categories of animal concern a particular complex of intensities and the transformations they might undergo. Consequently, it is not that cats and dogs are necessarily familial animals and lions and eagles are necessarily state animals, for insofar as the multiplicity of “demonic” animals spreads by contagion, it is possible to make a cat or a dog, a lion or an eagle, into a pack, into a multiplicity that would overrun their place in the familial or state orders. Certain animals are, however, more conducive to releasing a multiplicity than others, and Deleuze and Guattari hold this to be a consequence of their relative “powers of deterritorialization.”

particular manner in which humans might enter into relations with these animals Deleuze and Guattari term “becoming-animal.”

For Deleuze and Guattari, this “becoming-animal” has nothing to do with imitating a given animal, of living in a manner “like” a given animal is thought to live, but rather involves entering into a relation with an animal that takes one beyond oneself. A favorite example of Deleuze and Guattari’s is Melville’s *Moby Dick*: Ahab enters into a becoming-animal with the eponymous whale not by imitating the whale, but by relating to the whale in a way that draws him away from the roles assigned by family and state and leads him down a path of becoming wherein Ahab will cease to be a man. Though as the becoming-whale of a man, Ahab will never actually become a whale, this gesture towards the whale of the man enables him to escape the points of subjectification that hold him as a man. There are two principal consequences of formulating a becoming-animal in this manner. The first is that becoming-animal is an extraordinarily varied process, capable of a wide variety of both productive and destructive routes, and hence, is itself politically ambiguous.<sup>169</sup> Secondly, as Deleuze and Guattari write, becoming “produces nothing other than itself,” and that what is real is “the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes.”<sup>170</sup> In other words, the point of entering into a becoming-animal is to enter into a becoming, the “animal” is

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<sup>169</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 247.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

simply a facilitator, a point along a path taking one elsewhere. The actually existing sensible and living creatures we call animals remain trapped in their “molar form and subjectivity,”<sup>171</sup> and are, insofar as the priority of a given block of becoming and its reality is maintained, less real than the terms caught up in the becoming.

It is for this reason that Deleuze and Guattari can merrily write that “for the vertebrate to become an Octopus or Cuttlefish, all it would have to do is fold itself in two fast enough to fuse the elements of the halves of its back together, then bring its pelvis up to the nape of its neck and gather its limbs together into one of its extremities,”<sup>172</sup> for the physical impossibility of such a process for a living individual animal is conjured away along with the materiality of the terms caught up in the priority of their becoming. That is, despite the Nietzschean attempt to redraw the barrier between humans and other animals with their concept of “becoming-animal,” insofar as the priority is placed on *becoming*, humans and other animals continue to be determined in terms of their relation to *being*. Though Deleuze will find in the work of the painter Francis Bacon an instance of becoming-animal where the line between “man” and “beast” becomes blurred through their mutual suffering as “meat,”<sup>173</sup> ultimately for Deleuze, as with Guattari, animals are forms of *intensities* that can aid human beings enter into a series of becomings, the “immanent end” of which is a “becoming-

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 275.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 255.

<sup>173</sup> Deleuze, *Francis Bacon*, 21-22; 25.

imperceptible,”<sup>174</sup> that is, a kind of dissolution of all the forms that would stop-up the flow of intensities and allow the human to think individuation as such. Here, in the “undifferentiated abyss” of which Deleuze wrote in *Difference & Repetition*, one can finally grasp the being of becoming, or the eternal return of the will to power: the “Being that expresses in a single meaning all that differs.”<sup>175</sup> Like Nietzsche, Deleuze wants to bring the human into a relation with the animal in order to create a new kind of individual; however, like Heidegger, this individual is defined in terms of its relation to the thinking of Being.

### *Derrida*

Closer still to the Nietzschean end of the spectrum, and again despite his characterization otherwise,<sup>176</sup> is the last thinker I would like to examine in this survey: Jacques Derrida. While Derrida’s method of “deconstruction” clearly owes much to Heidegger’s *destruktion* of metaphysics, Derrida rejects the priority of ontology in defining what is properly human, seeking instead to show the ultimately untenable nature of the divisions that have characterized the history of thinking in the West concerning the human and other animals. For Derrida, these divisions ultimately founder on the suffering and death all animals

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<sup>174</sup> Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 279.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 254.

<sup>176</sup> Like Foucault’s characterization as the representative of “French Nietzscheanism,” Derrida has been seen as the representative of “French Heideggerianism.” See Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *French Philosophy of the Sixties*, 122. We will see that, at least concerning the human-animal divide, Derrida appears to be closer to Nietzsche than to Heidegger.

share, and it is on the basis of these that the animality of the human, along with any human obligations to animals, must be thought. Derrida's deconstruction of the human-animal distinction "begins"<sup>177</sup> with an anecdotal account of the shame the author felt appearing naked before his cat.<sup>178</sup> Derrida notes that as only humans clothe themselves, it has conventionally been thought that only they have the capacity for nudity, despite the fact that animals are themselves everywhere naked. In accidentally exposing himself to his cat, he feels shame for being "naked as a beast," but also, shame for being ashamed, for feeling shame at the nakedness he shares with this animal, yet that is at once denied the animal.<sup>179</sup> This being exposed to the animal, being exposed to the gaze of the animal as an animal, and as an animal that denies its own animality, leads Derrida to speculate that perhaps this state of exposure is where thinking begins.<sup>180</sup>

The importance of this point of exposure for thinking lies in the way in which the human-animal divide has been cast in the history of thought in the West: Derrida holds that thinking concerning the animal derives from poetry, for thinking concerning the animal is precisely what philosophy has had to deprive

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<sup>177</sup> By "begins" I mean the episode with which Derrida begins a lecture given in 1997 and later published as *The Animal That Therefore I am*, trans. David Wills, ed. Marie-Louise Mallet (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008). Derrida claims here that in fact "the question of the living and the living animal" has characterized his readings of all the philosophers he has taken an interest in, from his early work on Husserl (34), thus potentially relating all of Derrida's *corpus* (Derrida would presumably want us to hear in this word its double-meaning) to the question of the living animal, making the "beginning" of his work on this question much earlier than I indicate here. For the purposes of this survey, I will examine only those recent texts of Derrida which deal with the question most explicitly.

<sup>178</sup> Deleuze and Guattari's warning that familial animals "draw us into narcissistic contemplation" goes unheeded.

<sup>179</sup> Derrida, *The Animal...*, 4.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

itself in order to be philosophy.<sup>181</sup> Philosophy, in order to separate itself from poetry, made itself the discourse of reason, the particular and highest exercise of the particular and highest faculty of the *human*—this animal unlike other animals. In defining the human as the animal possessed of *logos* and thus, unlike all other animals, capable of speech and of reason, Western philosophy inaugurated a tradition of what Derrida will call “logocentrism,” running from Aristotle to Heidegger, which will see the human, the *rational animal*, as a being fundamentally other than that being without speech or reason, “the Animal.”<sup>182</sup> The otherness of “the Animal,” its lack of speech and reason, has underscored the history of animals being ill-treated by humans, a history that according to Derrida has over the last two centuries reached such unprecedented levels of human intrusion and dominance as to trouble the old concepts that mark this very distinction.<sup>183</sup>

It is for this reason, its role in the discourse of domination, that Derrida attacks the concept of “the Animal,” pointing out that there is no “Animal” in the general and singular, only a “heterogeneous multiplicity of the living.”<sup>184</sup> Reducing this great living plurality to a singular and general term capable of indicating its distinction from something called “human” is for Derrida “one of the greatest and most symptomatic *asinanities* [*bêtise*] of those who call

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 31.

themselves humans.”<sup>185</sup> Thus, Derrida’s goal is to “have the plural *animals* heard in the singular,”<sup>186</sup> for releasing the plurality of *animals* from their conceptual capture in the general and singular marks a first step in troubling the great division between human and animal. As *animals*, there are only different kinds of living entities, whose activities differ in any number of ways that do not necessarily privilege those particular activities traditionally considered to be human.

With *bêtise*, as with nudity, just at the moment the human attempts to isolate in itself something unique that would separate itself from “the Animal,” the human finds itself at its most animal: the valuing of its knowledge and intelligence above all else turns out to be among its greatest *bêtise*, just as the capacity to un-clothe and thus expose itself exposes only an animal body. Advancing along these lines Derrida takes aim at a number of attributes thought to be uniquely constitutive of the human, and attempts to show their untenability as uniquely human spheres. Thus, insofar as “the Animal” is nothing more than a word humans “have given themselves the right and the authority to give to the

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 41. In making a certain capacity for *bêtise* something characteristically human, Derrida comes closer to the work of Deleuze. Though I find Derrida’s attempt to differentiate himself from Deleuze by reading Deleuze’s treatment of *bêtise* in terms of Schelling and his notion of liberty unconvincing, their respective ideas concerning the human-animal divide do differ markedly. Whereas Deleuze understands the human-animal divide in the ontological terms of being and becoming, Derrida focuses more on the sensible consequences of this divide, hence his greater proximity to Nietzsche. See Jacques Derrida, *The Beast & The Sovereign, Volume I*, ed. Michel Lisse et al, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 153-157.

<sup>186</sup> Derrida, *The Animal...*, 47.

living other,”<sup>187</sup> and sovereignty is seen as the right one gives to oneself, then it is a kind of sovereignty that confers on “the heterogeneous multiplicity of the living” its status as “Animal” in the general and singular, and so makes possible the human being who stands over and apart from it. It is perhaps for this reason that Derrida devotes two series of lectures near the end of his life to *The Beast and the Sovereign*.

Just as the sovereign knowledge that would confer upon the human its unique status among the living is a kind of animality, a *bêtise*, so is there a kind of open secret linking the political sovereign and the beast *he* would master.<sup>188</sup> Perched atop the political hierarchy, the sovereign rules over his subjects as a man over his domestic animals.<sup>189</sup> Yet, the sovereign gesture that would establish distance from his fellows and consequently confer upon him the power to rule *as a man over beasts* is precisely what makes a beast of himself: the sovereign must share his distance from the law, the fact of his being above or outside it, with the beast, and so begins “to look like the beast he is supposed to subject to himself.”<sup>190</sup> The sovereign moment that would make possible the distinction between a human who rules and an animal that is ruled is thus at once the point

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>188</sup> Derrida characterizes the sovereign as a symbol of masculinity and the beast a symbol of femininity. See *The Beast & the Sovereign, Vol. I*, 187. It should also be noted that while Derrida acknowledges the different rhetorical affects that can be attributed to different animals (e.g. the dove, the wolf, &c), he makes no distinction between “beast” and “animal,” as does Aristotle: a beast is apparently for Derrida another instantiation of “the Animal” in the general singular.

<sup>189</sup> Derrida writes, “in place of the beast one can put, in the same hierarchy, the slave, the woman, the child” (*The Beast & the Sovereign, Vol. I*, 33).

<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

where human and animal are least capable of being distinguished. Likewise, the characteristic attributes through which the human would distinguish itself from “the Animal,” that is, human *liberty* or *responsibility*, are equally untenable.

Human liberty, like the sovereignty that would raise itself above the beast, is thought to be a liberty *from* the animal drives that determine the actions of beasts. The beast is in a sense imprisoned by its drives, driven along the narrow confines of a pre-determined course in a way that makes all its actions simply *reactions*. The human, as free and sovereign, does not simply *react*, but rather, *responds*. This distinction between reaction and response is for Derrida the fundamental point in understanding the question of animality: it all “comes down to knowing not whether the animal speaks but whether one can know what respond means. And how to distinguish a response from a reaction.”<sup>191</sup> For Derrida, the so-called unique capacity of the human for responsibility, for taking responsibility for its own actions that are something other than simple reactions, is itself a question of *translation*.<sup>192</sup> It is less the incapacity of animals to respond, than it is the capacity for humans to translate between an animal “reaction” and a human “response.”

However, the untenability of these key distinctions does not for Derrida mean that there are no relevant distinctions between humans and animals, and

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<sup>191</sup> Derrida, *The Animal...*, 8.

<sup>192</sup> Derrida, *The Beast & The Sovereign*, Vol. I, 336.

that such distinctions can simply be ignored.<sup>193</sup> Rather, the untenability of these key distinctions in the tradition of Western thought ought to precipitate their transvaluation. Both liberty and responsibility, though they imply “something of that indivisible sovereignty accorded to what is proper to man and denied the beast,”<sup>194</sup> cannot simply be jettisoned. Instead Derrida would deconstruct only “a *certain* political ontotheology of sovereignty,” for it is not a matter of “indivisible sovereignty and indivisible non-sovereignty, but between several divisions, distributions, *economies* [...] of a divisible sovereignty.”<sup>195</sup> The point for Derrida is to think a division of sovereignty, and hence a liberty and responsibility, that would go beyond the dogmatic and narcissistic ethics that exclude animals, and so make possible an extension of “the similar, the fellow, to all forms of life, to all species” and so be capable of affirming that “[a]ll animals qua living beings are my fellows.”<sup>196</sup> This capacity to affirm the commonality of human and beast in and despite their differences, is, unlike the powers or faculties that have so often been posited to distinguish the human from other animals, the power of the “non-power” of suffering. Suffering is the “non-power that we share with the animal, whence compassion. It is from this compassion in impotence and not

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<sup>193</sup> Derrida, *The Animal...*, 47.

<sup>194</sup> Derrida, *The Beast & The Sovereign, Vol. I*, 309.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

from power that we must start when we want to think the animal and its relation to man.”<sup>197</sup>

In this manner, Derrida, while drawing upon Nietzsche, would seem to turn him on his head: against the feeling of power, of “a *certain*” sovereignty, Derrida champions the “non-power” of suffering. However, insofar as this suffering is what is held to be common to both humans and other animals, it can be seen as a kind of pre-individual *aisthesis*. Like the Nietzschean tragic experience of a sensibility that extends beyond or below personhood, Derrida’s notion of suffering extends beneath particular entities and their species categorization and so affirms a commonality, a deeper fellowship, than the distinctions upon which social and political organization are based. For Derrida, as for Nietzsche, the human is a construction, an effect of forces capable of being deconstructed.<sup>198</sup> In focusing upon the suffering common to both humans and other animals—upon the affectivity their mortal bodies share—Derrida attempts a transvaluation of values that would bring nonhuman animals into the ethical fold, as creatures to whom humans are responsible.

One might be tempted to ask here whether or not the extension of fellowship and the possibility of ethical responsibility to others based on a similarity—even one so seemingly basic as suffering—is really sufficiently

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<sup>197</sup> Jacques Derrida, *The Beast & The Sovereign, Vol. II*, ed. Michel Lisse et al, trans. Geoffrey Bennington (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2011), 244.

<sup>198</sup> For Derrida, the unity of the world in which it is possible to designate something like the human is “always constructed” through “language in the broad sense” and thus “always deconstructible, nowhere and never given in nature” (Ibid., 8-9).

insufficient a basis for domination. Is the shared fragility of suffering and death enough to undermine the other tendencies in Nietzsche's pre-individual conception of sensibility, given that Nietzsche himself noted the link between feelings of power and the "original pain at the heart of the primordial unity"? Is a fellowship based in shared suffering enough to avoid the temptation to power, and if not, what then of the new "economies" of sovereignty made possible by this fellowship? For now, it is sufficient to note that Derrida remains, like the other thinkers examined in this survey, within the circle drawn by Heidegger and Nietzsche, one wherein the human is an artistic invention whose distance or proximity to other animals is understood in terms of this artistic fabrication.

*Conclusion: Back to Aristotle*

Concerning the relation between art, aesthetics, and politics, it has been argued that there exists a thread running through the work of a number of the influential thinkers on this topic that ties them to the work of Nietzsche and Heidegger. The principal theoretical innovation to which I directed my attention was what I called the posteriority of the human found in Rancière, Nancy, and Agamben. I argued that this posteriority finds its correlate in the priority of art found in Nietzsche and Heidegger, which states that the human is not the origin of art, but that art is the origin of the human. This priority of art, or the posteriority of the human, in turn allowed us to see how a number of recent and influential attempts

to theorize the human and its difference from other animals, namely, in the works of Foucault, Agamben, Deleuze, and Derrida, owe a similar debt to Nietzsche and Heidegger. Indeed, whether separated by an ontological abyss as in Heidegger, or brought together through suffering or the feelings of power found in mutual sensibility as in Nietzsche, it would appear that these recent attempts to understand the political relation between humans and animals remain decidedly within a paradigm defined by Nietzsche and Heidegger. Yet it must now be asked: what is the significance of this paradigm?

In linking the first set of thinkers to Nietzsche and Heidegger in this manner, the crypto-anthropology of these thinkers is laid bare: while the reflections on art, aesthetics, and politics in Rancière, Nancy, and Agamben all lead toward a theory of the human being, they rarely make this connection explicit. Even Agamben, whose writings on the question of the human have proved particularly influential among political theorists in recent years, makes no sustained attempt to link these two aspects of his thought. These notions of the posteriority of the human and the priority of art make it possible to more broadly generalize the claim Derrida makes in *The Truth in Painting*, that Kantian aesthetic judgment presupposes a practical anthropology.<sup>199</sup> Rancière, Nancy, and Agamben cannot be said to espouse the kind of pure aesthetic judgment Kant formulates, yet all three seem to smuggle a kind of philosophical anthropology

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<sup>199</sup> Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, 107-108.

into their writings on aesthetics, thus demonstrating that this relation between aesthetics and anthropology is not particular to Kant, and so suggests a more tightly-knit relationship between art, aesthetics, and our understandings of human being.

This statement is corroborated by my survey of Foucault, Agamben, Deleuze, and Derrida on the question of the human-animal distinction. In demonstrating their proximity to Heidegger and Nietzsche on the question of the posteriority of the human, the priority of art is also implied, even if these thinkers do not attempt to link these problems directly. Put differently: while my examination of Rancière, Nancy, and Agamben demonstrated their aesthetics to imply an anthropology, my examination of Foucault, Agamben, Deleuze, and Derrida suggest that their writings on the human-animal distinction imply an aesthetic. Yet none of these thinkers attempt to connect these accounts, and so they fail to recognize that each side of the equation requires the other: if what we know to be human is an artistic creation, the art that creates humans is itself defined and created by the human, or at least, some embryonic version of the human.

A possible reason for this oversight can be found in the way in which these thinkers orient their theorizing of these problems to the history of Western political thought, and, more specifically, to Aristotle. For instance, though Rancière will write, apparently approvingly, of Aristotle's claim that poetry is

superior to history, to “the unfolding of empirical events,”<sup>200</sup> and will also note Aristotle’s importance in transforming the political and philosophical roles of artistic practice,<sup>201</sup> Rancière will ultimately oppose himself to Aristotle and “the anthropological foundation of politics.”<sup>202</sup> Likewise, Nancy’s politics of separation are defined in opposition to a tradition extending back to Aristotle,<sup>203</sup> as are the theorizations of Agamben. For Agamben, the categories of the comic and the tragic, which in modernity are imbued with “the most profound ethical conflicts,” are derived from medieval ideas based on Aristotle’s *Poetics*.<sup>204</sup> Moreover, Agamben’s account of the relation of exception he finds in the distinction between *zoe* and *bios* is drawn from Aristotle’s manner of distinguishing between the home and the political sphere, and Agamben will even go so far as to claim that the “paradigm of sovereignty” against which he opposes himself was bequeathed to Western philosophy by Aristotle.<sup>205</sup> Aristotle is a central interlocutor in Deleuze’s *Difference and Repetition*, while Derrida places Aristotle at the forefront of the “logocentrism” of the Western tradition he sets as his task to deconstruct.<sup>206</sup> Derrida will even argue that the entire tradition of “man” as a rational or calculating animal rises from Aristotle’s definition of the human being, and that understanding politics in “the modernity of ‘our time’”

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<sup>200</sup> Rancière, *The Politics of Literature*, 174; *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 37.

<sup>201</sup> Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 18; 36.

<sup>202</sup> Rancière, *Dissensus*, 92.

<sup>203</sup> Nancy, *Multiple Arts*, 25.

<sup>204</sup> Agamben, *The End of the Poem*, 7; 9.

<sup>205</sup> Agamben, *Homo Sacer*, 2-3; 18; 46.

<sup>206</sup> Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, 27.

requires an examination of Aristotle.<sup>207</sup> Yet, while these thinkers all make reference to Aristotle as the principal figure standing at the head of the tradition to which they oppose themselves, none have engaged in the kind of sustained treatment of his philosophy that might understand the manner in which the link between anthropology, aesthetics, and politics might be illuminated.

Thus it can be said that while Aristotle weighs heavily upon the work of the thinkers I have surveyed, his presence is only slightly better than the proverbial elephant in the living room: Aristotle is acknowledged, but otherwise left undisturbed. However, given my argument that these theorists all fall within a paradigm defined by Nietzsche and Heidegger, that they also relate themselves to Aristotle should perhaps not be all that surprising: indeed, Heidegger famously pronounced that one need spend ten to fifteen years studying Aristotle in order for Nietzsche to be comprehensible.<sup>208</sup> While we need not affirm this pronouncement, we must note that both Nietzsche and Heidegger oriented their projects to, even *against*, Aristotle, and consequently recent thinkers who have taken up their attempts to reverse this tradition have thus taken up a kind of struggle against Aristotle. In fact, the Thomistic-Aristotelian Alasdair MacIntyre defines the contemporary state of morality in the Western world in these very terms: as a conflict between Nietzsche and Aristotle. For MacIntyre, Nietzsche's status as "the ultimate antagonist of the Aristotelian tradition" depends upon the

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<sup>207</sup> Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Vol. I, 333; 338-339; 349.

<sup>208</sup> Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?* trans. Fred D. Wieck and J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 73.

historical role of his moral philosophy. That is, the disintegration of the Aristotelian tradition in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, along with the subsequent failure of the enlightenment project to find a rational secular basis for morality, are for MacIntyre the necessary preconditions of Nietzsche's moral philosophy: only in a world where "all rational vindications of morality manifestly fail," and thus where explanation for moral adherence must be sought in the play or conflict of wills, is Nietzsche potentially persuasive. If the Aristotelian position can be recovered in a manner that would restore "intelligibility and rationality to our moral and social attitudes and commitments," then "the whole Nietzschean enterprise would be pointless."<sup>209</sup> MacIntyre argues that the Aristotelian position can be so restated, and so Nietzsche, presumably, can be tossed into the dustbin of history, but we need not agree with him or pick sides at this juncture—I am concerned more directly with what this conflict means for how we understand the human-animal distinction, its relation to art and aesthetics, and the political consequences of these.

What MacIntyre and the preceding look at the relation to Aristotle held by the above theorists make clear is that Aristotle lies both at the beginning, and potentially the end, of a certain trajectory of understanding the political relation between humans and animals. Aristotle's thoughts on this divide and its political and moral implications have served to orient an entire tradition, a tradition

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<sup>209</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 117; 259.

which, as we have seen, many influential theorists have made it their task to oppose. However, their opposition actually serves to agree with MacIntyre on the point of Aristotle's importance: while MacIntyre sees Aristotle, or some revived version of Aristotelianism, as the only statement of morality capable of filling the moral void of modernity, the thinkers I have surveyed above take the possibility of overcoming this tradition to be entirely bound to a reckoning with Aristotle. Thus it would appear that if the relation between human and animal, politics and aesthetics, and the moral implications of these as they are formulated in the West are to be better understood, along with attempts to revalue this tradition, it is to an examination of Aristotle that we must turn. Indeed, as MacIntyre writes: "no philosopher has taken animality more seriously than Aristotle."<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals* (Chicago: Open Court, 2002), 5.

## Part II.

# Aristotle on Animality and the Human Being: The Biological Writings

And we speak Aristotle all our lives and ‘don’t even know it.’

--Theodor W. Adorno, *Metaphysics*

### *Introduction*

Aristotle’s two most well-known statements concerning animals and their relation to humans are at once perhaps his most well known statements on politics: that “a human being is by nature a political animal” and that only “a beast or a god” can live outside the political community.<sup>211</sup> These statements, repeated in a few variations in the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Politics*,<sup>212</sup> have to a large extent served as the basis for “the anthropological foundation” of politics opposed by the thinkers examined above, along with what they take to be an anthropological invariant that has also been understood to underwrite the possibilities available to art. However, in opposing the tradition begun with Aristotle’s definition of the human as a political animal, these thinkers have

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<sup>211</sup> *Politics (Pol)*, 1253a1-6; 24-30. Indeed, Eugene Garver’s *Aristotle’s Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011) opens with the claim: “The whole of the *Politics* thinks through the meaning and implication of the idea that human beings are political animals” (p. 1). All English language citations from Aristotle’s *Pol.* refer to the translation by C.D.C Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1998).

<sup>212</sup> Cf. *Pol.* III.6 1278b19-22; *Nicomachean Ethics (NE)*, I.7 1097b11; VIII.12 1162a16-19; IX.9 1169b16-19. All English language citations from Aristotle’s *NE* refer to the translation by Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011).

focused on what they take Aristotle to mean by *political* and have failed to ask: *what, for Aristotle, is an animal?* Would not a radically changed understanding of what an animal is change what we take to be the politics available to this animal? Aristotle wrote voluminously on animals and their ways and means of living,<sup>213</sup> and his work has even been praised by modern biologists.<sup>214</sup> Moreover, Aristotle's work on animals, and biology generally, has been considered to represent a kind sea change in the Greek world view, transforming also the manner in which the human-animal distinction was conceived.

For instance, G.E.R. Lloyd writes that Aristotle was "the first to institute a comprehensive programme of research covering [what we now call] the natural sciences,"<sup>215</sup> through which the Greek conception of nature underwent the "elaboration and systematization" that would genuinely separate it from earlier mythical views and make it unique among ancient cultures.<sup>216</sup> For Lloyd, Aristotle's was the "most comprehensive physical system of the ancient world,"

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<sup>213</sup> A little over a quarter of Aristotle's existent work can be said to fall in this category. The two volumes of *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Revised Oxford Translation, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) come to a total of 1,985 pages attributed to Aristotle himself. I count among the biological works *On the Soul (OS)*, *Sense and Sensibilia (Sens.)*, *On Memory (OM)*, *On Sleep (OSI)*, *On Dreams (OD)*, *On Length and Shortness of Life (LSL)*, *On Youth, Old Age, Life and Death, and Respiration (OYOA)*, *History of Animals (HA)*, *Parts of Animals (PA)*, *Movement of Animals (MA)*, *Progression of Animals (Prog.)*, and *Generation of Animals (GA)*, which amount to 561 pages, or 28% of the total. All references to the biological works refer to the Revised Oxford Translation unless otherwise noted.

<sup>214</sup> Evital and Jablonka call Aristotle "that superb and unsurpassed biologist and philosopher." Eytan Avital and Eva Jablonka, *Animal Traditions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 45.

<sup>215</sup> G.E.R. Lloyd, *Magic, Reason, and Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 201.

<sup>216</sup> G.E.R. Lloyd, *Aristotelian Explorations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 125. It is this overarching concept of nature that for Lloyd is fundamental in distinguishing Greek science from the explanations given for natural phenomena in other parts of the world, for instance, in China (110-111).

which not only “laid down the types of question to be asked,” but “the terms in which to answer them.”<sup>217</sup> In this way, Aristotle and Aristotelianism defined a problematic that would reign in European science and cosmology for over two thousand years, a problematic which, Lloyd claims, is continuous with the scientific project in the West today.<sup>218</sup>

While the philosophical, if not necessarily scientific, treatment of animals begins considerably earlier than Aristotle, Sorabji argues that Aristotle’s work provoked a crisis in how the human-animal distinction was understood, leading to a massive re-evaluation of the psychic capacities thought to be distinctly human, including perception and appearance, belief, memory, and speech, and also a transformation in the concept of reason.<sup>219</sup> Though Sorabji frames this crisis in terms of specifically philosophical views, there is no reason why this crisis might not be seen as affecting Aristotle’s cultural context more generally. Among the theoretical innovations Lloyd attributes to Aristotle is a distinction between *logos* and *muthos*—between reason and myth—that leads Aristotle to readily dismiss received wisdom in the face of empirical evidence of its falsity.<sup>220</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> G.E.R. Lloyd, *Greek Science After Aristotle* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1973), 8.

<sup>218</sup> G.E.R. Lloyd, *Early Greek Science* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1970), 99; *Magic, Reason, and Experience*, 264. For more specific accounts of Aristotle’s scientific influence, see Stephen M. Modell, “Aristotelian Influence in the Formation of Medical Theory,” *The European Legacy* 15.4 (2010): 409-424.; and Thomas C. Vinci and Jason Scott Robert, “Aristotle and Modern Genetics,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 66.2 (2005): 201-221.

<sup>219</sup> Richard Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 7; 12; 103.

<sup>220</sup> Lloyd, *Aristotelian Explorations*, 111-112. Or as Vernant writes: “The Greek word *muthos* means formulated speech, whether it be a story, a dialogue, or the enunciation of a plan,” thus making it a kind of

While I think Lloyd, in the interest of crowning Aristotle first scientist, finds a harder distinction between these two concepts in Aristotle than the one actually advanced, Lloyd is right to note a tension here, between Aristotle's philosophy and the wisdom conveyed in the myths of his day.

Though Aristotle has been considered less radical or iconoclastic than other philosophers of his day—Plato in particular—for the value he assigns to commonly held opinions and received wisdom, we must be careful that this valuation does not obstruct our seeing the *re*-valuation of received wisdom happening through Aristotle's considerations. While Nussbaum notes something “defiant” in Aristotle's aim of saving “the appearances and their truth,” and of using philosophy “to show us the way back to the ordinary,”<sup>221</sup> it is not simply against other philosophers that we should see Aristotle positioning himself. That is, it would be wrong to see Aristotle as a kind of philosopher of the people, the champion of common sense against the abstractions of a detached aristocracy of philosophers with their heads in the clouds. As we shall see, Aristotle's investigations into the nature of animals and their relation to human beings will serve to radically undermine the received wisdom of his day, and the world bound up with it.

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*legein*, a form of speech, which “did not originally stand in contrast to *logoi*.” See Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone, 1996), 203-204.

<sup>221</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 242; 260.

While Aristotle takes seriously this received wisdom, in subjecting it to scrutiny he transforms it from the inside out, formalizing this wisdom according to the categories he observes and the causes he understands to be at work in it, while discarding those pieces of wisdom too weak to withstand such rough theoretical treatment. It is only in this light that we can understand Aristotle's claims that "no one fails entirely" in attempting to say something true about the nature of things, and that we must also be grateful for superficial opinions.<sup>222</sup> The partial truths hit upon in particular statements, while individually inconsequential, together form a picture of the world that can be understood and evaluated, just as superficial opinions serve to train that part of us that understands and evaluates. The value of received wisdom, then, is closer to that of a sparring partner that we might one day replace than it is to a ruler who must be obeyed, and Aristotle's investigations will serve to transform the world he knew into one that is in certain ways much more recognizable to us.

In Part II, I examine Aristotle's investigations into the nature of animals and their relation to human beings with a particular focus on Aristotle's biological writings, in order to understand what Aristotle means by "animal," and consequently the *political animal* human beings are supposed to be—the idea said to run through "the whole of Aristotle's *Politics*."<sup>223</sup> Contrary to the numerous thinkers who have taken this passage to be evidence that a capacity for

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<sup>222</sup> Aristotle, *Metaphysics (Meta.)*, II.1 993a30-b3; 993b12-14. English language citations refer to the Revised Oxford Translation.

<sup>223</sup> Recall Garver, *Aristotle's Politics*, 1.

politics is what distinguishes humans from other animals,<sup>224</sup> a closer look at Aristotle's biological writings reveals that certain other animals are also capable of living political lives. Specifically, in the *History of Animals*, Aristotle defines *political* animals not in the terms he gives in the *NE* and *Pol.*, as speakers, reasoners, and knowers of justice, but rather, as "those that have some work [*ergon*] in common," in which category he includes humans along with cranes, bees, ants, and wasps.<sup>225</sup>

Not only does this passage suggest that politics neither serves to define the human species nor distinguish it from otherwise very different animals, a closer look at the passage noted above where Aristotle contrasts humans with beasts and gods also troubles the conventional view. In the overwhelming majority of his comments on animals in the biological works, the word Aristotle uses for "animal" is *zoon*; however, the word commonly rendered as "beast" is *therion*. Unlike *zoon*, which typically refers to a living being, *therion* is used to describe wild beasts or "game," often in literature, and is related to *theros*, which describes not only wild animals but also the types of monsters that appear in works of literature, such as the sphinx, centaurs, or satyrs.<sup>226</sup> In this sense, it is likely that

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<sup>224</sup> See for example, Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 27; Alkis Kontos, "Domination: Metaphor and Reality," in *Domination*, ed. A. Kontos (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 214; J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 550; Rancière, *Dissensus*, 37, 92, 206.

<sup>225</sup> *HA* 488a6-10. Translation modified. Both the Oxford Revised Translation and A.L. Peck render *politika* as "social." On the problems of conflating the social and the political for understanding Ancient Greek thought, see Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 22-38.

<sup>226</sup> H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1983), 299; 318.

the “beast” which Aristotle considers self-sufficient like a god, and *unlike* a human, is a reference not to animals like bees or ants—which are also political and hence, presumably, *not* self-sufficient—but a reference to Homer’s Cyclops, a literary example Aristotle uses to show a type of self-sufficient, *apolitical* life.<sup>227</sup>

Thus it would appear that the conventional view that Aristotle understands politics to be something that serves to distinguish the human being from other animals is cast into doubt. Moreover, the view put forward in the *HA*—that political animals are those that share a common work—serves to displace the notion that all politics is necessarily predicated upon *logos*, and instead locates politics in capacities humans share with other animals. Yet, if politics proper is found among a variety of different animals, Aristotle appears to hold that what is particular to *human* politics does concern *logos*, and consequently, as I shall argue, the divinity of *nous*: human politics only differs from the politics of other animals insofar as it strives toward the divine. Thus, while it may be fitting to place Aristotle at the forefront of what Derrida calls “logocentrism,”<sup>228</sup> this “logocentrism” is only one aspect of Aristotle, one Aristotle that suppresses another. Thus it is only through a more thorough understanding of what Aristotle takes an animal to be and how this relates to what a human is that the legacy of Aristotle’s politics and the so-called “anthropological foundation” of politics in the West can be effectively confronted,

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<sup>227</sup> See Wolfgang Kullmann, “Man as a Political Animal in Aristotle,” in *A Companion to Aristotle’s Politics*, eds. David Keyt and Fred D. Miller Jr. (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1991), 96-97.

<sup>228</sup> Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, 27; *The Beast and the Sovereign*, Vol. I, 338-339; 349.

and this relation between the human-animal distinction, art, and politics can be understood.

I begin Chapter 4 with a discussion of the received wisdom on the human-animal distinction in Aristotle's day, examining how humans are seen to relate to animals in Homer, Hesiod, and three of the most prominent tragedians, before turning to Plato and his continuity with this tradition, which I call the world of poetic myth. After arguing that despite Plato's philosophical achievements, his dependence on certain poetic tropes serves to undermine his philosophy and confine him to the world of poetic myth, I turn in Chapter 5 to an examination of animals and humans in Aristotle's biological works. Here I reconstruct Aristotle's account of the human-animal relation, first by identifying the myriad commonalities Aristotle finds between humans and other animals in terms of their psychic capacities, anatomical features, and even modes of life, giving some flesh to the idea that politics is not a uniquely human phenomenon.

Following this look at the various points at which humans and other animals intersect, I turn to what Aristotle does understand to be uniquely human: namely, thought and the intellectual capacities dependent upon it. I argue that the ways in which Aristotle sees human senses and bodies to differ from other animals ultimately depend upon the uniquely human capacity for thought. I follow this with a closer look at human plurality, noting that not all humans are human in an equal sense, and might be seen as part of a natural hierarchy, where

some are much more animal than others. However, the extent to which Aristotle will go in defining this hierarchy will ultimately include certain aesthetic features, thus contaminating this natural order with artifice. For Aristotle, we will find, nature without art is unintelligible. Just as Aristotle's politics depend upon biology, so we will find that Aristotelian biology depends upon politics.

In this way, I set out to challenge the ideas put forward by the thinkers examined in Part I, that is, the ideas of the posteriority of the human and the priority of art. These ideas were found to be an attempt to reverse the trend in the history of western thought inaugurated by Aristotle, where art and politics are taken to be the expressions of human nature, an "anthropological invariant" that both enables and limits the possibilities inherent in each. In demonstrating both that politics for Aristotle is not an exclusively human activity, and that Aristotle's attempt to identify what is best and most distinctively human is ultimately dependent on art, we find that for Aristotle the "anthropological invariant" bound up with the possibilities of art and of politics is something more akin to a "zoological invariant," that art and politics depend upon capacities that are shared with other animals, and that the human as distinct from the animal already to a significant extent depends upon art. Consequently, the "reversal" that Nietzsche and Heidegger would accomplish and which the thinkers working within their legacies see themselves as advancing—that is, that art creates the human—depends upon a kind of "flattening" of Aristotle, one that would

downplay the continuity between humans and other animals while ignoring the role art plays in identifying what is unique in humans. If Aristotle's account can be shown to possess greater "volume" than the flat, one-dimensional reading offered by the aforementioned thinkers, then their "reversal" is without the force or consequences it was thought to have, and a rethinking of the human-animal distinction and its relation to politics and art requires another route.

## **Chapter Five:**

### **Humans and Animals in the World of Poetic Myth**

*From Homer to the Tragedians*

Aristotle's world is a world of poetic myth, where the received wisdom tending beyond the strictly practical is largely transmitted through the memorization and recitation of myths in poetic form. Thus poets stand in an important position of authority on matters human, animal, and divine, and perhaps among them none stand taller than Homer. Yet, if we use Homer as an example of received wisdom on the human-animal distinction, we will find that this distinction is conceived very differently than it is by Aristotle. The large majority of references to animals in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* fall within four basic categories: 1) in comparisons that link an animal or animals with a person or place through a simile, metaphor, or title; 2) in prizes or goods; 3) in auguries; and 4) in accounts of sacrifices. The references found in each of these categories illustrate the manner in which humans enter into particular relationships with animals, forging particular compositions of forces that serve to distinguish them from their fellows and so highlight their individuality, but in ways that transcend what we would understand as species barriers or the most common lines of categorization today.

In terms of the first category, we find Menelaus, in attacking Paris, to be “thrilled/ like a lion lighting on some handsome carcass/ lucking to find an

antlered stag or wild goat/ just as hunger strikes.”<sup>229</sup> Here the actions of Menelaus serve to bring him into proximity with the lion, a proximity which both serves to distinguish Menelaus from other Greeks while at once transforming Paris from his appearance as a god only moments before into no more than a hunted animal. Likewise, Odysseus, through the mastery and command of his comrades, is described by Priam as a “thick-fleeced bellwether ram—/making his way through a big mass of sheep-flocks,”<sup>230</sup> and the armies themselves are described variously as herds of goats, swarms of flies, or flocks of geese or cranes.<sup>231</sup> Even in activities thought to be more specifically human than exercises of force or gathering in great numbers, humans are individuated in ways that bring them into close proximity with certain animals, such as the eloquent speakers described as being “clear as cicadas.”<sup>232</sup> Humans who have long engaged in such acts of individual distinction come to attach themselves permanently to animals appropriate to these honors, as the titles of Agamemnon, “breaker of horses,” or Nestor, “the noble horseman,” bear witness.<sup>233</sup> Lands too are distinguished in this manner: Homer writes of the war-like “stallion-land of Argos,” and the wealthy “Orchomenos rife with sheep,”<sup>234</sup> among many others.

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<sup>229</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1998), III.15ff.

<sup>230</sup> *Il.*, III.190ff.

<sup>231</sup> *Il.*, II.455-480.

<sup>232</sup> *Il.*, III.145ff.

<sup>233</sup> *Il.*, II.20-30; 50-60; 330-335. Cf. Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*: “Owning horses and driving chariots implied both a way of life, essentially devoted to hunting and warfare, and high social standing. The horse was a noble, warlike beast and possessing, raising, and training it were the privileges of a minority” (49).

<sup>234</sup> *Il.*, II.285ff; 605ff.

Yet we might note here a difference between the proximity to animals an individual exhibits in simile or metaphor, on the one hand, and in a title on the other. That is, while Menelaus does not become an *actual* lion while stalking Paris, Agamemnon's title "breaker of horses" could, and likely is, meant to refer to *actual* horses, and thus the proximity to animals these two examples display differ in terms of their reference: one to the image of an animal, the other to an animal actually possessed and at the disposal of the title-bearer. The difference between these two types of animal proximity can be understood in terms of the second category noted above: prizes and goods. Animals and goods made of animal parts are frequently distributed to characters in Homer's poems to honor them and their deeds. For instance, among the gifts Agamemnon offers Achilles<sup>235</sup> in his attempt to assuage the latter's anger and restore his honor are lands "rich in sheep-flocks,/ rich in shambling cattle,"<sup>236</sup> and likewise Agamemnon honors Ajax for fighting Hector like a lion or boar with the choice cuts of meat from a sacrificial ox.<sup>237</sup>

Similarly, a distinguished Trojan archer's bow is noted to have come from "the horn of a wild goat he'd shot in the chest,"<sup>238</sup> and Paris's godlike features are noted along with his leopard skin cloak,<sup>239</sup> and similar goods are displayed or offered to Odysseus at various points in his travels. In this way we might see the

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<sup>235</sup> "Achilles,/ that lionheart who mauls battalions wholesale" (*Il.*, VII.226-230).

<sup>236</sup> *Il.*, IX.150ff.

<sup>237</sup> *Il.*, VII.255-260; 321-325.

<sup>238</sup> *Il.*, IV.105-110.

<sup>239</sup> *Il.*, II.15-20.

role animals or their parts play as prizes as solidifying the tenuous proximity to animals established through deeds: in acting like a lion in battle one might be rewarded in cattle, and so after be known as a “lord of cattle.” Thus becoming like an animal in one’s deeds serves to distinguish one in a manner that one might win for oneself prizes that would establish the physical recognition of one’s “animality,” and so a more permanent identity with the animal in a personal title. The animality recognized in prizes and possessions signifies both mastery of animals, and through them, mastery of other men. In both cases animals serve as markers of one’s status in relation to others, indicating the kind of person one is.

Yet in entering into proximity with animals in such a way as to distinguish oneself among one’s peers as a master, one is also elevated above one’s peers, and enters into proximity with the divine. Not only are great deeds frequently described as “godlike” by Homer, but we must note that the Greeks also invested considerable authority in auguries, thus reading divine import not only into the flight patterns of birds, but also the conflicts among different animals, as when a snake devouring a sparrow and her brood of eight is interpreted by the Greeks as a sign from Zeus that it will be nine years before they secure victory.<sup>240</sup> Insofar as animals can be sent by gods, and divine judgments can be read into animal activities, and insofar as the ferocity of human conflicts can likewise be described metaphorically as the conflict between different animals, it might also be possible

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<sup>240</sup> *Il.*, II.300-330.

to read these battles as a divine script, the duel itself becoming a kind of augury from which the favor of the gods might be ascertained.

Indeed, Homer's texts are rife with examples of victory and defeat being attributed directly to divine intervention, and divine intervention can even be responsible for the distinguishing proximity to animals noted above. Athena will show favor to Odysseus by "making him taller, more massive to all eyes" so that he might win honors in the contests organized by his hosts, the Phaeacians, and they might treat him with "kindness,/ awe and respect."<sup>241</sup> Likewise, Diomedes is granted divine enhancement fighting the Trojans: Diomedes is seized by a fury, becoming "claw-mad as a lion," and proceeds to maul the Trojan "flocks," invoking such awe that the Trojans become confused as to whether or not Diomedes is human or god.<sup>242</sup> In this way, the proximity one might enter into with animals is at once a proximity to the gods—it is the gods that shine through the great deeds of men, especially where those deeds make them more like animals.

Yet we must also note here the terror that marks the proximity of humans to gods and other animals in the world of poetic myth. Diomedes in his fury attacks even Apollo, who admonishes him while intervening on the part of his adversary: "Think, Diomedes, shrink back now!/ Enough of this madness—

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<sup>241</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1996), VIII.15ff.

<sup>242</sup> *Il.*, V.135ff.

striving with the gods./ We are not of the same breed, we never will be.”<sup>243</sup>

Despite celebrating an individual’s efforts to imitate the gods, the Greeks were pointedly aware of the disaster brought in thinking oneself their equal. Likewise, the possibility of being permanently transformed into an animal, not simply in attaching oneself to one as the marker of one’s status, brought equal terror, as in Odysseus’s episode with the witch Circe, who transforms his crew into various animals.<sup>244</sup> In short, there needs to be some way of regulating the proximity to gods and animals humans attain through their individual deeds, and this way, this *techné* that humans will adopt to regulate their tenuous proximity with the divine, other animals, and each other, is sacrifice.

Sacrifices serve a vital role in Homer’s poetico-mythic world. While the sacrifices performed in the *Iliad* have an obvious enough narrative function—that is, to either transform or fortify the fortunes of the Greeks by paying the proper respect owed to the gods—the length at which Homer will often describe the sacrifices, from the opening rituals and prayers to details of the butchering itself, gives these passages a kind of didactic quality.<sup>245</sup> Sacrifice extends beyond not only the practical concerns of slaughtering and butchering an animal for human consumption and divine offering, but as a kind of magic ritual, sacrifice transforms the living animal into consumable flesh. Through the magic of sacrifice and the specificity of its procedures, humans conjure away their affinity

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<sup>243</sup> *Il.*, V.435-41. Cf. Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, 114.

<sup>244</sup> *Od.*, X.

<sup>245</sup> See especially *Il.*, II.415ff.

with other animals, demarcating the boundaries of human, animal, and divine that are continually blurred in the heroic deeds described above.

Thus sacrifice stands opposed to the proximity human, animal, and god enter into through their deeds, serving to divide these figures in a way that establishes a community of those who sacrifice in opposition to those who are sacrificed and those who demand sacrifices.<sup>246</sup> In this way the world of poetic myth would cope with the terror and anxiety of life lived in the midst of opaque and potentially hostile forces, wherein power—or at least *prowess* of some kind—may serve to elevate one above one’s peers, or bring about enslavement and death.<sup>247</sup> In detailing the proper procedures of sacrifice, Homer serves to teach his audience how to recognize, draw, and uphold the boundaries of human community. For those who would ignore this ritual, Homer offers terrifying consequences. When Odysseus’s crew slaughters and consumes the cattle of the sun without observing the proper rites, the magical transformation from living animal to consumable flesh is botched: despite the cattle being dead, Homer claims their “hides began to crawl, the meat, both raw and roasted,/ bellowed out

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<sup>246</sup> Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, 148-149. The role of sacrifice in establishing this community is so important that any political or military undertaking, from engagement in a battle, the conclusion of a treaty, to the founding of a colony, must first involve a sacrifice. See Marcel Detienne, “Culinary Practices and the Spirit of Sacrifice,” in *The Cuisine of Sacrifice Among the Greeks*, eds. Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant, trans. Paula Wissing (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 3-4.

<sup>247</sup> Or as Heath writes, “the Greeks recognized and feared the possibility of animal-human fluidity.” For Heath, the ancient Greeks drew relatively clear lines between what is human, animal, and divine, and consequently when “conflations do occur they signal something dangerous and destructive.” See John Heath, *The Talking Greeks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 25, 24.

on the spits, and [they] heard a noise/ like the moan of lowing oxen.”<sup>248</sup> The consumers of this polluted non-flesh, having failed to observe the ritual that properly separates the human from the animal and so establishes the human community, are cursed and ultimately destroyed.

In this way we might agree with MacIntyre when he writes, “a man in heroic society is what he does,”<sup>249</sup> but with a twist: a “man” can make himself something other than a “man,” something super or subhuman, as the heroic deeds that serve to distinguish him from others and so constitute his individuality bring him into proximity with both animals and gods. The heroic path is thus one that leads away from the merely human and its community, and the terror and anxiety of this situation is opposed by the institution of sacrifice, which seeks to establish the boundaries in which a human “is what he does,” a human community in which these deeds have sense. This basic structure, the opposition between individual deeds that distinguish while threatening to efface, and the institution of community wherein the deeds have meaning but are consequently limited, their greatness leveled-off and made to march with those of others, is among the key constitutive relations in the world of poetic myth. However, as I have attempted to show, this structure is bound up with the relation of humans to other animals. That is, this dynamic of individual and community is mediated through human relations to animals: the individual allies himself with animals

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<sup>248</sup> Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. Robert Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1996), XII.390ff. See also Jean-Pierre Vernant, “Food in the Countries of the Sun,” in *The Cuisine of Sacrifice Among the Greeks*, 166.

<sup>249</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 122.

through their imitation, acquisition, and domestication in order to set himself above others, at once occupying a position of favor with the gods, whereas the community destroys animals through sacrificial rites in order to establish a kind of basic equality between its members before these same gods. Animals in this sense are symbols of individuality, and their lawful destruction the assertion of the rights of the community.

This same basic structure, along with the presentation of the human-animal distinction found therein, runs through other important texts in the world of poetic myth and the received wisdom that shaped the world in which Aristotle philosophized. For instance, Hesiod will also speak of “lion-hearted Achilles,” write of men as “swarms of bees clinging to cave roofs,” and compare a king and his subject to a hawk and a nightingale, all examples of humans entering into poetic proximity to animals and so distinguishing themselves through exertions of force or ability, either as perpetrators or victims.<sup>250</sup> Auguries are also prevalent in Hesiod: they are woven into the very fabric of agricultural life. The patterns of animal life are connected to the gods who determine the weather, and in observing animals one then knows how to adjust one’s actions accordingly and so reap the god’s bounty. In this way animals provide a kind of measure of human activity, and in synchronizing certain life patterns with them, humans can

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<sup>250</sup> Hesiod, “Theogony,” lines 1007; 594ff; “Works and Days,” lines 202-212, in Hesiod, *Theogony, Works and Days, Shield*, trans. Apostolos N. Athanassakis (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

secure good fortune for themselves.<sup>251</sup> Yet there remains a limit to this regulation: the patterns of animals may reveal something of the gods' intentions, but it is uniquely for humans to establish a community to live in their accord. Thus Hesiod will write that Zeus gave justice to humans, and that it is unknown among "the wild beasts and winged birds."<sup>252</sup> Entering into too close a proximity with animals is to forsake justice and the human community as it has been ordained by the gods.

This poetic proximity to animals and gods is also found among a number of the most well-known tragedies, especially in the work of Aeschylus. References to animals in the *Oresteia* are particularly plentiful: near the beginning of the *Agamemnon*, the brutality of the titular character's act of sacrificing his own daughter like "a goat" is also read into the actions of eagles who kill and eat a pregnant hare, along with the unborn fetuses. In like manner, this predatory animal striving will devour the house of Atreus.<sup>253</sup> As in Homer, humans are brought into proximity with different animals according to the nature of their deeds, and Aeschylus will compare his characters to lions and wolves as they predate upon each other, oxen when they face death like a sacrificial offering or labor beneath the yoke of another, and crows, cockerels and

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<sup>251</sup> Hesiod, "Works and Days," 486-489; 568-569; 800-801.

<sup>252</sup> Hesiod, "Works and Days," 275-279.

<sup>253</sup> Aeschylus, "Agamemnon," in *Greek Tragedies* Vol. 1, eds. David Greene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 231-236; 130-160.

hens when they flaunt their victories.<sup>254</sup> Clytaemestra is repeatedly compared to a snake, and she herself dreams of giving birth to a snake, an omen foretelling that her son Orestes will also prove her murderer.<sup>255</sup> Moreover, the chthonic laws transgressed in the murder of his mother will awaken a curse that Clytaemestra claims will, “like dogs,” follow after Orestes and “drag [him] down.”<sup>256</sup> Indeed, hunting is a frequently appearing symbol in the plays, stripping the hunted of their humanity as the hunter enters into proximity with a predatory animal: the tapestries Clytaemestra convinces Agamemnon to trample and so commit *hubris* are referred to as the “net” that “ensnared” him like a “beast,”<sup>257</sup> and Orestes will then hunt down his mother and her fellow conspirator, Aegisthus, only to be hunted in turn by the Furies, who are frequently compared to the hounds of Clytaemestra’s curse.<sup>258</sup>

Though these kinds of metaphors appear far less frequently in Sophocles and Euripides, we still find both these tragedians making use of the Homeric human-animal distinction. In Euripides’s *The Trojan Women*, Hecuba will compare herself to a bird, and, enslaved to Odysseus, describe her new master as a “brute, murderous beast,” and Andromache will extol “the young mare torn

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<sup>254</sup> Aeschylus, “Agamemnon,” 715-35; 1256-60; 1298; 1636-42; 1472-4; 1671-2.

<sup>255</sup> Aeschylus, “The Libation Bearers,” in *Greek Tragedies* Vol. 2, eds. David Greene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 247-9; 994; 527; 928; 1046-7.

<sup>256</sup> Aeschylus, “The Libation Bearers,” 924.

<sup>257</sup> Aeschylus, “The Libation Bearers,” 493. Cf. 997-9.

<sup>258</sup> Aeschylus, “The Eumenides,” in *Greek Tragedies* Vol.3, trans. Richmond Lattimore, eds. David Greene and Richmond Lattimore (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 131-2; 147-8; 221; 231; 247-8. For development of this relation between the Furies and animal metaphors, along with the logic of sacrifice dictating their final agreement with Athena, see Stefan Dolgert, “Sacrificing Justice: Suffering Animals, The *Oresteia*, and the Masks of Consent,” *Political Theory* 40.3 (2012): 263-289.

from her running mate” that “will not easily wear the yoke,” unlike “a brute and speechless beast of burden.”<sup>259</sup> Even Sophocles, perhaps the poet most directly concerned with “the human” among the great tragedians,<sup>260</sup> and who generally avoids such poetic animal metaphors,<sup>261</sup> will reproduce the basic structure in which we found humans to enter into particular proximity with animals as an effect of their deeds. The famed choral ode in *Antigone* “praising” the human being as the most *deinos*—the most “wonderful” or terrible and fearful—whose power and cunning make possible the great deeds that serve to distinguish humans from other animals, are what the play demonstrates to be *impossible* through individual action.

It is precisely Creon and Antigone’s attempts at self-reliance, their attempts to set themselves above the human community in their extreme deeds, which seal their fate and demand sacrifice. Antigone is said to have “the savage spirit of a savage father,” and this savage inability to “know/ how to yield to

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<sup>259</sup> Euripides, “The Trojan Women,” in *Greek Tragedies* Vol. 2, trans. Richmond Lattimore, 146-8; 283-4; 669-72.

<sup>260</sup> That is, MacIntyre seems to see in Sophocles a kind of humanistic shift, writing: “In Homer the question of honor is the question of what is due to a king; in Sophocles, the question has become the question of what is due to a man.” Castoriadis takes this question farther, arguing that, unlike Aeschylus, Sophocles “presents an anthropology presupposing nothing and whereby these abilities and potentialities are created by humans themselves. He simply, clearly, and emphatically posits humanity as self-creation.” More recently, Wood writes of the “centrality of human action and responsibility” in Sophocles, and Honig turns to Sophocles in her theorization of an “agonistic humanism.” See MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 133; Cornelius Castoriadis, “Aeschylean Anthropogony and Sophoclean Self-Creation of *Anthropos*” in *Figures of the Thinkable*, trans. Helen Arnold (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 11; Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Citizens to Lords* (London: Verso, 2008), 50; Bonnie Honig, *Antigone Interrupted*, esp. Ch. 1.

<sup>261</sup> Not entirely, however: “In the savage forests he [the murderer] lurks and in/ the caverns like/ a mountain bull.” See Sophocles, “Oedipus the King,” in *Greek Tragedies* Vol.1, lines 476-8.

trouble” is shared by Creon.<sup>262</sup> Both Antigone and Creon, in placing themselves above the community, bring themselves into proximity with the wild animals who supposedly know no community—only sacrifice can re-establish the human community their deeds would destroy, and this sacrifice is made with the lives of Creon’s son Haemon, and Antigone herself. Thus, even in Sophocles, the great poet of human awakening, we find that the human to be perched precariously between god and animal: only through the community established in sacrifice is human life distinct from others in anything like a continuous or dependable sense.

Thus we find a certain way of understanding the human-animal distinction articulated in the Homeric epics to be reproduced in a number of the other major poets that shaped the received wisdom of Aristotle’s age. Yet it is worth noting here: though Aristotle may have been known among European scholars in the Middle Ages as “The Philosopher,” unlike a goddess in the world of poetic myth, Aristotle did not spring, fully-formed, from the head of Zeus. That is, while we will find Aristotle’s account of the human-animal distinction to differ markedly from that of the world of poetic myth, this should not suggest that Aristotle stands utterly alone in this endeavor, without philosophical progenitors. Though a thorough examination of these progenitors is beyond the

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<sup>262</sup> Sophocles, “Antigone,” in *Greek Tragedies* Vol.1, lines 515-7. Honig interestingly captures the way in which each of these characters is out of step with the community in her discussion of Creon’s “conspiracy” with democracy and the aristocratic underpinnings of Antigone’s rebellion. See *Antigone Interrupted*, Ch.4.

scope of the present work, it is worth making note of the human-animal distinction as it appears in some of the major political works of Aristotle's most famous mentor: Plato.

### *Plato the Tragedian?*

While barring poets from the ideal city he constructs in the *Republic* is perhaps Plato's most well-known act with respect to the arts, Plato's own poetic prowess has not gone unnoticed by his commentators: indeed, it is now widely believed that Plato entertained the ambition of becoming a poet in his youth, and some have even gone as far as to refer to the *Republic* as "the last Greek tragedy."<sup>263</sup> Additionally, it has also been held that part of Plato's philosophical intention, at least in the *Republic*, was to "expel the Homeric inheritance from the city-state."<sup>264</sup> Yet, from the perspective of how the human-animal distinction was understood in the Greek world of poetic myth, that is, a perspective from which there is little substantial difference between Homer and the tragedians, is it possible for Plato to be both anti-Homer *and* the last tragedian? And if so, what becomes of Plato's conception of the human-animal distinction—will he reject this aspect of the inherited wisdom of his day, or affirm it in some manner? In the following I will argue that while Plato's philosophy is not entirely continuous with the world of poetic myth, it nevertheless remains deeply embedded in its

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<sup>263</sup> J. Peter Euben, *Tragedy and Political Theory: The Road Not Taken* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 269.

<sup>264</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 131.

terms. Though Plato advances a conception of justice that might represent a rupture within this world, Plato will remain drifting among its flotsam. In this sense Plato is a kind of philosophical Robinson Crusoe: his insights, like Crusoe's voyage, open up the possibility of a new world, a new beginning, though rather than pursuing this possibility he instead continues to think through the debris salvaged from the world of poetic myth. Plato thus articulates an idea of the relation between humans and animals that remains continuous with the world of poetic myth in many respects, even if this relation now finds itself beneath a new sun.

Plato is routinely taken to stand at the head of the Western tradition of political thought as a kind of founding father, with Whitehead's famous, though perhaps now cliché statement, that all philosophy is but a footnote to Plato, being perhaps the most exaggerated instance of this trend. While there is good reason to see Plato as representing the dawning of something new in the history of Western thought, we must at once be careful not to overlook important continuities between Plato and his own forbearers, in particular those responsible for weaving the fabric of what I have called the world of poetic myth above. For instance, Nussbaum argues that the Platonic dialogues are a kind of "anti-tragic theater": Plato appropriates different "tragic models" of staging the action in his dialogues, yet eschews the rhythm and other artful accoutrements of poetic speech, adopting instead a flat, didactic tone in order to artfully repudiate

artfulness, to appeal to the intellect and not the emotions. In so doing, Plato “creates a new kind of writing.”<sup>265</sup> Yet might the continuities between Homer, the tragedians, and Plato’s “anti-tragic theater” be even stronger than Nussbaum claims? Is it not a little odd to praise the creator of some of the most arresting poetic images in Western political thought (the Cave, the Line, the Sun, and all those animals, to which we will attend in a moment) for his dry, calculated prose, the “didactic flatness,” which Nussbaum claims is also found in the philosophical tradition that predates Plato?<sup>266</sup> Perhaps certain elements of the Homeric and tragic traditions—like the Heraclitan world, in Deleuze’s claim—still *growl* within Platonism, “like an animal in the process of being tamed.”<sup>267</sup> And if they do, if elements of the world of poetic myth remain prominent in Plato’s thought, might this change how we understand Plato to be related to the philosophy of his forbearers?

Aristotle, for one, sees a great deal of continuity between Plato and what we now call “pre-Socratic” philosophy. In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle claims that Plato held throughout his life the view that all sensible things (*aistheta*) remain in a perpetual state of flux, a view he adopted from Cratylus and Heraclitus early in his life. Aristotle sees Platonic philosophy as basically a fusion of this doctrine of the perpetual flux of nature with Socratic ethical thought: Plato held that the universal (*katholou*) that Socrates sought through his ethical questioning did

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<sup>265</sup> Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 122-131.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

<sup>267</sup> Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 59.

indeed exist, but not in the natural world of sensible objects, which remains constantly changing and unstable. Rather, the universal was to be found beyond the sensible world, in what Plato called Ideas. However, for Aristotle even this fusion was not entirely original. Aristotle claims a close affinity between Plato and the Pythagorean doctrine that held the sensible world to be an imitation (*mimesei*) of numbers. Where Plato differs from Pythagoras, according to Aristotle, is in how the Ideas and the sensible world relate: sensible objects do not for Plato *imitate* the Ideas, like they do numbers for Pythagoras, but rather sensible objects exist by virtue of their participation (*methexin*) in the Ideas. The originality of Plato thus consists in changing the way in which universals and particulars relate, from the Pythagorean *mimesis* to the Platonic *methexis*.<sup>268</sup> While there is not space here to dispute the details of Aristotle's perhaps less than charitable reading of Plato and his relative importance in the history of philosophy, nor the significance of the transformation from one poetic and theatrical mode of relating universal and particular to another,<sup>269</sup> what must be gleaned from this presentation is the perceived closeness of Plato to the doctrines of nature held by certain pre-Socratic philosophers. From this we might expect Plato to reject the structure of the human-animal distinction found in the world of poetic myth and instead present a view much closer to those found among the natural philosophers, but this is not exactly the case.

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<sup>268</sup> *Meta*, I.6, 987a31-987b10.

<sup>269</sup> That is, both *mimesis* and *methexis* are words taken from the arts: *mimesis* as a kind of artistic imitation of the natural world, *methexis* as participation in an artistic performance.

The view expressed by natural philosophers such as Cratylus and Heraclitus that nature is in a constant state of change, where objects ceaselessly come into being and pass away, suggests a continuity between human and animal life independent of the deeds that characterize their relation in Homer and the tragedians. That is, on this view what makes humans and animals alike is their common membership in the natural world, their participation in this state of flux, not so much their individual activities and their place in the socio-political world. This common membership in the natural world, together with the view that this natural world is one of perpetual change, makes it possible to theorize that humans are not just closely related to other animals, but may have been much more like them at some point in the distant past. Indeed, Anaximander of Miletus claims that given the prolonged period of “nursing” humans require, they could not possibly have survived had they come into the world as they presently are, but must have been more like some other animal. Anaximander posits that living creatures “came into being from moisture evaporated by the sun,” enclosed in “thorny barks,” which they shed as they came out of the water and onto land. The first humans were similarly sheltered by fish-like creatures, which they shed like shells when they came onto dry land.<sup>270</sup> Plato never engages in this kind of natural philosophy, nor does he give a similar account in his major political works, though the question of human origins is broached repeatedly. Rather,

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<sup>270</sup> See Fragments 133-137 in *The Presocratic Philosophers*, eds. G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven, and M. Schofield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 141-142. According to the editors, “Anaximander’s is the first attempt of which we know to explain the origin of man, as well as of the world, rationally” (142).

Plato's characters speak of these origins in the terms of the world of poetic myth, of a world where humans are linked to other animals and gods through the deeds they perform, and their consequent place in the socio-political order.

Plato's *Republic* is rife with references to animals, and notably, comparisons between humans and different kinds of animals. Plato's characters routinely compare political rule to sheep-rearing,<sup>271</sup> and political education to the training of horses and hounds.<sup>272</sup> The first city he constructs along with his interlocutors is dismissed as a "city of pigs,"<sup>273</sup> while the insatiability of human appetites are frequently considered bestial, as is democracy more generally, which Plato compares to a "great and multiform beast."<sup>274</sup> Although Saxonhouse has argued that Plato's use of animal metaphors is intended to be comedic, a kind of parody of Aristophanes illustrating the undesirability of the Kallipolis as a political regime,<sup>275</sup> I see Plato's use of animal metaphors here as continuous with those found in Homer and the tragedians examined above, making Plato's understanding of the human-animal distinction consistent with that espoused in the world of poetic myth. Saxonhouse takes particular issue with the comparison Socrates makes between the guardians (or, strictly speaking, those who will be

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<sup>271</sup> See, for example, *Republic (Rep)*, 345d. Cf. Plato's *Statesman*, 262d; 275b; 275d.

<sup>272</sup> *Rep.*, 335b; 342c; 375a ff; 404a; 459b; *Statesman* 267d.

<sup>273</sup> *Rep.*, 372d.

<sup>274</sup> *Rep.*, 590a.

<sup>275</sup> Arlene W. Saxonhouse, "Comedy in Callipolis: Animal Imagery in the *Republic*," *The American Political Science Review* 72.3 (1978): 888-901. For other accounts of the comedic dimensions to the *Republic*, especially Book V and its relation to Aristophanes, see Allan Bloom, "Interpretive Essay," in *The Republic of Plato*, trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic, 1991), 380ff, and Leon Harold Craig, *The War Lover* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 204; 208; 212; 347.

auxiliaries) and hounds, especially as puppies, which she takes to be a metaphor intended to invoke laughter and even ridicule: there is no possible way Socrates could be serious when he claims that dogs are philosophical,<sup>276</sup> nor can this comparison be seen as continuous with the animal metaphors used by Homer to describe Greek heroes. Achilles and Hector were compared to *wild* animals—*ferocious beasts*—not the domesticated variety used to describe “Socrates’ new breed of men.”<sup>277</sup>

Yet this is not entirely true, for as we have seen, both hounds and horses were held to have aristocratic associations in Ancient Greek society. Keeping and raising horses, along with hounds bred for hunting and certain kinds of birds, were the particular pastimes of the wealthy and leisured warrior class. Proximity to these animals indicates the kind of person one is: a master of both animals and of other men, distinguished from the many as an important figure in the community, and favored among the gods. Even where “dog” can be said to have negative connotations, perhaps most famously when Achilles insults Agamemnon by referring to his “dog’s eyes” along with his “fawn’s heart,”<sup>278</sup> evidently to indicate the latter’s slavish dependence and cowardice, this should not lead us to the conclusion that a dog would be an inappropriate animal for auxiliaries to take as their model.

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<sup>276</sup> *Rep.*, 375d.

<sup>277</sup> Saxonhouse, “Comedy in Callipolis,” 893; 895.

<sup>278</sup> *Il.*, I. 223-225. Socrates mentions this line at *Rep.*, 389e.

Recall that the role of the auxiliaries in the Kallipolis, and arguably, even that of the philosopher king, is a *supporting* role: their prominence in its political organization is not so that they might rule simply in their own interest—which would allow them to prey upon the sheep as *wolves*, not dogs—but in the interest of the *Idea of justice*. This Idea, irreducible to its actual manifestations in the sensible world, is thus likewise beyond all the machinations of power that characterize politics in the sensible world, though it is supposedly approximated as closely as is possible in the laws of Kallipolis. In order to rule according to the Idea of justice, the city requires not lions or other ferocious creatures, such as Homeric or tragic heroes, but well-bred and trained dogs to serve in utter devotion, “like sleepless hounds [...] who have the keenest possible sight and hearing.”<sup>279</sup>

This idea that rulers ought themselves to be devoted to their city to the point of being its slaves, like trained hounds, is not unique to the *Republic* among Plato’s major political works. In fact, in Plato’s *Laws*, the Athenian stranger claims that destruction will surely befall any city where “the law itself is ruled over”; consequently, the surest way for a city to flourish is for its rulers to be “slaves of the law.”<sup>280</sup> Later in the text the Athenian will claim that one can only be a “praiseworthy master” if one has first been a slave, speaking of “noble

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<sup>279</sup> *Rep.*, 404a10-11. English citations of the *Republic* refer *Plato: Republic*, trans. C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004) unless otherwise noted.

<sup>280</sup> *Laws*, 715d. English citations refer to *The Laws of Plato*, trans. Thomas L. Pangle (New York: Basic, 1980).

enslavement”: first to the laws, “which is really an enslavement to the gods,” and then to those perhaps most godlike among humans, namely one’s elders, and those “who have lived honorable lives.”<sup>281</sup>

This “noble enslavement” may be thought to mimic life in the age of Kronos, a myth Plato has his philosopher relate in both the *Laws* and the *Statesman*. According to both the Athenian and Eleatic strangers, preceding the present age of Zeus was the age of Kronos, wherein the god portioned out the earth into regions of governance, where each species of animal was assigned a daemon to be its shepherd. Humans were no exception, and likewise were ruled over by daemons, who, superior to humans, ruled “in a way that provided much ease both for them and or us,” providing “peace and awe and good laws and justice without stint.”<sup>282</sup> If the best political regime is to invoke something of the peace and justice of divine rule found in the lost age of Kronos, it must establish laws that most closely approximate the rule of a divine shepherd, and nothing is more useful to a shepherd than a well-trained hound.<sup>283</sup>

Like the roles played by animals in Homer and the tragedians, the rulers of the Kallipolis are to imitate the hound in order to orient themselves toward the

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<sup>281</sup> *Laws*, 762e. Cf. *Laws* 906b-c, where the Athenian speaks metaphorically of “the highest masters” of the city being dogs or shepherds, just as in the *Republic*.

<sup>282</sup> *Statesman*, 271d, e; 272a; *Laws*, 713d,e. English citations from the *Statesman* refer to *Statesman*, trans. J.B. Skemp, ed. Martin Ostwald (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1979).

<sup>283</sup> While Socrates makes the comparison of a person listening to reason to “a dog being called to heel by a shepherd” (*Rep.*, 440d), thus placing reason (*logos*) itself in the role of shepherd, Glaucon equates the shepherd to whom the auxiliaries will behave as “obedient sheepdogs” with the *rulers*, men who are like shepherds to the city. Though honor-loving Glaucon may want his rulers to occupy a position similar to that of the daemons in the myth of the age of Kronos, if it is really the divine that is to rule through the laws in Kallipolis, then all its human rulers will need to be like well-trained hounds.

gods in the appropriate fashion, and so distinguish themselves from the other denizens of their political community. In so doing they differentiate themselves from wolves like Thrasymachus,<sup>284</sup> who claims justice is not divine, that it is nothing more than a word used by the powerful to sanction that power and so advance their own interests, which, as wolves, means to devour the goods of the city.<sup>285</sup> Likewise it is to differentiate themselves from pigs, whose city is indeed laughable to Socrates' honor-loving interlocutors, and perhaps justifiably so, given its lack not only of the markers of aristocratic status, but also of philosophy and hence knowledge and justice: Socrates will later describe the soul that "bears its ignorance easily," as wallowing in this ignorance "like a pig."<sup>286</sup> Pigs, like sheep or "stingless drones,"<sup>287</sup> are like wolves or lions in that they pursue their own interests at the expense of others, their difference lies only in that they lack the strength of these predatory animals, and so are insufficiently powerful to

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<sup>284</sup> *Rep.*, 336d.

<sup>285</sup> At *Laws*, 906c-d, the Athenian also speaks of "wolves" being impious in a similar manner: that is, of holding self-serving views of the gods that facilitate the gratification of their appetites to the detriment of the city. Interestingly in this context, the great Athenian political reformer, Solon, compares himself to "a wolf wheeling about among many dogs" in a poem describing how he placed himself between the interests of the rich and poor in the battles for democratic reform in Athens. See "Solon" in *Early Greek Political Thought from Homer to the Sophists*, eds. Michael Gagarin and Paul Woodruff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 28; Cf. Danielle Allen, "The Origins of Political Philosophy," in *The Oxford Handbook to the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. George Klosko (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 92; and Ellen Meiksins Wood and Neal Wood, *Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), Ch. 2.

<sup>286</sup> *Rep.*, 535e. Cf. *Laws*, 819d, where the Athenian expresses shame at Greek ignorance in similar terms: that the state of ignorance occupied by the Greeks "was one that belonged not to humanity but to the offspring of certain pigs."

<sup>287</sup> The "stingless drone" is used in Plato to signify a person who is idle and so a burden on the city. Socrates says the drone-like person is ruled by unnecessary pleasures and appetites (*Rep.*, 559c-d) and numerous negative references appear throughout the *Republic*. Cf. Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 304-5, which the Athenian stranger references at 901a of the *Laws*.

accomplish their aims. It is for this reason that they prove unfit models for the guardians: guardians must not only be slaves to their city's laws, but they must be strong enough to uphold them. Socrates' question in the *Republic* of who "would choose to fight hard, lean hounds, rather than [...] fighting fat and tender sheep?" seems to resonate with the Athenian stranger's unsympathetic statement in the *Laws* that, "it's appropriate that an idle, soft-spirited, and fattened animal usually is ravaged by one of those other animals who have been worn very hard with courage and labors."<sup>288</sup>

It is for this reason that democracy appears so dangerous to Plato, for it combines all the "fattened animals" whose desires would normally be kept in check by their individual weakness, often also enlisting the help of wolves and lions—would-be tyrants—to create a "multifarious beast" threatening the peace and justice of the city with its "bestial" desires.<sup>289</sup> Though the Platonic justice towards which Socrates gestures is irreducible to the interests of power, ensconced within the vantage point of poetic myth, Plato cannot imagine this justice could ever exist in the sensible world without it, and this antinomy—between the Idea of justice and its real actualization—is the problem to which Plato's hounds would be the solution. Insofar as all crafts aim at the good of the other, and justice is itself a craft, it too must aim at the good of the other—all the

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<sup>288</sup> *Rep.*, 422d5-6; *Laws*, 807a-b.

<sup>289</sup> *Rep.*, 588c ff. Similar references to the "bestial" nature of sophists and regular citizens (*politikous*) appear in the *Statesman*, 291a-c; 303c.

others, the good of the whole political community.<sup>290</sup> Only well-trained hounds, obedient to the laws, are capable of grasping this well enough to defend it, and it is for this reason Socrates considers them philosophical.

Not only does philosophical training serve to distinguish the guardians from the “other animals” that make up the city, but it also attempts to absorb the role sacrifice played in the world of poetic myth: that is, as the ritual that serves to establish a community by drawing a definite distinction between gods, humans, and animals. In the *Statesman*, the Eleatic stranger teaches the young Socrates that making the correct distinction between entities—the groundwork for their just ordering—is akin to carving an animal for sacrifice: that is, carving it according to its “natural divisions.”<sup>291</sup> If philosophy serves to distinguish some from others, like the deeds of Homeric and tragic heroes, and also serves to define the divisions that make up the community, as did sacrifice, then the tension between these two collapses, and the relations of domination established in heroic deeds become more firmly established in the political order.

While the idea of justice being the good of the other irreducible to power is Plato’s own unique discovery, his utilization of the received terms of the world of poetic myth, entangled as they are with the machinations of power and domination, ultimately serves to obscure the other to whom good is due, and so undermine the cause of justice. That is, insofar as Plato retains the ideas

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<sup>290</sup> *Rep.*, 345d.

<sup>291</sup> *Statesman*, 287c.

concerning the human-animal distinction of Homer and the tragedians, ideas that we have seen involve humans coming into proximity with certain animals according to their respective places in relationships of domination, he takes with the right hand what he has given with the left: the possibility of a justice beyond the interests of power. Caught in a theater of power where the only available roles are dominator and dominated, Plato lapses back into a “second best position,” the warrior ethic espoused by Polemarchus at the beginning of the dialogue, and that Socrates had labored so extensively, though ultimately in vain, to refute: that justice means doing good to friends and harm to enemies. Plato’s philosophical ordering of the terms of the world of poetic myth, despite opening up a window from which something new might be glimpsed, serves ultimately to make the terms “friend” and “enemy” less fluid than they had previously been, perpetuating the rule of one at the expense of the other.

It is in this light that we must return to Aristotle, and his path breaking studies of animals. Aristotle’s interest in biology, taken in the context of the received wisdom on how humans relate to other animals in the world of poetic myth, and Plato’s use of these terms in his philosophical reflections on justice, represents a way of turning to the other, to an understanding of the friend to whom good is due. Aristotle, we shall see, takes up Plato’s notion of justice as the good of the other, but goes beyond him in trying to shake himself free also of the world of poetic myth, by turning to the natural world and attempting to provide

an account of all these animals who circulate as currency in games of political power and domination. In attempting to provide an account of these animals in their independence from poetic metaphor, Aristotle would alter the course of their circulation in these games. If “the human being” is indeed “by nature a political animal,” then Aristotle’s attempt to grasp what an animal really is can only be seen as a profoundly political endeavor, one that offers the possibility of redefining the limits of politics and what is understood to be justice. To this endeavor, then, I presently turn, and attempt to follow Aristotle in his manner of accounting for the animal—or as we should really say, *animals*—in all their manifest plurality.

## **Chapter Six: What is an Animal?**

### **Aristotle on Human Animality**

To grasp what Aristotle understands to be an animal, I will here focus on his biological and zoological writings, bracketing for the present his comments on animals in his explicitly political works. In this section I will pay particular attention to the manner in which what Aristotle has to say about animals also applies to humans, thus examining what I call “human animality.” Human animality is the intersection between what Aristotle takes to be particular to animals, and yet also holds for humans, from their souls and their capacities, to the structure of their bodies, movements, and the shape of their internal organs. I will begin by giving an account of these similarities, both in terms of the generalities that both humans and other animals can be seen to fall under, and in terms of the particular similarities between humans and certain animals that serve to make them alike. I will then examine in more detail the shared psychic capacities that support the kinds of life activities that seem to make politics possible, in order to elaborate upon the idea that humans are not for Aristotle the only political animals.

*From the Soul to the Body*

Unlike the human-animal distinction as it is found in the world of poetic myth, where specific humans and certain animals enter into proximity according to human deeds, Aristotle attempts to grasp what lies behind these deeds, and so understand what relates humans and animals at a more fundamental level. For Aristotle, this means looking to what is not just the origin of these deeds as movements, but to the life that makes it possible for one to accomplish a deed in the first place: one's soul. "The soul," Aristotle writes, "is in some sense the principle [*arche*] of animal life."<sup>292</sup> For Aristotle, the soul (*psuche*) is both the animal's origin and animating principle, without which it would not be an animal at all, but a mere likeness, like an animal sculpted in stone.<sup>293</sup> Yet even if its soul is what makes an animal what it is, the quality of being ensouled is not particular to it alone: for "the principle [*arche*] found in plants is also a kind of soul."<sup>294</sup> Soul is thus the common origin of both plant and animal—it is what makes them what they are, and what must be studied if one is to understand what it is they are and how they are.<sup>295</sup> Given the great variety of plant and animal life, however, if the soul really is responsible for making living things what they are there must be more than one kind of soul, or at least, multiple parts within the soul, in order to account for these differences. To this end Aristotle lists five "psychic powers," or

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<sup>292</sup> *OS*, I.1 402a6-7.

<sup>293</sup> *PA*, I.1, 641a18-21.

<sup>294</sup> *OS*, I.5. 411b28. Cf. Plato's *Laws*, 782c-d, where the Athenian describes the Orphic distinction between animals, which possess souls (*empsychon*), and plants, which do not (*apsuchon*).

<sup>295</sup> *PA*, I.1, 641a28-31.

potentials of the soul (*dunameon tes psuches*): the nutritive, the appetitive or desiring (*orexis*), the sensory, the locomotive, and the power of thinking.<sup>296</sup>

While the nutritive and the sensory are passive or receptive powers that require external movement in order to be actualized, the appetitive and locomotive powers concern movement originating with the organism.<sup>297</sup> As the organisms commonly called animals are seen to move about and pursue different objects relevant to their lives, it is clear to Aristotle that they possess both the powers of locomotion and desire. However, Aristotle holds that an animal is not capable of desire without imagination (*phantasias*), and all imagination is either calculative (*logistike*) or sensitive (*aisthetike*).<sup>298</sup> Insofar as all animals, in order to be animals, have a share in desire, they must also have a share in either calculation or sensation, and as Aristotle holds that all animals *do not* have a share in calculation,<sup>299</sup> they must then have a share in sensation. In this way, sensation (*aisthesis*) becomes the point at which an animal can be differentiated from a plant, for in possessing a sensitive soul (*aisthetikes psuches*) the animal is open to the world in a way the plant is not, for it is able to receive the stamp of sensible objects and their movements and respond accordingly. Sensation structures desire, and desire drives movement, and thus the particular way in which an animal is animated is owing in large part to sensation. Thus animals

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<sup>296</sup> *OS*. II.3, 414a29ff.

<sup>297</sup> The power of thinking is more complex, and will be discussed below.

<sup>298</sup> *OS*. III.10, 433b27-30.

<sup>299</sup> For reasons that, like thinking, will be discussed below.

are first and foremost sensory creatures,<sup>300</sup> and the structure of their senses will play an enormous role in determining how they live.

While all animals possess a soul with the power of sensation, the organization of sensation is not identical among them. The sensory powers of the soul are embodied in the wide variety of sensory organs possessed by different animals, of which the sense of touch is held by Aristotle to be the most common, for while certain animals may not possess eyes, ears, nose, or mouth, they all must necessarily possess bodies. As touch requires only a body, Aristotle calls it the most corporal (*somatodes*) of the senses, the base-sense shared by all animals and for which the varied parts of animal bodies exist.<sup>301</sup> While the potentials of the soul are only actualized in matter as they are organized in a body—that is, the actuality of the soul is found through the body—the body in relation to the soul is only potential: the soul is the actuality (*entelecheia*) of the potential for life of a body.<sup>302</sup> Thus the unity of the life and habits of a given animal—its actuality—is the product of the way in which sensation, appetite, and movement have served to shape and be limited by the matter distributed its soul by nature.<sup>303</sup> Or in other words, the actuality of the animal is the result of the way in which the soul

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<sup>300</sup> *OS*, II.2 413b2-3; III.11 434a6; *Sens.*, 1, 436b12; *On Sleep*, 1, 454b25; *OYOA*, I, 467b24; *GA*, II.5, 741a8ff; V.1 778b33-34. An interesting account of locomotion (*kinesis*) as the prime differentiator between plant and animal is given by Nederman; however, his account neglects the central role Aristotle reserves for *aisthesis* as I have described it. See Cary J. Nederman, “The Puzzle of the Political Animal: Nature and Artifice in Aristotle’s Political Theory,” *The Review of Politics* 56.2 (1994), 288.

<sup>301</sup> *PA*, II.8, 653b29-31; 653b24; *OS*, II.2, 413b4; *HA*, I.3, 489a17.

<sup>302</sup> *OS*, II.1, 412a20ff.

<sup>303</sup> *PA*, I.1 642a10-13; I.5, 645b15-20. For further discussion of the way in which the matter must be appropriate to the given activity of the soul, see Stephen Everson, “Psychology,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), 174.

specific to that kind of animal intersects with matter, shaping the matter into the support for the activity that makes that soul the kind of soul that it is.<sup>304</sup> Yet while in this sense animals must possess the bodies appropriate to the powers of their different souls, insofar as this process is common to all animals, a variety of similarities and intersections between species emerge.

For instance, Aristotle holds that all animals have a front and a back distinguished according to sense, the front part being the part of the animal through which it receives its sensations. For animals possessed of movement, a further distinction can be made between left and right, the right being the part from which Aristotle claims movement to originate.<sup>305</sup> “Perfectly formed animals [*teleia ton zoon*]”, that is, animals which have managed to completely shape their matter to the ends of their specific kind of soul, are divided into another three parts: one for taking in nourishment, one for evacuating excrement, and an intermediate region between these two.<sup>306</sup> This intermediate region serves as the seat of both sensation and movement for the rest of the body. As all animals capable of moving themselves have at least four points of motion,<sup>307</sup> the limbs of quadrupeds can be seen to be in an analogical relationship to those of humans: Aristotle notes that the front and back parts of humans correspond to the bottom and top parts in quadrupeds, and that the bones of forelegs in quadrupeds even

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<sup>304</sup> Or as Lloyd writes: “For Aristotle matter or the material is what is *informed*”; that is, without soul to give it shape, matter is “indeterminate.” See Lloyd, *Aristotelian Explorations*, 69.

<sup>305</sup> *Prog.*, 4, 705b9-21.

<sup>306</sup> *OYOA*, 2, 468a14-16.

<sup>307</sup> *HA*, I.5, 490a26.

resemble the bones in human arms.<sup>308</sup> Nevertheless, humans are not quadrupeds, but bipeds, standing upright with what Aristotle calls their “superior [*ano*]” parts corresponding to the superior (*ano*) part of the universe, the heavens.<sup>309</sup> Yet even here, where Aristotle’s other philosophical, and even theological, convictions begin to seep through his empirical observations more clearly, he does not hesitate to note that humans share this characteristic with birds, who likewise stand bipedal and heavenwards.<sup>310</sup> Moreover, birds also possess tongues capable of being used to communicate, and some birds so much so that they appear to impart instruction (*mathesin*) to one another, much like humans.<sup>311</sup> In this manner, Aristotle relates humans to other animals more specifically—not simply in terms of larger conceptual categories, such as biped, but more immediately, in terms of their similar or analogous body parts that on their own do not yet constitute such a category.

Thus while under conceptual categories like “viviparous” the human is related to species as diverse as horses, different kinds of cattle, dolphins, and whales,<sup>312</sup> the fact of shedding teeth brings humans into proximity with still other animals, such as the horse, the mule, and the ass.<sup>313</sup> The appearance of the human face, along with the shape and position of its ears, nostrils, and teeth,

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<sup>308</sup> *HA*, II.1, 498b11-13; III.7, 516a33-34.

<sup>309</sup> *Prog.*, 5, 706b4-5.

<sup>310</sup> *PA*, IV.12, 693b4-5; *Prog.*, 5, 706a27-28.

<sup>311</sup> *PA*, II.17, 660a35ff.

<sup>312</sup> *HA*, VI.12, 566b2-6; *GA*, II.1, 732a33.

<sup>313</sup> *HA*, II.1, 501b2-4.

bring it into close proximity with the ape, as do its arms, hands, and nails. The sexual organs of female apes also resemble those of human females, though Aristotle considers the sexual organs of male apes to be more like those of dogs than human males.<sup>314</sup> Similarly, through diversity of eye color, humans enter into proximity with the horse, which unlike other animals excepting certain humans, will even occasionally have eyes of different colors.<sup>315</sup> Of course, these different sets of relations are not mutually exclusive, and virtually any identifiable commonality between species can potentially be used to group together otherwise very different animals if deemed useful. The point here rather is to recognize the complex array of relations in which Aristotle situates the human being as an animal related to other animals. As conceptual lines crisscross and overlap, humans move into closer proximity with some animals and become further from others, while from another perspective different commonalities emerge.

Likewise is the case with internal organs, for as Aristotle notes: “the inner parts of man are to a very great extent unknown, and the consequence is that we must have recourse to an examination of the inner parts of other animals whose nature in any way resembles that of man.”<sup>316</sup> Thus the bodily resemblances that brought humans into proximity with certain animals are here taken, along with the concept of the human as a kind of animal, as the basis for an extension of this analogical relationship between humans and other animals. That is, knowledge of

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<sup>314</sup> *HA*, II.8, 502a29-30; 502b1-5; 502b22-23.

<sup>315</sup> *GA*, V.1, 779b4-6.

<sup>316</sup> *HA*, I.16, 494b21-24.

other animals can be taken to fill lacunae in knowledge of humans insofar as the human is a kind of animal and can be shown to be similar to other animals with respect to certain relevant particularities—in this case, bodily particularities. Thus the human proximity to the ape found in the shape of their features and the structure of their limbs continues to the internal organs, which are found—in this case, under dissection—to correspond to human organs,<sup>317</sup> while from the organs themselves spring a host of animal relations. Like other animals with teeth in both jaws, such as the pig, the dog, the bear, the lion, and the wolf, the human has only one stomach, and that stomach resembles that of the dog, while the lower part of the gut is like that of the pig, as is the shape of the human spleen, while the human liver resembles instead that of the ox. The human womb, like all bipeds or viviparous quadrupeds such as the dog, the pig, the horse, the ox, and all horned animals, is situated below the midriff.<sup>318</sup>

Beyond the specific animals bound in this network of relations, Aristotle argues that the heart (or in bloodless animals, its analogue), placed as it is in the intermediate region of the body, is the first principle (*arche*) of the natural body, and likewise the origin (*arche*) of both sensation and movement.<sup>319</sup> While blood

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<sup>317</sup> *HA*, II.9, 502b24-26. This analogical relationship between humans and other animals seems also to have been a practical one. That is, according to Lloyd, dissection of human bodies in antiquity “was only undertaken on any scale” in Alexandria, where, under the patronage of the Ptolemies, anatomists at the *Museum* were provided access to the bodies of criminals from the state prisons. See Lloyd, *Greek Science After Aristotle*, 4. Perhaps the importance of burial rites in ancient Athens, combined with the relative equality of power between citizens, served to obstruct such forms of inquiry in Athens, where inquirers such as Aristotle had to make due with other animals.

<sup>318</sup> *HA* II.17, 507b15-16; I.16, 495b24; 26; I.17, 496b21-24; III.1, 510b15-17.

<sup>319</sup> *GA*, II.4, 738b16-17; *OS*, 2, 456a1-6.

is the most common of animal parts, followed by lymph and fibre, and then flesh and bone, these are developed from the heart outwards, as it is the origin of sensation and movement, and also, the seat of vital heat or breath (*pneuma*).<sup>320</sup> Animals develop brains soon after, in order to cool and regulate the heat emanating from the heart.<sup>321</sup> In this way, different animal bodies are different gradations of heat: the powers of a given animal soul find expression in the material of the heart, from which sensation and movement spring, giving shape to the rest of the body and its organs according to the movement of the body and the heat produced therein. If the body cools beyond a given point, it is no longer capable of undertaking its vital activities; if the body is starved of the nutrients necessary to feed this heat, it consumes itself.<sup>322</sup>

And so in this way Aristotle demonstrates the animality of the human from above and from below. From “above,” the human body is brought into proximity to the general concept of “animal” insofar as its vital activities conform to those that Aristotle can define in general terms, and from “below” in terms of the similarities between human and other animal bodies that serve to bring the human into proximity with other specific animals. Thus, the human being is an animal in that it possesses an animal body: both in general, and in particular. Yet, this is not to suggest that for Aristotle the human being is simply an ape with the eyes of a horse and the tongue of a songbird. As shown above, animal bodies

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<sup>320</sup> *HA*, III.2, 511b1-10; *GA*, II.6, 743b25-31; *MA*, 10, 703a14-15.

<sup>321</sup> *PA*, II.7, 652b26-27.

<sup>322</sup> *OYOA*, 23.17, 478b32-33; *LSL*, 5, 466b29-33.

are not for Aristotle static objects, nor do their various parts and organs determine their activity. Rather, an animal comes to be what it is as the actualization of its soul, and the soul is itself life activity. Consequently, in order to grasp what it really means for Aristotle to call the human a kind of animal, we must also examine what kind of activities humans and animals have in common, not in the sense where humans imitate different animals in great and exceptional deeds, but in the life activities that serve to define what each are in their individual lives. Grasping this necessarily involves another look at the common psychic potentials of humans and other animals.

### *Life Activity, Psychic Potential, and Politics*

The soul is life activity, and this activity finds actualization through a material body, whose potential is to live, but can only do so through the actuality of the soul. The actualization of the activity of the soul through the body means for Aristotle that all affections of the soul (e.g. anger, courage, fear, joy) involve corresponding affections (*pathe*) of the body, and should thus be understood to be bound to certain ways of moving the body, and thus inseparable from the natural matter that supports these bodily movements.<sup>323</sup> Thus where bodies share similar movements and have similar organs, so they will tend to share similar characteristics or qualities. In this way Aristotle links the similarities

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<sup>323</sup> *OS*, I.1 403a16ff.

between the bodies of humans and other animals noted above with characteristics such as courage (*andria*) or high spiritedness (*thumoi*), noting that humans differ from other animals in these respects more in terms of degree than in the characteristic itself. Even characteristics like wisdom (*sophia*) or the capacity to engage in a craft (*techne*)—or at least something analogous to them—are said to be shared by animals. Thus while Aristotle holds the natural world to be ordered along a kind of ascending scale, from the lifeless toward plants and then animals, this scale moves by such subtle degrees that it is sometimes impossible to determine exactly where a given natural object is situated relative to larger categories, i.e. whether it be plant or animal, let alone *what kind of animal*.<sup>324</sup>

The human being, like other animals, is possessed of a soul with the powers of sensation, desire, and movement. The various sources of an animal's movement can be reduced to either desire (*orexin*) or thought (*noun*), and as only the human among animals is considered by Aristotle to be possessed of thought, it is consequently only objects of desire that can be said to initiate movement in all animals.<sup>325</sup> Animals are impelled to move and to act (*prattein*) by their desire, which in turn arises from their sensory experience of the object of desire. In this way desire can be said to arise from sensation, leading to its actualization in a set

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<sup>324</sup> *HA*, VIII.1, 588a17-588b12. Regarding the difficulty of categorizing certain animals, see *PA*, IV.5, 681a25-28; 681a37-681b4; IV.10, 689b31-690a1; IV.11, 690b22; IV.13, 697a30-697b3; IV.14 697b14-21.

<sup>325</sup> *MA*, 6, 700b14-27.

of activities independent of thought.<sup>326</sup> The movements initiated by desire can even run contrary to thought (*nous*) and to calculation (*logismon*), for in being so closely related to sensation or perception (*aisthesis*), desire directs itself toward the *apparent* good, not necessarily that which is truly good. Consequently, desire is capable of being either right or wrong, while thought, for Aristotle, is always right (*orthos*).<sup>327</sup>

Animals thus pursue the objects of their desire—a variety of apparent goods—but they do not all do so alike. Animals with more refined sensory organs are capable of desiring in different ways, as their desire is mediated by a more varied array of psychic powers. A greater number of objects of desire produce a greater variety of movements, thus instilling in an animal a more varied or complex set of characteristics—the human being considered in this regard is the most complex and complete. However, even if Aristotle will, as will be shown below, use thought to separate humans and other animals, there remain a number of psychic powers that appear to underwrite the particular human powers of thought, recollection, and language, while still being shared by other—if not all—animals: namely, imagination, memory, and voice.<sup>328</sup> Together these psychic potentials appear to make it possible for an animal so endowed to share a

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<sup>326</sup> *MA*, 7, 701a31-701b1.

<sup>327</sup> *OS*, III.10, 433a25-30.

<sup>328</sup> Though I limit my discussion of psychic capacities common to both humans and other animals to these three, there are others discussed by Aristotle in his biological writings. For a discussion of some of these other similarities in comparison to Darwinian accounts of human-animal similarities, see Larry Arnhart, “Aristotle, Chimpanzees, and Other Political Animals,” *Social Science Information*, 29.2 (1990): 477-557.

world with meaningful others and to act in concert with them in pursuit of their desires, thus giving such an animal the basic capacities necessary to engage in the kind of politics described as common to a variety of animals in the *HA*—*sharing a common work*. In this sense, we shall see, Aristotle holds that humans are not the only political animals.

The first of these potentials, imagination (*phantasia*), is tied up closely with sensation and desire, yet reducible to neither. While Aristotle holds that imagination is a movement resulting from the actualization (*energeian*) of sensory potential,<sup>329</sup> imagination differs from sense in its lack of immediacy. That is, animals with refined sensory potentials and complex sensory organs imagine objects in that they do not just perceive them, but they perceive them as objects of a certain kind, related to other objects of the imagination in the animal's world. In this sense the "image" generated by the power of imagination is not simply the *representation* of an object, but an *interpretation* of that object in terms of its meaningfulness to the life of the animal.<sup>330</sup> Through this imaginative interpretation, the relation between the object and the given animal found in sensation unfolds into a space where objects are related through the animal. The immediate relation that existed between the animal and a given object of sensation becomes mediated by all the other sensory objects that constitute the animal's life, which are here not simply sensory objects, but

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<sup>329</sup> *OS*, III.3, 429a2.

<sup>330</sup> See Jean-Louis Labarrière, "Imagination humaine et imagination animale chez Aristote," *Phronesis* 29.1 (1984): 22.

imaginary ones also. The animal possessed of imagination thus lives in a space of imagination, a dimension of far greater breadth than the narrow relation between animal and object found in immediate sensibility. Yet insofar as the space of imagination is still one dominated by sensation, it remains a world bound to the material particularities of the given animal, and is thus for Aristotle still capable of leading the imagining animal astray like desire—imagination cannot provide the same level of certainty as thought.

However, in places Aristotle does seem to suggest a closer affinity between imagination and thought than the infallible notion of thought would allow. Aristotle writes that both sensation and imagination are on “common ground” with thought, in that all three are powers of discrimination (*kritika*), and that imagination, like thought, allows the animal a degree of distance between itself and the object imagined, much like a person looking at a scene in a painting—a spectator (*theomenoi*) as opposed to one directly experiencing the object or action.<sup>331</sup> The links between the spectator (*theomenoi*), the act of viewing (*theaomai*), and theoretical wisdom (*theoria*), which Aristotle places at the pinnacle of knowledge, cannot here be overlooked.<sup>332</sup> If the kind of vision made possible through imagination gives the viewer a power of discrimination fine enough to free it from the overwhelming force of sensory objects in their

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<sup>331</sup> *MA*, 6, 700b19-20; *OS*, III.3, 427b21-24.

<sup>332</sup> J. Peter Euben has argued that *theoria* is closely connected to *theater* and the spectatorship involved both in the official political and religious rites of Greek city states, and to Athenian tragedy. See J. Peter Euben, *Platonic Noise* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 42; J. Peter Euben, *The Tragedy of Political Theory*, 50, footnote #41.

immediacy, then the power it offers appears very similar to that of theoretical wisdom. For Aristotle, opinions can serve to constrain (*anagke*) a given opinion holder not only through exposure to fallibility, but through the overwhelming power of the affective content of an opinion, which can compel its holder to feel fearful or threatened.<sup>333</sup> While imagination may not provide the imagining animal with infallibility, the freedom it finds in this space—the distance opened up between it and its sensations—seems to be at the very least a kind of proto-thinking, and a necessary condition for the theoretical wisdom that will allegedly make the human distinct among animals.

Further, Aristotle will even suggest that thought (*noein*) is itself composed of imagination and judgment (*hupolepsis*).<sup>334</sup> If this were the case, thought would not represent a definite break from imagination, but would be rather a higher form of discrimination, one that combines the breadth of vision of the imagination with the capacity to make decisions and so take up definite courses of action, while remaining connected to sensation and the particularities of animal matter. However, Aristotle will ultimately arrive at a different position, arguing that thought is, unlike sensation, separable from the body.<sup>335</sup> Yet even here, in the conception of thought as a purely self-sufficient thinking of itself, insofar as an animal can have access to this thinking, and thus that thinking can happen in the soul of an embodied creature such as the human being, the animal

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<sup>333</sup> *OS*, III.3, 427b20-23.

<sup>334</sup> *OS*, III.3, 427b28-29.

<sup>335</sup> *OS*, III.4, 429a22-27; 429b5.

body is never simply left behind. That is, while thought may think without need of a body, or organs, or senses, or images—the human animal still needs these things in order to access this self-sufficient thought. Thus *human thought* can never be completely self-sufficient, never completely divorced from an animal body, for only through these supports can its own powers of thinking be made actual.<sup>336</sup> But as mentioned above, imagination is not the only such “support” for what are commonly considered distinctly human activities that are shared with animals.

Like imagination, memory (*mneme*) is closely bound up with sense perception, but also like imagination, it is not reducible to it. For there to be memory there must be an elapse of time; thus, Aristotle holds that only animals capable of perceiving time (*chronou aisthanetai*) have the power of memory. In this way memory is dependent upon the particular organization of a given animal’s power of sensation.<sup>337</sup> Memory is like the impression formed by a seal stamped upon the soul, and the capacity to retain this impression depends upon both the power of the soul to receive the impression, and the power of the sensory organs to make this impression—thus certain kinds of animals at different stages in their lives will have a greater or lesser power of memory.<sup>338</sup> At all times, however, Aristotle holds that memory implies a kind of mental picture

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<sup>336</sup> See Lloyd P. Gerson, “The Unity of Intellect in Aristotle’s *De Anima*,” *Phronesis* 49.4 (2004): 365; 369-370.

<sup>337</sup> *OM*, 1, 449b28-30.

<sup>338</sup> *OM*, 1, 450a31-450b6.

(*phantasmatos*), even when the memory is a memory of an object of thought (*noeton*), and consequently memory can be an aid to thought, but is necessarily bound up with imagination, and thus with sensation.<sup>339</sup>

Insofar as an animal capable of imagination is also capable of memory, the dimension of the animal's experience added through the mediation of sensory objects by one another in imagination now becomes extended in time. That is, if the power of imagination gives *space* to the imagining animal, then the power of memory gives *time* to the remembering animal, and the *breadth* of the space of imagination acquires the *depth* of the movement of memory. An animal whose powers of sensation are refined enough to perceive breadth and depth—space and time—perceives a distance between itself and others such that it can be said to relate to itself and others through its life activity: in this manner it can be said to possess a world. Sensory objects are now not only mediated by others present to the animal and related by it, but by past objects that bore some relation to the animal. An animal possessed of memory is thus capable of sensation along an entirely new axis, one where the sensory objects that form its life no longer need to be directly present in order to be sensed and so inform life activity. Living and moving in a space of these dimensions—a *world*—thus allows an animal to discriminate between sensory objects according to both space and time, to compare objects and responses in the present and to remember outcomes for the

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<sup>339</sup> *OM*, 1, 450a12-13.

future. Insofar as these capacities allow an animal to be worldly in this way, to live and move in a world composed of meaningful others, it is perhaps less surprising to find that Aristotle holds an animal possessed of such powers to be capable of forming opinions and even exercising practical wisdom, or “prudence” (*phronesin*), activities which cannot, in this light, be considered exclusively part of the human domain.<sup>340</sup>

Just as sensation is held to separate plant and animal life, so language is often thought to be the line of demarcation between animal and human life. But here again, the picture Aristotle paints is more complex, acknowledging that humans share many of what might be called the “component parts” of language with other animals. Aristotle distinguishes between sound (*psophos*), voice (*phone*), and speech (*dialektos*). While *psophos* can be virtually any sound, from the sound of two inanimate objects knocking together to the sounds made by insects, *phone* is the sound made specifically by an animal’s soul, using the breath in the windpipe to knock against its inner walls.<sup>341</sup> Thus, if an animal is to have a voice it must also have a throat and lungs. More importantly, however,

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<sup>340</sup> *OM*, 1, 450a13-16. Cf. Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals*, 12-13; 36. Though Sorabji argues that Aristotle denies opinion (*doxa*) to other animals based on the apparent relation between opinion, belief (*pistis*), and reason (*logos*) Aristotle sketches at *OS* III.3, it seems that what Aristotle is describing there is not so much the capacity for opinion as such, but the particular way in which *humans* form opinions. Thus animals without reason may still have opinions, they just do not have them in precisely the same manner as do animals with reason. See my discussion of *pistis* in relation to *logos* and *nous* below.

<sup>341</sup> *OS*, II.8, 420b32-421a2. Cf. *Il.*, III.145ff, where Homer describes the eloquence of human speakers as being “clear as cicadas.” For Aristotle, human speech possesses a depth that cannot be grasped, as it is in Homer, by simple reference to its sound; rather, sound is now mediated by an account of psychic powers and material organization.

Aristotle holds that voice has meaning (*semantikos*) and consequently that the act of soul that produces voice must be accompanied by imagination.<sup>342</sup>

Imagination, as both the distance between the animal and the sensory objects that compose its world, and the relation of these objects to one another through the senses and life activity of the animal, provides the interpretive framework that makes voice possible. Voice depends upon interpretation in that it does not simply represent an object as the object is, but rather provides a kind of aural code for the object, an audible expression of the animal's interpretation of the sensory object. In this way voice might be thought of as part of a chain of interpretation: a kind of translation of the object between the different sensory registers of the animal. The animal's perception of the object through particular sense organs (e.g. eyes, ears, etc.) is interpreted as an "image" that relates the object to other objects and the life activity of the animal, before being interpreted again in the sound made by the animal as an expression of or response to this "image." This sound is then interpreted again by the animal's own sensory perception of the sound it has itself made in response to the "image," and again in the consequent "image" generated from this perception. Insofar as voice serves as a relay in these translations between the animal and itself—between its different sensory and imaginary capacities as it goes about its life activity, voice

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<sup>342</sup> *Contra* Clark, who overemphasizes the importance of human speech, and thus maintains that "beasts" cannot make "semantic sounds of a distinguishable sort." For Aristotle, a semantic sound is precisely what voice is, regardless of the animal from which it emanates. See Stephen R.L. Clark, *Aristotle's Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 23.

possesses a reflexive quality that sharpens the animal's awareness of itself and its surroundings, bringing its world into clearer focus. The animal is, in a sense, "tuned" through the use of its voice—that is, the complex of relations in which it exists are made to resonate, to "fit together" as the means by which the animal has to perceive these relations are refined.

This vocal refining of the senses is not simply or necessarily accomplished by an animal in isolation, however: the voice is also a means of communication. That is, some of the objects that resonate with an animal's voice are the voices of other animals. Thus Aristotle will write of birds communicating with each other, some to such a refined degree as to appear to impart instruction (*mathesin*).<sup>343</sup> Yet while Aristotle does not refer to even the more perfectly tuned resonance of animal voices as *dialektos*, his means of distinguishing between *dialektos* and *phone* appears to rely much more on material characteristics than on psychic ones. That is, while the difference between mere *psophos* and *phone* was not only the organization of matter involved (i.e. throat and lungs), but required also an activity of soul and of imagination such as to give the sound meaning, Aristotle writes simply that "language [*dialektos*] is the articulation of voice [*phones*] by the tongue."<sup>344</sup>

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<sup>343</sup> *PA*, II.17, 660a36-660b2.

<sup>344</sup> *HA*, IV.9, 535a29-32.

If possessing a tongue that is capable of finely molding different sounds, a tongue that is “freely detached [*apolelumenen*],”<sup>345</sup> is what makes an animal capable of differentiating its speech from voice, then it would appear the difference is a material one. Insofar as Aristotle thinks that soul and its potentials are what give form to matter, then a less perfectly formed tongue might be taken as evidence of some kind of deficiency in the soul.<sup>346</sup> However, even in this case, insofar as certain birds are more adept at using their voices than others, the subtle differences between sub-species and species of animals on Aristotle’s ascending scale are here so fine that the difference between human speech and birdsong is perhaps more akin to differences *between languages* than between two utterly different capacities. In all it would appear that with respect to voice and speech, there are more commonalities between humans and other vocal animals than there are differences. In this light, it is worth noting again how *unsurprising* it should be when Aristotle notes that cranes appear to be prudent (*phronima*)—this insight should not be seen as the expression of personal eccentricity or a simple repetition of folk-wisdom, but a consequence of Aristotle’s theorization of the aforementioned capacities.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> *HA*, IV.9, 535b1-2.

<sup>346</sup> *GA*, IV.3, 768b25-29.

<sup>347</sup> *HA*, IX.10 614b19. At 263d of the *Statesman*, Plato’s Eleatic Stranger also speaks of the crane as being *phronimon*, suggesting this view may not have been all that rare. However, Aristotle’s account of capacities such as imagination, memory, and voice can serve as a philosophical basis for such folk-wisdom. We might perhaps liken this basis to what Nussbaum refers to as Aristotle’s attempt to “save the appearances and their truth” and so use philosophy “to show us the way back to the ordinary.” Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 242; 260. However, as we shall see, Aristotle’s attempt to formalize such folk-wisdom and shape it into theory will have potentially radically consequences for his world.

In this way, imagination, memory, and voice all demonstrate the rich and complex set of relations that compose the life activities of animals, all of which humans and animals share. But what of political life? If imagination, memory, and voice together show the ways in which certain animals are capable of interacting with their surroundings and others in a reflexive manner, such as to be said to share a world and to act together in it, to such an extent that they might even be said to be possessed of prudence (*phronesis*), would it not then be possible for at least certain kinds of non-human animals to engage in forms of politics? Contrary to much of what is thought about Aristotle, as I have already noted above, his answer to this question is “yes.” In his *History of Animals*, Aristotle writes that some animals are gregarious (*agelaia*), while others are solitary (*monadika*), and that others still *dualize* (*epamphorterixei*)—that is, they “partake of both characters.” Aristotle makes a further distinction among gregarious animals, noting that some are political (*politika*), while others are scattered (*sporadika*). While Aristotle categorizes the human being as a “dualizing” animal, he also includes humans among other political animals, such as the bee, the wasp, the ant, and the crane, as those who together share a common a work (*koinon ergon*).<sup>348</sup>

While it is clear from the above account that humans are not, according to Aristotle, the only political animals, these overlapping categorizations have led to

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<sup>348</sup> *HA*, I.1, 487b33-488a14.

some controversy concerning the sense in which Aristotle understands humans to be political. Is it that humans are naturally city dwellers, and that what is most important to city life is the common work they share in order to make this life possible, a capacity shared with certain other animals?<sup>349</sup> Or does this categorization allude to the great diversity of organization of human life, wherein politics is but one actualization of human potential, a “discontinuous act” that does not occur everywhere, and is no more human than familial association?<sup>350</sup> Or is the political nature of the human animal an intensification of gregariousness lying along a continuum of possible forms of human life (*bioi*)?<sup>351</sup> For our purposes here, however, the important point is that however humans live, whether as solitary wanderers,<sup>352</sup> in dispersed rural communities, or in crowded cities, none of these forms of life are distinctly human in and of

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<sup>349</sup> John M. Cooper, “Political Animals and Civic Friendship,” in *Aristotle’s Politics: Critical Essays*, eds. Richard Kraut & Steven Skultety, 65-89 (Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield, 2005), 65; 68; 69.

<sup>350</sup> Carnes Lord, “Aristotle’s Anthropology,” in *Essays on the Foundations of Aristotelian Political Science*, eds. Carnes Lord & David K. O’Connor, 49-73 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 60.

<sup>351</sup> David J. Depew, “Humans and Other Political Animals in Aristotle’s *History of Animals*,” *Phronesis* 40.2 (1995): 156-181.

<sup>352</sup> When Aristotle writes that humans are also solitary (*monadika*), it is not clear exactly what he has in mind. While the word *monadika* implies units independent of one another, it is still unclear as to what would constitute a “unit” or “independence” here. Must a human being live entirely alone to be considered *monadika*, or could “solitary” refer to the independence of one family unit from others? And must the individual or family live a solitary life all the time, or can it still be considered *monadika* if it only lives this way part of the time? Or does Aristotle include *monadika* among the possible forms of human life out of the belief that humans once lived that way, sometime in the distant past? While Aristotle suggests in the *Politics* that humans form cities out of a want of self-sufficiency, i.e. that they cannot sustain themselves as *monadika* (I.2, 1252b26-30), perhaps this ought to be taken as a more specific statement concerning the development of political life in Greece than a more general one concerning the human condition. If modes of animal life (*bioi*) vary according to characters (*ethe*) and sustenance (*trophas*) (*HA*, VIII.1, 588a14-15), and characters (*ethe*) can vary according to geography (*topoi*) (*HA*, VIII.29, 607a9), then perhaps Aristotle believes there are parts of the earth so abundant that humans do not need to organize themselves politically to survive, but instead live as *monadika*. That is, it is possible that Aristotle sees politics as a response to scarcity, and that where scarcity does not prevail, neither would politics.

themselves—that humans live in all these ways is consistent with their status as animals. Each of the above modes of living represents a different material instantiation of the powers humans share with other animals. Even the political life, which requires a degree of cooperation perhaps seen as uncommon among non-human animals—a diversity of tasks united in a single common work—is still a mode of life that cannot, from Aristotle’s perspective at least, be seen as distinctively human. Bees, wasps, and cranes are for Aristotle, like human beings, *political animals*—city life is just the shape politics takes, or *can* take, among humans.<sup>353</sup>

Thus in terms of souls and their capacities, bodies and their organs, modes of life and their organization, the human being is, for Aristotle, an animal. Aristotle’s theorization of animal life is both rich and complex, demonstrating the myriad ways in which the particularities of the human are found to correspond to the particularities, and in some cases the generalities, of other animals, thus making him not only perhaps the greatest of early biologists and zoologists, but one of the preeminent thinkers of human animality. With Aristotle, the poetic and analogical relationship to animals found in earlier Greek thought is transformed and regularized into similarities that can be known and to an extent at least, categorized. Thus the human-animal distinction acquires a degree of

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<sup>353</sup> *Contra* Clark again, who concludes that without language, “beasts” can be neither practical nor political (Clark, 24). However, as it has been shown, while animals may not have *dialektos*, those with *phone* can be said to be both practical and political (cranes), and even some without *phone* are said to be political (bees, wasps).

stability that it lacked prior to Aristotle, whose inquiries serve to draw the boundaries in which human life can be comprehended as animal life without the frenzy of the Dionysiac revel, or some other intervention of gods or supernatural beings. In this sense, Aristotle's understanding of human life as animal life serves to demystify both, situating humans and animals upon the common ground of knowledge.

Given the role animals played in the world of poetic myth—as facilitators of aristocratic distinction, on one hand, and as the lives whose sacrifice makes possible the degree of equality necessary for community, on the other—Aristotle's detailed excursus into the many and profound similarities between humans and other animals can be seen as a political challenge to the basic structure of this world. Against the aristocratic distinction earned by the warrior, Aristotle's demonstration of the animality of any and all human beings has a decidedly egalitarian edge. If the human being is a particular kind of animal, and thus shares certain psychic and bodily features with other animals, then the poetic proximity of great warrior-heroes to certain animals becomes more like rhetorical flourish than statements concerning a given hero's being—a distinction of *style*, not *substance*. That is, the poetic myths that sung the praises of heroes and in so doing served to establish a certain distinction between humans and other animals lose their place as arbiter of this distinction, and their hegemonic position among the received wisdom of this world is weakened.

However, the relative equality between humans as distinct from gods and animals established through sacrifice—that is, the *human community*—is also undermined by Aristotle’s investigations. If humans are just another species of animal, one to whom even politics is not unique, then why is it that they are party to a community ruled according to justice, and not other animals? Why are other animals excluded from this community, and even sacrificed in its name? Or conversely, what is there to stop one from treating other humans as one does other animals? If humans are simply another kind of animal, taboos that served to draw the boundaries that delineated acceptable and unacceptable human actions—such as human sacrifice and cannibalism—seem to lose their force, and the boundaries of the community become blurred. In short, Aristotle’s biological reflections have far-reaching political consequences, and if the most basic feature of the political communities that Aristotle knew is to persist—that is, if humans are to continue to be defined in some sense as distinct from other animals—then Aristotle needs some conception of what makes the human being unique.

Thus, despite the lengths Aristotle goes in demonstrating the animality of the human being, this animality does not exhaust what it means to be human. Rather, for Aristotle there remains something in excess of the animal that makes it possible to identify the human as a kind of animal different, and, in some ways, separate from, other animals. It is toward these “excesses,” the different ways in

which the human animal is decidedly *unlike* other animals, that we must now turn.

## **Chapter Seven:**

### **What is Humanity? The Human Excess**

While the previous section focused on the similarities between humans and other animals that serve to make the human being a kind of animal, in the following chapter I take the opposite tack, and pursue instead what Aristotle considers to be uniquely human. I argue that it is the intellectual powers, predicated upon an ability to access divine and eternal thought (*nous*), that are ultimately what make the human being a qualitatively different kind of animal in Aristotle's eyes. The unique capacity to access divine thought makes possible a whole host of unique intellectual capacities that serve to displace the importance of the capacities humans share with other animals, orienting them according to the exigencies of thought.

In orienting the psychic capacities of the human animal to the divine, both the human senses and even the human body can be understood as supports of this divine thought—they exceed the abilities of other animals precisely in ways suited to intellectual activity. In this sense, we might see the human as a kind of “excessive” animal, that is, an animal that exceeds all others due to its particular relation to the divine. Yet, while this excess and consequent uniqueness of the human animal might suggest it to be some kind of monster, Aristotle instead

makes the exceptional character of the human the exception that proves the rule, and the human being is set up as the standard against which all other animals are measured, making the “excess” of the human into a “deficiency” in other animals. Thus while Aristotle’s inquiries into the nature of animals served to redefine the human-animal distinction upon which a certain form of community was based, and thus undermine this community, Aristotle’s insistence upon the uniqueness and even superiority of humans among other animals will provide the basis for a new form of human community, one that excludes other animals in its orientation to the divine.

### *Thought and the Intellectual Powers*

Near the beginning of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle famously claims that human beings “by nature desire to know.” It is this desire for knowledge that underlies the value we place on the senses, and consequently sight is valued most highly, for it is most (*malista*) capable of bringing us knowledge and allowing us to make differentiations between objects.<sup>354</sup> However, while the senses are particular material organizations of the power of sensation found in the soul, insofar as they require the body and its organs to sense, the power of sensation is limited by the particularity of its bodily organs. Aristotle notes that not only do the appearances of the imagination differ among animals, but that even the sensory perception of

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<sup>354</sup> *Meta.* I.1, 980a21-27. The word Aristotle first uses here for knowledge, *eidenai*, is linked to both *oida*, to know, and *eido*, to see. Thus sight is foremost among the senses in that all senses aim at knowledge, and sight is most like knowledge.

objects by different individual members of the same species frequently differ. For this reason, sensation and imagination offer no clear way of differentiating between the true and the false<sup>355</sup>—the knowledge obtaining in both is bound by the particularity of the sense organs. If human beings, in their desire for knowledge, would pursue it beyond the animal confines of sensation and imagination, they would thus require a knowledge farthest from the senses humans share with other animals. The form of knowledge Aristotle holds to be farthest from sensation is the most (*malista*) general knowledge (*katholou epistemen*).<sup>356</sup> Among the powers of the soul (nutrition, desire, sensation, movement, and thinking), Aristotle holds only thinking to be possible without a body, and in this sense it can be said to be farthest from sensation. Thus, the most general knowledge will be that acquired by thought, and only animals possessed of the power of thought will be able to lay claim to such knowledge, under which all particulars lie.

Human beings are, according to Aristotle, the only thinking animals.<sup>357</sup> However, unlike the other psychic powers, which in some sense can be said to “dwell” in the soul, thought does not—or at least not in the same way. That is, nutrition, desire, sensation, and movement are known to be potentials of the soul in that they are made apparent through bodies. Though bodies on their own are held by Aristotle to be inert, it is still only through them that anything can be said

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<sup>355</sup> *Meta.* IV.5, 1009b6-10.

<sup>356</sup> *Meta.*, I.1, 982a21-25.

<sup>357</sup> *OS*, III.10, 433a11-12; *PA*, I.1, 641b7-8.

about souls, and the two are so closely intertwined that Aristotle compares their relation to a piece of wax and its shape.<sup>358</sup> Thought, however, stands alone in that it can be separated from bodies. While the actualization of other psychic powers depends upon the objects of the material world—there must be an object of sensation that is sensed, an object of desire that is desired, and objects that move and are moved—thus ensuring their embodied nature, thought for Aristotle depends only upon thought. This is not to say, however, that human thinking is generated by humans. Thought as such precedes the thinking that happens in the human soul: it comes from without (*thurathen*) and enters (*epeisienai*) the human soul, divine (*theion*) and without any commonality with bodily activity.<sup>359</sup>

Thus the potential for thought in the human soul, that is, the “psychic power” of thought, is the capacity to be open to this thought, to think “with it” in a sense. Unlike the world of sensible and desiring bodies, always in need and dependent on other bodies for life, incorporeal thought is self-sufficient: thought thinks itself, and thus it needs nothing, depends on nothing but itself—it is *divine*. Thought thus exists as if on another plane than the material world, offering as it does a view of self-sufficiency—of freedom from material boundaries—utterly unlike those experienced among animals. In this way we

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<sup>358</sup> *OS*, II.1, 412b3-8.

<sup>359</sup> *GA*, II.3, 736b27-28. For an alternate account of this passage, see Victor Caston, “Aristotle’s Two Intellects: A Modest Proposal,” *Phronesis* 44.3 (1999), 215-216. Caston’s argument, however, does not detract from the three points I am highlighting here and subsequently: 1) that thought is separable from matter; 2) that thought is divine; and 3) that among animals only humans have access to thought, and are consequently oriented to the divine in a way other animals are not (211-212; 224).

might think of the human power of thought as analogically similar to the animal power of sensation. Just as sensation opens up an entirely new dimension to the sensible soul, such as to make possible a qualitative difference between the soul with sensation, the animal, and the soul without sensation, the plant, so thought opens an entirely new dimension to the thinking soul, such as to make possible, for the first time among the powers we have examined above, a qualitative distinction between human and animal.

Yet, as one commentator writes, while “in thinking, we access a divine activity[,] we do not become God.”<sup>360</sup> Though the divine realm of thought to which the human animal, uniquely among animals, has access, makes it possible for the human being to be a qualitatively different kind of animal, it does not mean that the human is no longer *some kind* of animal. Human beings do not live by thought alone, but still live as embodied creatures, subject to sensation, imagination, and desire and wholly dependent upon the material world. In this sense the particularity of the human animal appears to be found in the nexus of the divine and the animal, as the capacities humans share with animals come to be ordered, interpreted, and mediated by the divine. Indeed, thought serves to *organize* the human animal in a fairly literal sense for Aristotle, as we shall see. In a sense, human life is an attempt to accommodate the divine within the confines of the animal, and in so doing the human being can be identified as

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<sup>360</sup> Gerson, “The Unity of the Intellect,” 370.

possessing a number of unique powers concerning the translation of thought into the animality of everyday human life. In order to better understand these powers, and thus what Aristotle considers to be uniquely human, we must look to how they relate to this first of human powers, thought, and the various words Aristotle uses to describe intellectual activity.

The condition of human thought, the self-sufficient thought that comes from without in order to think in the human soul, Aristotle calls *nous*. While Aristotle will also frequently refer to thinking as it happens in the human soul by *nous* and its various cognates, the other words he uses for intellectual activity appear to be restricted to specifically human activity, without possessing a separate existence. In this way, when Aristotle writes that thought (*nous*) is “that whereby the soul thinks [*dianoeitai*] and judges [*uppolambanei*],”<sup>361</sup> we ought to understand thinking (as *dianoia*) and judging to be specifically human articulations of the divine *nous*. The human capacity for thought—the human receptivity to the divine *nous*—makes thinking and judging possible, and thinking and judging are themselves bound in a web of other intellectual powers. *Logos*, often translated as “reason,” is perhaps the most important among these, and along with the related *logismos* (calculation) and *sullogismos* (inference), makes possible intellectual activity involving chains of reasoning relating diverse objects in both the present, past, and future.

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<sup>361</sup> *OS*, III.4, 429a22-24.

Thus the thinking and reasoning soul is able to draw conclusions about the relations relevant to its life in all of these tenses, which itself involves yet another capacity, *bouleusis* (deliberation). While a version of this capacity was found above in animals possessing memory and imagination, *bouleusis* allows for a greater degree of “mobility” among the objects being related—objects of deliberation do not impose themselves upon the human with the same force as objects of sensation or imagination do upon the animal. That is, deliberation might be seen as opening up still more space between the deliberator and the senses, in much the same way as imagination does for other animals. Deliberation serves as another layer of mediation for the desire of the deliberator, and makes it possible for the subsequent actions of the deliberator to be initiated by choice (*proairesis*), as opposed to simply being driven by desire.<sup>362</sup>

In this way *nous*, through reason, calculation, inference, deliberation, and choice, serves to displace and re-orient the power of the imagination humans share with other animals, extending the distance it affords the given animal from sensation through additional layers of mediation, and adding to the complexity of psychic life. Likewise, the power of memory that works together with imagination in forming the world of certain animals is in the human displaced, re-oriented, and extended by the particularly human power of recollection

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<sup>362</sup> This is not to suggest that deliberation is opposed to or even completely separable from desire. Nussbaum, following Aristotle at *OS*, III.10, 433a21-23; b1-4, points out that deliberation is a form of *orexis*, and *orexis* is involved in all animal movement. See Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 275. Yet while deliberation might be a form of desire, it is not present in all desiring animals (*OS*, III.11, 434a12).

(*anamnesis*). Just as memory extends sensation and imagination in time and so gives a kind of presence to objects not immediately present to a given animal, recollection opens up the temporal dimension to the complex web of intellectual powers found in humans. Aristotle holds recollection to be a kind of investigation (*zetesis*), which is in turn dependent upon deliberation and inference.<sup>363</sup> Thus recollection does not simply give a kind of presence to objects not immediately present, but it gives this pseudo-presence over to the power of human thinking. Through recollection, the human can “move” through the collection of past sensations, “appearances,” and thoughts and bring them to bear upon present deliberations in a much more directed and concerted manner than animals possessed only of memory.

As recollection is for Aristotle a form of reason directed toward the past, we might see a similar temporal direction in Aristotle’s understanding of belief, or trust (*pistis*). Aristotle holds that we never find *pistis* among beasts,<sup>364</sup> for to trust someone, that is, to believe or have faith that they will do or accomplish a certain thing or behave a certain way in the future, requires one to be persuaded, and persuasion (*peithoi*) depends upon reason (*logos*), which as we have seen, is

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<sup>363</sup> *OM*, 2, 453a6-13.

<sup>364</sup> Rather than use the typical word for animal found in the overwhelming majority of his discussions of the topic, *zoon*, Aristotle instead uses the word ‘beast,’ or *therion*, to describe the creature without trust. While the difference does not affect the immediate point I am trying to make—that *zoa* other than humans are by Aristotle’s definition incapable of trust—we should read *therion* as being less expansive than *zoon*. That is to say, while the human being is one kind of animal among many, possessing certain natural powers by virtue of being the kind of animal that it is, *therion* refers to a human that in some way fails in its natural capacities as a human: one who is a ‘beast.’ While all humans are animals, only some are beasts. Cf. *NE* VII.1 1145a30-32.

among the intellectual capacities particular to human beings.<sup>365</sup> Thus trust serves along with recollection to highlight the way in which the human being, despite being a kind of animal, exceeds other animals also in the powers it has at its disposal to orient itself in time. Animal memory and imagination, while still present and active in humans, come to be mediated by reason through deliberation, recollection, and trust, re-orienting the human to the world and making the human capable of exceeding the cognitive powers of other animals.

Insofar as humans, through the power of thought, appear to inhabit a much richer world than that of other animals, one would expect that the voice that proved to be so important for orienting vocal animals to their world and each other, and in so doing making possible in them a kind of reflexivity, is different again in humans. This is indeed the case; however, as we have seen, while Aristotle reserves the term *dialektos* for human speech, he seems to equate its difference from animal *phone* in terms of the shape of the tongue and mouth parts actually making the sounds. However, relying only on material differences in this way seems to present a problem for Aristotle's account. If the activities of the soul serve to make a living thing the kind of thing that it is, that thing is like and unlike other things in terms of its activities, which in turn depend on the likeness or unlikeness of the psychic capacities that make these activities possible. Thus, if speech is to be truly unique to humans—that is, if human

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<sup>365</sup> *OS*, III.3, 428a21-24.

speech is to be qualitatively different from birdsong—it requires a corresponding psychic capacity unique to humans.

Insofar as Aristotle takes *nous* and its related intellectual capacities to be what is most unique and definitive of human beings, it would appear that a likely candidate for the psychic capacity of speech might be found there, perhaps in the word *logos*. *Logos* is used in a variety of ways to mean not only reason, but also “account,” “speech,” and “language.”<sup>366</sup> If we read *logos* as the psychic capacity (*dunamis*) for speech or language, and *dialektos* as the actual activity (*energeian*) of speech, then the problem dissolves: we can explain why Aristotle lists only material differences when differentiating between *dialektos* and *phone*, for *dialektos* is itself the material actualization of a psychic capacity, while at the same time locating a unique psychic capacity for language related to divine thought in *logos*. *Phone*, in line with the account given above in terms of its relation to the world of imagination, would be the vocal articulation of a *phantasmatos*, an image impressed upon the senses through the power of imagination.<sup>367</sup>

Thinking of *logos* as the potential for human language and *dialektos* as its activity allows us to see speech from the two different perspectives that inform Aristotle’s understanding of human life. As *logos*, human language is a psychic

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<sup>366</sup> These are but a few of the many meanings and usages of *logos*. See Liddel and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, abridged (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), 416–417.

<sup>367</sup> *Psophos*, as un-intentional and meaningless sound that can emanate from lifeless objects, is without psychic potential. The possibility of sound resides entirely in the material of the object responsible for the sound.

capacity or potential made possible by the specifically human relation to the divine. As *dialektos*, human language is an activity involving a more finely ordered series of vocal sounds than other animals are capable. *Logos* may be divine, but only through its relation with *nous*, just as *dialektos* is animal if seen only as the sounds made possible by the vocal organs. Both serve to show the particularity of the human animal, in that *dialektos* exceeds animal voice, while *logos*, as language, is irrelevant to divine thought on its own terms, which is self-sufficient in its own thinking and without need of human language. In this way we ought to think of *logos-dialektos* as divine thought reverberating within the animal voice. Like the animal use of voice that served to refine the vocal animal's senses, speech can be used to clarify human thinking and so free it of errors, thus bringing humans closer to the self-sufficiency of divine thought. But one might ask at this juncture: what of the human senses? If the animal voice can be used to refine the senses, can *logos-dialektos* also serve such a function, or is it entirely oriented to thought? What is the relation between thought and the senses? In order to answer these questions, we will have to examine the senses in what Aristotle takes to be their particularity; that is, the way in which human senses differ from the senses of other animals.

### *The Human Senses*

We have seen that the human soul, in possessing a part that is receptive to thought, makes possible a host of intellectual capacities particular to the human. In this way other psychic capacities humans share with animals, such as imagination, memory, and voice, are transformed in their mediation by the various human powers of thinking. That is, thinking in humans serves to displace the centrality of imagination, memory, and voice found in other animals. While all are still present in the human and required to translate the divine thought that comes from outside into animal terms relevant to animal life, the animal life that is mediated by thinking—the life that reaches out to the divine—is no longer simply animal life, but human life. Indeed, insofar as the particularity of human life is found in the attempt to accommodate the divine within the animal, the entire constellation of powers that constitute the animal is transformed. Thus it is not simply imagination, memory, and voice that are displaced and exceeded by the intellectual powers that constitute thinking, but the psychic power that serves to constitute the animal as such: sensation (*aisthesis*).

Insofar as human sensation is mediated by thought and thinking, human senses will differ from those of other animals in terms of their ability to support thinking and thought. For this reason human senses are not each superior to those of different animals, but rather, human senses will be superior or inferior to

other animals to the degree that they support human intellectual powers. Thus, while Aristotle claims that humans are inferior to many other animals in terms of sensory perception (*aisthesis*), and perhaps the worst among animals at perceiving things at a distance, humans are still the best at differentiating between objects, thanks to their possession of the best sense of touch.<sup>368</sup> While perceiving objects at a distance has no clear link with intelligence—in fact, it may even serve in certain animals to substitute for intelligence, by encouraging the animal to rely instead on the distant appearances generated by such senses and the imagination—a refined sense of touch allows the animal so endowed to make finer sensory distinctions and discriminations (*kritika*). As Aristotle also considers thinking to be a form of discrimination, the refined sense of touch found in humans actually brings them closer to thinking, making them also the most intelligent (*phronimotaton*) of animals.

The relative strengths and weaknesses of other human senses serve also to contribute to human intelligence: the human sense of taste is also considered by Aristotle to be highly discriminating, as it is a form of touch, whereas smell is the least developed of the human senses, again, as it is without any clear link to intelligence. The capacities of seeing and hearing lie somewhere between these extremes. While Aristotle, as we have already seen, claims sight to be valued most highly (among humans, presumably) for its ability to impart knowledge and

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<sup>368</sup> *OS* II.9 421a20-23; *Sens.* 4 441a2; *HA* I.15 494b15-18; *GA* V.2 781b17-21.

make distinctions, thus implying close links to both thought and knowledge, he says little about the superiority of human sight, noting only that human sight is superior to those animals with hard eyes.<sup>369</sup> Hearing, on the other hand, is held to have direct links to intelligence (*phronesis*), as it is primarily through sound that instruction (*matheseos*) is possible.<sup>370</sup>

Like birds and other animals possessed of a voice, the human sense of hearing, while not necessarily greater than other animals, allows humans to communicate with others and so situate themselves reflexively in their world. For humans especially, insofar as thought becomes sound through *logos*, the sense of hearing allows humans to engage and refine the activities that make them different from other animals. In this way the five senses humans possess, mediated as they are by the human intellectual powers, all serve to make humans the most intelligent of animals. While intelligence, or “practical wisdom” (*phronesis*), depends upon the senses and is thus shared by other animals, insofar as the capacities of the human soul are oriented by thought, the human senses that make up the human capacity for sensation will likewise be oriented to supporting thought. In this way, humans are distinguished from other animals not only in terms of being the only thinking animals, but also of being the most intelligent animals. Yet if this is indeed the case, we would expect to find that the human *organization* of sensation, that is, the particular bodies and sense organs

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<sup>369</sup> *OS* II.9 421b27.

<sup>370</sup> *Sens.* I 437a11-14.

humans possess would also be most suited among animals for thought. We thus now turn to the material organization of the human being, and the way in which Aristotle holds human bodies to differ from the bodies of other animals.

### *The Human Body*

In the first book of *On the Soul*, Aristotle dismisses the Pythagorean view that any soul could be adequately “clothed” in any body as absurd—for a given soul to engage in the activities that make it the soul that it is, it needs a material structure capable of supporting these activities.<sup>371</sup> Yet to understand what a thing really is, we must look not to these material proprieties, but to its form (*eidos*), as it is the form that serves to impart to a thing its particularity as that thing.<sup>372</sup> Though we might be tempted here to read in Aristotle’s insistence on the dominance (*kuriotera*) of form over matter the faded letter of Platonic philosophy, for Aristotle the forms of enmattered things cannot exist without their matter, and he roundly dismisses the doctrine of the Forms.<sup>373</sup> The bodily parts of humans, then, will be determined by those activities which serve to distinguish the human from other animals, but these parts will nevertheless be necessary for the actuality of that distinction. As we have already seen that it is the receptivity to thought and the intellectual powers bound up with thought that serve to differentiate humans from other animals, human bodies will then be

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<sup>371</sup> *OS* I.3. 407b22-26.

<sup>372</sup> *PA* I.1 640b22-29.

<sup>373</sup> See for example, *Meta.* III.6 1002b30; XI.1 1059b3; XIII.4 1079a5-7.

organized according to the requirements of thought, and individual parts will be either necessary for the existence of the human being as a thinking animal, or at least conducive to intellectual activities in some manner.<sup>374</sup> As Aristotle sees the bodies of living things (*zoa*) to be structured according to six points (superior and inferior, right and left, front and back), we can use these points to better grasp how the human body differs from other animal bodies, and how these differences relate to the unique human capacity for thought.

To grasp the ordering of the superior and the inferior in the human body, the posture of the human body, unique among animals, might be taken as the first or at least most immediately visible piece of material evidence of the human intellect and its relation to the divine. As it is the work (*ergon*) of the “god-like” (*theotatou*) to think (*noein*) and to be intelligent (*phronein*), Aristotle holds that the human is either the only animal to have a share in the divine (*theiou*), or at least the animal with the greatest (*malista*) share in the divine.<sup>375</sup> That is, from the perspective of thought, the human is the only divine animal, and from the perspective of intelligence, the human is the most divine animal. In both ways, however, Aristotle holds that being physically close to the ground would impede both thinking and sensation, confining both to a narrower range of possibilities. Thus for Aristotle it is only fitting that the human being should stand erect, with its superior parts upward, for in this way human senses are freed from immediate

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<sup>374</sup> *PA* I.1 640a34-640b1.

<sup>375</sup> *PA* IV.10 686a26-35; II.10 656a7-9.

contact with the ground, and so opened to developing in different and more complex ways more appropriate to the body of a thinker.

Yet, as we have already seen, in his account of animals, Aristotle noted that certain birds also could be said to stand erect. But here Aristotle makes a distinction: birds cannot be considered to stand erect in the same way as humans, for the distribution of their weight is such as to favor their wings.<sup>376</sup> That is to say, birds stand erect to facilitate flight, not thought. If the *ergon* of the bird is to fly, then it must be that this capacity is the dominant capacity of a bird's soul, whose movements then serve to give shape to its matter in such a way as to support this capacity. That certain birds, such as cranes, are also highly intelligent might thus be seen as a kind of externality of their capacity for flight: insofar as being bipedal is conducive to flight, it also happens to free the bird's senses from immediate contact with the ground, thus making it possible for them to move and develop in the complex ways that facilitate intelligence. This intelligence is not, as we have seen, the same as being receptive to divine thought.

Thus humans stand alone among other animals, with their superior parts elevated, because they are thinkers, and standing in this way facilitates thought in the same way as the structure of a crane's body facilitates flight. However, while this may give us an answer as to *why* humans stand erect, Aristotle will also give an explanation of *how* humans stand erect. Aristotle holds that certain animals

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<sup>376</sup> *Prog.* 11 710b9ff.

are, according to their place on the great scale of life, “higher,” or more valued or honorable (*timiotera*) than others, and that this value corresponds with the value of the given animal’s soul. Higher souls are allotted by nature more heat than others, and surely as heat rises, so does the heat of a soul affect the growth of the material body and its organs in this direction.<sup>377</sup> As the heat rises from the hottest region of the human body, the area around the heart and lung, it elevates the body along with it, pushing upwards toward the heavens and so holding the head aloft. The heat rising up from the body and out through the head is also the reason the human skull is shaped in the manner than it is: Aristotle holds that due to the evaporation of heat from the heart and lung, the skull is the last bone to become solidified. Sutures upon the skull are the remnants of the time before its parts had joined to become a single bone.<sup>378</sup> The skull also serves to protect the human brain, which is not the seat of thought, but rather serves to cool the excessive heat of the human body, and is thus larger, cooler, and moister in humans than in other animals.<sup>379</sup> The lower or “inferior” parts of the human body also differ from other animals according to the necessities of standing erect. Unlike other animals, humans have fleshy lower parts, including the buttocks, thighs, and calves, which help make the mature human being

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<sup>377</sup> *OYOA* 19.13 477a18-20; *PA* II.7 653a27-30.

<sup>378</sup> *PA* II.7 653a31-653b1.

<sup>379</sup> *HA* I.16 494b28-29; *PA* II.14 658b4-8; *GA* V.3 783b36-784a5.

heavier below than above, giving its posture additional support.<sup>380</sup> Humans also have the largest feet among animals of comparative size, again to facilitate standing erect.<sup>381</sup>

Of course, the human body is not simply structured around being able to stand erect, but being capable of moving in this position, and it is here where the next two points, right and left, can be seen at work in the human body. Aristotle claims that the movement of all animals begins on the right side; the right side is more dexterous than the left, and consequently better (*beltion*). As there is a greater discrepancy between the right and left sides in human beings than other animals, with most humans heavily favoring their right sides while the left side in humans is “freer” or more (*malista*) “detached” (*apolelumena*), humans are capable of a finer and more differentiated set of movements than other animals.<sup>382</sup> The flexibility and dexterity of the human body, together with its capacity to stand erect, complement the highly refined powers of sensation in the human soul. As humans stand and move they expose their senses to new and varied objects, training and refining their senses through varied organs that find

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<sup>380</sup> *HA* II.1 499a31-499b4; II.1 500b26-30; *PA* IV.10 689b5-17.

<sup>381</sup> *PA* IV.10 690a28-31.

<sup>382</sup> *Prog.* 4 706a16-26. While this point may seem innocuous enough, Aristotle’s naturalization of the discrepancy between right and left sides of the body, making it even a source of differentiation between humans and other animals, may actually be closely bound up with his sexism, which I examine below. In Plato’s *Laws* (794d-e), one of the arguments made by the Athenian in favor of training women along with men in the military arts depends on an analogy to human hands. The Athenian holds that “by nature the limbs on both sides are almost equally balanced,” and that it is only by habituation and improper use that one grows stronger and more favored than the other. Properly trained, humans would be capable of using both hands well, and likewise, properly trained women ought to be capable of defending the city along with their male counterparts. If humans naturally favor the right side, which is better, then Plato’s argument collapses, and the dominant political role of men is likewise naturalized.

their actuality in the world as experienced through this bodily structure. In this way human skin and flesh is also refined, becoming through the movements of the human body more finely tuned to the objects with which it has contact, and so serving the human capacity for touch, which as the most discriminate sense of touch among animals, requires the most delicate skin and softest flesh as its material support.<sup>383</sup> Aristotle has the blood also playing a similar role. As Aristotle considers blood that is thickest and hottest to be most conducive to strength, while the coolest and thinnest blood most conducive to sensation and thought, insofar as human blood is held to be the thinnest and purest it is suited to sensation and thought, yet heated enough by the natural heat accorded to the human as a “higher” animal, remains appropriate also for strength and so also facilitates movement.<sup>384</sup> In this way human organs facilitate the kinds of movements of which humans are capable, ultimately to accommodate their status as the most intelligent of animals, and indeed, the only one possessed of the capacity for thought.

But as we have seen above, not only do humans tend to pursue their life activities with others, but their capacity for thought is, unlike the self-sufficiency of divine thought, articulated through the animal voice as human speech. In this way thought depends on the particular organs of the human body, which can be seen now to differ from other animals also in terms of the last two structuring

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<sup>383</sup> *HA* III.11 517b27-28; *PA* II.16 660a12-13.

<sup>384</sup> *PA* II.2 648a2-4; *HA* III.19 521a4-5.

points: front and back. As noted above, an important means of distinguishing between *phone* and *dialektos* was through the human tongue: its shape, breadth, and dexterity, that is, its “freedom,” or “detachment” (*apolelumenen*) from the rest of the mouth. Here we find that it is not simply the particularities of the human tongue that serve to shape *phone* into *dialektos*, but also the lips, which, being composed of the soft flesh and delicate skin characteristic of humans, helps not only protect the teeth but shape the sounds of language.<sup>385</sup> Human teeth are also held by Aristotle to play a role in forming the sounds particular to letters (*grammaton*), and thus their number and character are also for the most part determined by speech.<sup>386</sup>

In this way the requirements of *logos* can be seen to a considerable extent to have made the human face what it is: insofar as the capacity for thought in humans is refined and perfected through speech, through dialogue with each other, this activity has formed the matter and organs of the face in such a way as to support this activity. It is for this reason that Aristotle can claim that the word “face” (*prosopon*) is only used for humans,<sup>387</sup> despite his own comparison of human facial features to those of the ape: like the birds who were found above not to stand as erect as humans for the fact that they do not do so for the sake of thought, so is the face of an ape not really a face insofar as it only emits voice, and

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<sup>385</sup> *PA* II.16 659b32-660a3.

<sup>386</sup> *PA* III.1 661b13-16.

<sup>387</sup> *HA* I.8 491b9-10.

not language. Just as humans are the only animals that stand erect, so they are the only animals that look directly in front, and articulate in this direction.<sup>388</sup> Thus it is *logos* that determines the front and back of the human, through the formation of the human face.

In this way the superior and inferior, the right and left, and the front and back of human beings are structured according to the necessities of thought and its intellectual capacities, and thus the particularities of the human body are found to be expressions of the dominant aspect of its soul: the capacity for thought. In this manner Aristotle is also able to dismiss the rival claim that it is the matter that determines the work, and not the opposite. As we have seen, it is the psychic capacity for thought that forms and organizes matter in a manner conducive to its own actualization. As Aristotle claims, it is easier to give a flute to a flute player, than to teach someone how to play the flute. Or put more bluntly: humans have hands because they think; they do not think because they have hands.<sup>389</sup> Humans stand erect and bipedal, moving as they do and facing in the direction as they do in order to enable their intellectual capacities to flourish. While this flourishing may spring from the soil of animality, it blossoms into a creature that, while still animal, nevertheless stands apart from other animals.

Yet one might ask here: if what makes humans different from other animals is the possession of a power particular to it alone, a power that brings

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<sup>388</sup> *PA* III.1 662b19-22.

<sup>389</sup> *PA* IV.10 687a7-23.

this one animal into relation with the divine, and in so doing, re-orient the other capacities of the animal so as to exceed all, or at least most others, what stops this animal from being a kind of deformity? Aristotle's repeated use of the word *malista* (most, more) to describe the human in relation to other animals implies that the human is in *excess* of the animal—the human is the animal's psychic capacities, senses, and body mutilated by an alien capacity and ordered according to the service of this capacity. That is, if the human is a kind of excess of the animal, an animal marked as distinct among others, why is it not considered a kind of monster? It is not difficult to conjugate the human within the grammar of Greek mythological creatures: a birdlike ape of cities and fields, ferocious, omnivorous, and like a plague, spreading across the earth. To understand how Aristotle avoids the threat of monstrosity, installing instead the human as paramount among animals, we must now turn to Aristotle's treatment of monsters.

### *Monsters*

Aristotle calls "monsters," or "monstrosities" (*teraton*) those which are contrary to nature (*para phusin*), including both the deficient and the excessive. Things can be contrary to nature insofar as nature is conceived as that which holds for the most part or in general, not as eternal and necessary.<sup>390</sup> That which deviates

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<sup>390</sup> GA IV.4 770b8-13.

from nature is thus monstrous, and a thing is more or less monstrous in terms of the degree to which it deviates from nature. In this sense, humans might appear to be monstrous in three senses: 1) in the human capacity for thought, which, being entirely unique among all other living things, is contrary to nature in terms of being unlike what holds for the most part among animals; 2) in terms of humans exceeding all other animals in certain of their shared capacities, thus making the human a kind of excessive animal; and 3) in terms of the unique features of the human body, which in supporting capacities that are either completely unique or excessive, give the human a monstrous shape. In all these ways the human appears to be a deformed, monstrous animal.

However, unlike, say, a sheep with a swollen gall-bladder,<sup>391</sup> the characteristics that might be used to identify “the human” as monstrous do not necessarily serve to distinguish it from other humans. “The human” does not simply exist as a solitary creature, born of animals to which it bears only a passing resemblance, but rather, “the human” is just a more general way of referring to *humans*, who consistently reproduce themselves as humans, as animals possessed of all these “monstrous” characteristics. The consistency of this reproduction is what makes it possible to identify the human as a *kind* of animal, endowed with its own range of possibilities considered to fall within its nature, and against which monstrosity can be measured. Thus the human as

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<sup>391</sup> PA IV.2 677a2.

such, insofar as it is its own kind (*eidos*) of animal, can only be monstrous relative to this kind, and not in comparison to other animals.

Humans are human—or at least potentially so—by virtue of their parentage: humans are not generated at random by a variety of different animals, but only by other humans, to whom they share a resemblance. While in failing to resemble one's parents one goes contrary to nature and is therefore already in a sense for Aristotle a kind of monster, such a monstrosity is still recognizably human. Yet further deviation is possible: Aristotle makes reference to cases in which a child is born that appears “to be not even a human being, but some kind of animal.”<sup>392</sup> In such cases people will associate various animal features with the child, saying it has the head of a ram or a bull, or some other mix of different animals, and even suggesting that it is the result of such mixed animal parentage. Aristotle dismisses this piece of folklore, less due to the belief that different kinds of animals cannot be mixed, than due to the uneven periods of gestation in these animals.<sup>393</sup> In focusing on the periods of gestation for different animals, Aristotle also alludes to what he will offer as an explanation for the existence of monsters as such: *material* differences, especially the deviation of matter from form.

The form of an animal is to be found in its soul, which is imparted to the animal through the seed of the male of the species, in those species divided by

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<sup>392</sup> *GA* IV.3 769b7-10.

<sup>393</sup> Aristotle will actually suggest that different species with gestation periods of similar length can in fact breed, and that the dry climate of Libya, compelling animals of all kinds to conjugate together at watering holes, is a possible explanation for the great variety of animal species in that region. See *GA* II.7 746b7-11.

sexes. The matter is supplied by the female, and it is in this way that animals develop: as we have seen, the capacities of the soul shape the matter with which it is endowed, so that the particular organization of that matter will support the activities of the soul that make it a soul of a certain kind (*eidos*). Monstrosity results when the matter does not yield to the form in the manner that it ought; when the powers of the soul shape the matter only imperfectly, then the particularities of the given soul fail to leave their stamp in the matter. What results is a monster, such as the child that is not human, but only “some kind of animal.” In this case, the power of the soul most particular to the human has failed to impart its form upon its matter, and consequently the child is never developed beyond the raw material potential humans share with other animals: it is perhaps like a ram, or a bull, or a sheep, or an ox—but certainly not the human equipped with all the characteristics enumerated above. In this way Aristotle reduces monstrosity (*tera*) to deformity (*anaperia*).<sup>394</sup> No longer a mythical or divine creature occupying the fringes of human society, with Aristotle the monster becomes a fact of animal reproduction.

If monstrosity is a condition relative to the *eidos* of a given animal and not to the *genos* “animal,” then monsters are only ever deformed animals, robbed of the necessary particularities of their kind by unruly matter—they do not exist as their own distinct kind. In this way the particularities of humans that serve to

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<sup>394</sup> *GA* IV.3 769b11-30.

distinguish them from other animals cannot be considered monstrous, for they are part and parcel of the human *eidos*. But if what saves the human from being considered a monstrosity, a kind of accident of nature, is in a sense the incommensurability of the different animal species, how then can we account for various comments Aristotle makes comparing animals to humans in a manner that suggests *they*—not humans—are a kind of deformity? Aristotle writes that in humans alone do “the natural parts hold their natural position,” extending up toward the heavens, and that all animals excepting humans are “dwarf-like.”<sup>395</sup> Indeed, Aristotle holds that humans are not only the most natural bipeds, but that humans are more (*malista*) natural than all other animals.<sup>396</sup> On the great scale of living beings, animals that birth live young are the “highest” in that they are the most perfect (*teleia*), and among these, the human being is the “first” (*proton*).<sup>397</sup> To be “first” in this sense is to be the standard from which all other kinds deviate, the most complete of animals.

Humans serve as this standard precisely because of the unique capacities they possess: insofar as humans are animals that can think, the capacity to think must be considered part of the animal soul. As only humans think, they are the only animal that makes actual all the capacities of the animal soul—they are thus the most complete of animals, and insofar as it is nature that has assigned the power of thought to the animal soul, humans are likewise the most natural.

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<sup>395</sup> *PA* II.10 656a11-12; IV.10 686b4-6.

<sup>396</sup> *Prog.* 5 706b10; 4 706a9-20.

<sup>397</sup> *GA* II.4 737b25-26.

While different animals may appear to possess capacities that humans do not, these are ultimately only particular material instantiations of powers organized otherwise among humans. It is the soul that moves, that imparts to the animal its manner of being, and the most complete actualization of the soul in a manner of being is that of the human. By making particular human capacities the standard of all animal souls, Aristotle transforms human excess into animal deficiency. As animals do for the most part live, reproduce, and die within the range of possibilities enabled by their particular *eidos*, their deficiencies *qua* animal are no more monstrous than human excess was found to be, yet the kinds of lives they are able to live are still held up in contrast to the human.

In this sense, Aristotle can be seen to extend and transform the view of Protagoras that “man is the measure of all things.” While Aristotle himself rejects what he takes to be Protagoras’ view, it is not due to the apparent anthropocentrism of the claim. According to Aristotle, what Protagoras means by humans being the measure of all things is that what *appears* right to each individual must be right for that individual—for another to dispute what is right for that individual is to attempt to impose one’s own understanding of apparent right upon them. Hence, there is no external arbiter of right, only a world of appearances among which humans must decide their own course, and the threat

of relativism looms large.<sup>398</sup> However, if like Aristotle we hold that appearances concern the provinces of imagination and sensation, and what differentiates humans from other animals is not these but the capacity for thought, a capacity that exceeds the bodily world of appearances and extends toward the divine, then the problem with Protagoras' claim is not that it places humans at the centre of the world, but that it places *animals* there.<sup>399</sup> In order for the human being to be the measure of all things, or at least, the standard from which all other animals are thought to deviate, there must be some fixed point to which the position of the human can be anchored. This point is the divinity of thought, which we will recall is for Aristotle infallible. As only humans are receptive to the thought that comes from the outside, not only are they possessed of the fullest range of animal capacities, but only they are capable of measuring according to a standard free from the particularities of their bodily organs, from their perceptions. Only humans have access to divine thought, and thus only they can strive towards infallibility, even if its actual attainment is perhaps impossible. It is for this

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<sup>398</sup> *Meta.* XI.6 1062b13-20. Cf. Plato's *Theaetetus* 161d-e, where Socrates makes a similar argument, asking: "For if that opinion is true to each person which he acquires through sensation, and no one man can discern another's condition better than he himself, and one man has no better right to investigate whether another's opinion is true or false than he himself, but, as we have said several times, each man is to form his own opinions by himself, and these opinions are always right and true, why in the world, my friend, was Protagoras wise, so that he could rightly be thought worthy to be the teacher of other men and to be well paid, and why were we ignorant creatures and obliged to go to school to him, if each person is the measure of his own wisdom?" English citations from the *Theaetetus* refer to *Plato: Theaetetus; Sophist*, trans. Harold N. Fowler (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921).

<sup>399</sup> Indeed, at 161c of the *Theaetetus*, Socrates mocks what he sees as the arbitrariness of Protagorean claim, asking why a pig or a "dog-faced baboon" might not be made the measure of things, given that they also possess sensation.

reason that “man is the measure of all things”: because of his relation to the divine.

In this manner Aristotle can be said to have tamed to some extent both the terrifying power of the gods, and their occasionally monstrous and unruly children. In elevating a kind of pure thought to divine status, Aristotle re-orientes human beings in their relationship to their world, both natural and supernatural. But here it must be asked: at what cost? That is, there is a certain egalitarianism to Protagorean relativism, in which one can discern a possible support for democratic practices,<sup>400</sup> and perhaps even a kind of accommodation between animal species. With Aristotle, however, the terrain has shifted. While humans are indeed animals, the kind of animal they are makes their place in the natural world fundamentally unlike other animals. We might then ask: are all humans equally unlike other animals? That is, while we might assume from the preceding exposition that all humans are capable of being human by virtue of their capacity for thought, insofar as there are different kinds of humans, might there be different capacities for thought? Human bodies also differ—to what extent can these material or physical differences be said to be evidence of psychic differences, and how far can a human deviate from the norm before it must be considered monstrous, sharing perhaps more with the animal than with the human? To these questions we presently turn.

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<sup>400</sup> See Wood, *Citizens to Lords*, 53-60.

## **Chapter Eight: Human Plurality and Inequality**

The most well known distinctions drawn between human beings in Aristotle's writings are perhaps those drawn between freemen and slaves, and within this distinction, slaves by convention and slaves by nature. While I would not deny the importance of these distinctions to Aristotle's understanding of politics, in keeping with the discussion of Aristotle's works this far I will place these distinctions aside and instead focus upon distinctions between humans that are discernible in Aristotle's non-political writings: specifically, the distinctions Aristotle understands to exist between women and men, and between men of a "high" and "low" sort. While Aristotle does not organize any of his treatises along these lines—that is, he has no treatise "On Women" or "On Higher and Lower Sorts"—the particularities of women and other people Aristotle takes to be naturally inferior make frequent appearances in Aristotle's attempts to grasp what is proper to human life. I have consequently set to organizing this chapter around what Aristotle has to say about these people in order to better evaluate how Aristotle casts the relationship between humans and other animals in terms of human plurality. If humans differ among themselves, do these differences have a bearing on that which is held to differentiate humans from other animals in general, namely thought and the intellectual capacities?

I argue that yes, indeed, Aristotle does not consider humans as an undifferentiated block sitting at the apex of the scale of animal life. Some humans are, for Aristotle, more like animals than others according to their relation to thought and the intellectual capacities, and in examining these different shapes of human life we gain a glimpse of what Aristotle takes to be the ideal human being. This glimpse also reveals the extent to which Aristotle has performed a kind of transformation of the values of the world of poetic myth. Whereas the great heroes of that world were those who were brought into proximity with the gods through their imitation and mastery of animals, for Aristotle the divine and the animal are at *opposing ends* of a hierarchy of the living. Thus according to Aristotle one cannot become godlike by imitating an animal, but rather, only by striving toward that which is most divine in human beings; that is, by striving toward the knowledge attained through the access to divine thought and the actualization of its related capacities. Only through thought are humans most divine, and those who are most divine are, unlike in the world of poetic myth, least like other animals. In this way Aristotle's ideas appear to resonate with the Eleatic Stranger of Plato's *Statesman*: philosophy comes to serve the role played by sacrifice in the world of poetic myth, which we will recall, was to establish and uphold the distinction between gods, humans, and animals that made possible a certain kind of community. In occupying the position of sacrifice, philosophy thus takes up the mantle against poetry and its blurring of

the boundaries drawn and upheld between gods, humans, and animals; however, unlike sacrifice, or at least publicly proclaimed sacrifices made on behalf of the city, philosophy does not appear to be equally available to all. That is, the divisions between god, human, and animal sanctioned by Aristotelian philosophy allow for a hierarchy of humans, between those that stretch closer to the divine, and those that wallow or prowl closer to other animals. Understanding these distinctions and the way in which they lay the foundations of political inequality is the task of this chapter.

### *On Sexual Difference*

Aristotle's thoughts on women and how they differ from men are perhaps as notorious as his thoughts on slavery, and like his thoughts on slavery, there is no definite consensus on where Aristotle stands. While most contemporary commentators acknowledge a clearly sexist dimension to Aristotle's biology, there is disagreement over how exactly his sexism works, and consequently, how deeply it ought to be seen to stain other aspects of his thought.<sup>401</sup> Despite these differences, however, it is possible to discern a certain prominent tendency, wherein Aristotle's biology is seen as "both misogynist and silly," yet not a real

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<sup>401</sup> See Devin M. Henry, "How Sexist Is Aristotle's Developmental Biology?" *Phronesis* 52 (2007): 251-269; and Karen M. Nielsen, "The Private Parts of Animals: Aristotle on the Teleology of Sexual Difference," *Phronesis* 53 (2008): 373-405. Cf. Stephen G. Salkever, who argues that "Aristotle's biology is in fact the basis for his insistence on evaluating the dignity and importance of women more highly than did the culture in which he lived" (201). See *Finding the Mean* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 199), Ch. 4.

threat to other laudable aspects of his thought—only a “grossly flawed application of methods” that would, properly applied, reveal the essential similarity between both female and male capacities.<sup>402</sup> Indeed, it is not Aristotle’s methods or his metaphysics that are seen to be at fault, but an inability to adequately separate these from his own personal biases and those of his society.<sup>403</sup> Moreover, the overwhelming majority of differences Aristotle observes between females and males—and women and men especially—are differences of material, which Aristotle considers less important than differences of soul or form. In this way those that would seek a feminist dimension in Aristotle’s works tend to argue for the fundamental similarity of *human* capacities, while downplaying the relevance of differences in material (i.e. bodily differences) and the possible relation of those differences to other habits and characteristics Aristotle takes to differ between women and men.<sup>404</sup> Or in other words, Aristotelian *feminism* is a dimension of Aristotelian *humanism*.<sup>405</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, “Aristotle, Feminism, and Needs for Functioning,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle*, ed. Cynthia A. Freeland (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 249-250. See also *The Fragility of Goodness*, 371.

<sup>403</sup> Marguerite Deslauriers, “Sex and Essence in Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and Biology,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle*, 140; Charlotte Witt, “Form, Normativity, and Gender in Aristotle: A Feminist Perspective,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle*, 130.

<sup>404</sup> Deslauriers, 155.

<sup>405</sup> “Aristotelian feminism ceases to be concerned with gender issues solely [...] I think that American feminism is too much propelled by questions of narrow self-interest, too little by a more generous and general concern for human functioning” in Nussbaum, “Aristotle, Feminism...”, 256-257. See also Larry Arnhart, “A Sociobiological Defense of Aristotle’s Sexual Politics,” *International Political Science Review* 15.4 (1994): 389-415; and James Bernard Murphy, “Aristotle, Feminism, and Biology: A Response to Larry Arnhart,” *International Political Science Review* 15.4 (1994): 417-426.

However, as we have already seen, Aristotle's understanding of the relationship between soul and body, between form and matter, and between the actual and the potential, knits these terms too closely for there to be the kind of distance the above position requires in order for material differences to indicate nothing of kind. While we might agree with Nussbaum that for Aristotle "the body is the scene of all our ethical achievements,"<sup>406</sup> the body is not a neutral support of these achievements, for the very shape and organization of the body bears the imprint of the powers of the soul. Just like the aforementioned child that is nothing more than "some kind of animal," so is the sexless subject of such humanism not a human at all: it is rather, by Aristotle's lights, a monster. As we have seen, monsters are for Aristotle those instances where, contrary to nature, the matter is unable to adequately reflect the form—where the body has been unable to convey the powers of the soul in their minute particularity. In this sense, women evade monstrosity only by being consistently reproduced, but if they are not monsters, but a natural kind of "deformity," then the implication is that they are either of another kind (*eidōs*) than men, or that within the same human *eidōs* there are souls that more closely conform to that *eidōs*, and those that do not. If some souls can be considered better actualizations of the form than others, we can expect the bodies of those souls to differ also.

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<sup>406</sup> Nussbaum, "Aristotle, Feminism...", 254.

In his biological writings Aristotle gives an account of a great many physical differences between women and men: here I will examine only a small number of these, choosing those that I think reflect important structural features in Aristotle's account of the human body and that imply differences of the soul. Women, according to Aristotle, have more blood than any other animal, and their blood is thicker and darker than the blood of men.<sup>407</sup> Women are less muscular, have thinner bones, less resilient flesh and are generally smaller and more delicate than men.<sup>408</sup> Women also have smaller brains than men, and fewer sutures on their skulls.<sup>409</sup> Females develop more slowly in the womb than males, and more quickly than their male counterparts after birth, ultimately living shorter lives. Moreover, women pregnant with females tend more frequently to suffer pain and various complications with their pregnancies.<sup>410</sup> These differences cannot simply be dismissed as "silly," even in cases where their falsity can more or less easily be demonstrated,<sup>411</sup> as the point is not their veracity, but rather, how these material differences serve to compose the particularity necessary to be a human being, and in so doing, inscribe this human into a set of relations that is anything but politically irrelevant.

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<sup>407</sup> *HA* III.19 521a23-28.

<sup>408</sup> *HA* IV. 11 538b7-15;

<sup>409</sup> *PA* II.7 653a26-653b1.

<sup>410</sup> *HA* VII.3 583b20ff.

<sup>411</sup> While we may laugh today at the suggestion that women's brains are smaller than men's, I include here the 'more or less' in that to actually cut open human beings and compare their brain sizes seems to me an activity requiring a considerable degree of determination (i.e. not exactly one *easily* accomplished), and as has already been noted, depends also on certain socio-political features.

For instance, recall that in differentiating humans from other animals, Aristotle held that while hot, thick blood was conducive to strength, cool, thin blood was conducive to intelligence. Human blood is a kind of balance between the two, being both hot and thin, and in this manner conducive to sensation, movement, and intelligence. If women have thicker blood than men, then in this way they are, like beasts of burden, more sluggish than men, a little less well equipped for dexterous movements and sensation. These points are underscored by other bodily traits: soft muscles and thin bones are poor supports of movement and activity,<sup>412</sup> just as flaccid flesh does not stimulate sensation and the powers of discrimination.

That women are held to have smaller brains is also significant to the translation of psychic capacities into matter, though not in the way we might think today. Recall that brains for Aristotle do not think, but serve to cool the body. Women are naturally cooler than men, and consequently do not require brains of the same size; for this same reason, their skulls have fewer sutures, for less heat emanates up from the region of the heart and lung before exiting through the top of the head.<sup>413</sup> This last point is the most important: the skull and the brain are as they are in women due to their lack of heat, and it is precisely the heat in the soul that serves to differentiate “high” and “low” along Aristotle’s

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<sup>412</sup> *PA* II.9 655a11-13.

<sup>413</sup> *PA* II.7 653a26-653b1.

scale of animal life.<sup>414</sup> As the soul moves the body, and heat is a motive force, bodies that are larger or more dexterous must have souls with more heat. As it is through the soul that the form of a living thing is imparted to its matter, material differences between living things can be taken to suggest differences in soul. Insofar as women and men have consistently different levels of vital heat, then it would appear the only explanation within the edifice of Aristotle's biology is that they possess psychic differences, and that their bodily differences are something like the effects of these differences.

As Aristotle treats both women and men as *anthropos*, making them variations of the same kind (*eidos*) of animal, that there are identifiable consistencies between women and men linked to the heat of the soul suggests a range of unequal psychic possibilities within the sphere of a single *eidos*.<sup>415</sup> In this way we might think of Aristotle's distinction between women and men to mirror the distinction between humans and other animals: just as humans are animals possessed of souls which most perfectly express animal possibilities, so do men, according to Aristotle, more perfectly express human possibilities than do women.<sup>416</sup> The great scale of animal life does not simply stop at humans as one undifferentiated block, superior to all other animals, but rather, certain

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<sup>414</sup> Recall *OYOA* 19.13 477a18-20. See also *LSL* 5 466b15; *GA* II.1 732a16-20.

<sup>415</sup> *Meta.* X.9 1058a29-32. For a discussion of forms and the degree of particularity or generality to which they are meant to refer, see Charlotte Witt, "Form, Reproduction, and Inherited Characteristics in Aristotle's Generation of Animals," *Phronesis* 30:1 (1985): 46-57.

<sup>416</sup> Nielsen calls this notion the "degrees of perfection" model. See Nielsen, "The Private Parts of Animals," 374-380.

humans are higher—and thus more unlike other animals—than others. Just as humans possess bodies more attuned to the needs of thought and the intellectual capacities than other animals, so do men, though presumably to a lesser degree, possess bodies more attuned to the needs of thought and the intellectual capacities than do women. This point is further emphasized by the idea that women develop unevenly and are generally less healthy when pregnant with females rather than males: being pregnant with a female is almost like being ill, for females are, as Aristotle puts most brutally, a kind of mutilated (*peperomenon*) male, a natural deformity (*anaperian*).<sup>417</sup> For this reason Aristotle will also compare women to boys, for both are, following this logic, underdeveloped men.<sup>418</sup> Yet while children are, like other animals in comparison to humans, “dwarf-like” in their disproportioned bodies and their inability to stand properly erect, boys will one day be men, while women, presumably, will not. Thus the “footprints” (*ichne*) or seeds of the fully developed human can be found in the animality of the child, especially a boy, while a woman represents a different instantiation of the human animal.<sup>419</sup>

Aristotle also uses character traits to reinforce the distinction he draws between female and male, and in the *History of Animals* he gives a fairly extensive list of these traits. Though Deslauriers argues that Aristotle offers no

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<sup>417</sup>GA II.3 737a27-29; IV.6 775a14-15.

<sup>418</sup>GA I.20 728a16-20.

<sup>419</sup>PA IV.10 686b11-15; *Prog.* 11 710b10-20; *HA* VIII.1 588a27-588b3. Aristotle uses the word *therion* in this last passage to designate the kind of animal the child resembles, apparently to indicate that this animality is not simply another kind of animal, but a deviance from the completely human.

theoretical account of these differences and gives no evidence that they have any connection with organs or capacities,<sup>420</sup> a certain consistency between these traits can be deciphered and related to Aristotle's more general definition of "female" that suggests otherwise. For instance, Aristotle holds that the females in most species tend to be less "spirited" (*athumotera*) and less courageous than their male counterparts, while also being more impulsive, mischievous, and "softer in disposition" (*malakotera*). These differences are most visible in animals with the most developed characters, and, unsurprisingly at this point, Aristotle holds that human beings possess the most (*malista*) developed of animal characters. In addition to these character traits women are thought to be more compassionate, more tearful, more jealous, more querulous, less hopeful, less moved by shame, more prone to lying and deception, less active, and possessed of better memories.<sup>421</sup>

While these traits might seem to be little more than a catalogue of the gender stereotypes prevalent in Aristotle's society, like Aristotle's comments on female anatomy, they cannot simply be dismissed. What all these traits have in common is their passivity: they are all changing reactions to or impressions received from the mutable objects of the sensual world, concerned with the spheres of sensation and imagination, and to varying degrees distant from thought and the intellectual powers. As Aristotle defines the male as "that which

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<sup>420</sup> Deslauriers, 155.

<sup>421</sup> *HA IX.1* 608a32-608b15.

generates in another” and the female “that which generates in itself,” he thus assigns an active or creative principle (*poietikon*) to the male, whose semen is thought to bear the form as psychic principle, and a passive (*pathetikon*) principle to the female, whose discharge serves as the matter that the soul will use to form itself.<sup>422</sup> Aristotle will even compare this process to the arts: the male is the *demiourgon*, the craftsman or artist, whose activity serves as the appropriate *techne* in shaping the female matter into a human being. Male activity and female passivity represent different capacities (*dunamin*), and it is according to these capacities that one is male or female.<sup>423</sup> As humans are male or female according to these capacities, then it must be that they are male or female according to differences in the soul, as bodily and character differences are expressions of the soul, and the soul is the seat of the capacities. Thus when Aristotle equates the first principle of movement in generation with the male, and claims it to be better (*beltion*) and more divine (*theioteron*) than female matter,<sup>424</sup> he is not simply repeating the stereotypes particular to his society, but rather, he is refining them into a coherent system of thought. While this system remains rough in many places—as noted by Deslauriers, Aristotle does not explicitly connect female characters to female organs and capacities in one and the same text—he leaves a well-defined *gestalt* that strongly implies their

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<sup>422</sup> *HA* I.3 489a10-11; *GA* I.2 716a13-14; *GA* I.21 729b13-14.

<sup>423</sup> *GA* II.4 738b19-26; II.4 740b24-27.

<sup>424</sup> *GA* II.1 732a8-11.

relation, and which to deny seems something akin to refusing to see the forest for the trees.

That Aristotle's biology outlines a natural basis for sexual inequality does not, however, mean that women are for Aristotle utterly incapable of partaking in the activities that define men as men. The "higher" animals are for Aristotle more "independent (*autarkester*) in their nature (*phusin*),"<sup>425</sup> the implication here being that activities of certain "higher" animals are more complex and to a greater degree open to contingencies than "lower" animals. Or in other words, the activities of "higher" animals at least are not prescribed in a determinate way by nature; moreover, as we have already seen, "nature" itself is frequently used by Aristotle to mean something akin to "that which holds for the most part" and not "that which is necessary in all cases." In this way we might expect the activity of certain animals to vary, not only within their own natures, but even to the point of being capable of living in ways contrary to nature. Such is the case with certain domestic animals, which come to breed in all seasons, like humans, owing to the availability of food and shelter.<sup>426</sup> Similarly, Aristotle writes of the change in gelded animals: through the mutilation of only one organ, the entire bodily nature of the animal is changed, and the male takes on a female nature.<sup>427</sup> And perhaps most surprisingly, Aristotle also notes that certain hens, through changes in their activities (*prattein*), come to change their characters (*ethe*) to such an

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<sup>425</sup> *GA* II.1 732a16-17.

<sup>426</sup> *HA* V.8 542a26-28.

<sup>427</sup> *HA* VIII.2 589b29-590a8.

extent as to be almost identical to males. According to Aristotle, if a hen beats a cock in a fight, she will imitate the cock by crowing and attempting to tread him—Aristotle even claims that the crest on the hen’s head and the tail-feathers on its rump will rise up, and in some cases the bird will even grow spurs.<sup>428</sup>

While Aristotle’s account here seems again to sound much like a folktale, it is not without basis in his philosophy. Aristotle writes that actuality is logically prior to potentiality<sup>429</sup>: it is the actual that determines the potential, and the actual is form, the potential the matter, and in living things, the form is conveyed to the matter through the soul. The soul thus stands on the side of actuality, and as we have seen, the soul is activity.<sup>430</sup> Consequently changes in the activity of the animal compel, at least in the case of hens, a change in the matter necessary to support this activity, just as an absence of the necessary matter to support a given activity makes that activity impossible (i.e. the case of gelded animals). It is unclear how broad the conclusions from these examples might range. While Aristotle is clear in his example of the hen that this account concerns birds, and no explicit attempt is made to connect such changes to humans, if humans are indeed “higher” animals and these animals have greater “independence” from their natures, then one might expect an even greater degree of variety in forms of life that serve to confuse the natural categories in which human life is organized,

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<sup>428</sup> *HA* IX.49 631b5-11.

<sup>429</sup> *OS* II.4 415a20. See also the *Metaphysics*, where Aristotle writes: “where one is better and another worse, the better is always prior” (*Meta.* III.3 999a13-14).

<sup>430</sup> *OS* II.2 414a15-19.

even those apparently so basic as female and male. Then again, the opposite also seems plausible. Insofar as humans have the most developed characters of any animal, making the differences between female and male more complete and visible in humans, the perfection of the human *eidos*, as the standard of all other animals, might actually serve to impede further transformations.

Regardless of the potential fluidity of the categories of female and male according to changes in the activities undertaken by the soul, for Aristotle, women and men are unequal instantiations of the human form and their inequalities stem from capacities in the soul. Thus, while humans are capable of a wide variety of forms of life, they are not all capable of the same things in equal measure, and for Aristotle, some are decidedly better than others. Specifically, those that are better, those that live more in-keeping with the possibilities available particularly to humans as humans, are closer to thought and the intellectual capacities, while others are closer to other animals. In order to better understand the inequalities among humans and how these relate to the human animal distinction, we must consequently look to other kinds of human beings.

### *'Low Sorts' and the Physical Features of the Best Human*

We have seen that Aristotle takes the bodily differences between women and men to indicate differences in their respective psychic capacities. However, while sexual difference is clearly an important distinction for human life as Aristotle

understands it, not all of the great variety of bodily differences that compose human beings can be attributed to differences of sex. We must now ask: if the particular physical traits that serve to distinguish a female body from a male one can indicate, at least in humans, a psychic difference, do all, or at least other, physical differences between humans likewise indicate psychic differences? In the following I will attempt to show that while Aristotle does not take every physical particularity among human bodies to indicate a difference in psychic capacity, he does link a number of such differences with character traits. Using these pairings of physical and character traits, it is possible to build a kind of “physical model” of the good person; that is, it is possible to construct archetypes of what a bad and good person ought to look like, and so gain a more detailed picture of the Aristotelian ideal, and how this relates to thought and animality.

We will recall that the human face, though similar to the face of an ape, must for Aristotle be considered unique thanks to the human capacity for thought, which, through the articulation of thought through the voice in language, serves to give the human face its particular features. In a similar vein, Aristotle associates certain general differences between faces with character traits. People with large foreheads are considered “slow” (*braduteroi*), while those with small foreheads are quick (*eukinetoî*); those with broad foreheads tend to be easily distraught (*ekstatikoi*), while those with rounded foreheads are likely

to be spirited (*thumikoi*).<sup>431</sup> While green eyes are a sign of both good vision and the best disposition (*beltistou*), narrow eyes are a sign of a bad disposition (*kakoetheias*), particularly if where the upper and lower eyelids meet near the nose is fleshy. Moreover, eyes that blink repeatedly are a sign of indecision, while eyes that stare indicate impudence—the best (*beltistou*) is the mean between these two, neither blinking excessively, nor staring.<sup>432</sup> People with large ears that stick out are prone to “irrelevant talk” (*morologias*) or “chattering” (*adoleschias*), while the best people (*beltistou*) have medium-sized ears sticking out from their heads at a medium position. Likewise, the best tongue, capable of the clearest articulation, is that which is medium in size and width.<sup>433</sup>

In addition to these descriptions of the face, Aristotle also adds that people with flat feet are prone to wickedness (*panourgoi*).<sup>434</sup> Aristotle also links the pitch of the voice and its development in boys to their sexual habits, even claiming that men who fail to moderate their lusts never reach their full bodily development, and tend to age more quickly than other men.<sup>435</sup> Voices that break too quickly thus never develop in the manner appropriate to men, which is to be deep, and this depth Aristotle considers superior to the high-pitched.<sup>436</sup> Lastly, just as the superior intelligence and powers of discrimination of humans were

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<sup>431</sup> HA I.8 491b9-14.

<sup>432</sup> HA I.10 492a2-3; I.9 491b21-25; I.10 492a10-12.

<sup>433</sup> HA I. 11 492b1-3; 30-32.

<sup>434</sup> HA I.15 494a16-18.

<sup>435</sup> HA VII.1 581a19-21; VII.1 582a23-27.

<sup>436</sup> GA V.7 786b35-787a2.

seen above to depend upon our superior sense of touch, which were in turn supported by our soft flesh, so among humans, Aristotle holds that those with the softest flesh are better equipped for the activities that constitute thinking (*dianoian*) than those whose flesh is hard.<sup>437</sup> Again, while Aristotle's account appears to compile a list of culturally specific stereotypes, before such an accusation can be leveled, we must first look at the physical differences Aristotle does not appear to consider relevant indicators of character or psychic differences.

Regardless of whatever racial stereotypes may have prevailed in Aristotle's day, and quite unlike modern racism, Aristotle appears to invest very little meaning in skin color. Though Aristotle, in the general comments on human beings that appear throughout his works, will frequently refer to "white" (*leukos*) as a common human property,<sup>438</sup> and thus serve to communicate his own idea of what color a human typically is, there is little evidence to suggest a kind of hierarchy of skin colors like the hierarchies he establishes between other differences. To begin with, *leukos* is used not only for white, but also to indicate that something is more generally "light;" its opposing term, *melanos*, more typically indicates "dark" rather than "black," though Aristotle will also make specific reference to Ethiopians as *melanon anthropon*. At any rate, the gradation of shades existing between light and dark does not map itself onto

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<sup>437</sup> *OS* II.9 421a20-26.

<sup>438</sup> See for example, *On Dreams* 1 458b14; and *Meta*, IX.7 1049a31-32; IX.10 1051b7-8; X.5 1055b34, among others.

distinctions like Greek and barbarian, and Aristotle's references to Ethiopians are used as evidence concerning general human traits, such as the color of bones, teeth, and semen<sup>439</sup>—he says nothing about Ethiopians in terms of any psychic differences they may possess as Ethiopians.

Aristotle does, however, correlate other physical properties with light and dark. For instance, he claims people with lighter skin, both male and female, produce a greater quantity of discharge during sex. Given that Aristotle considers humans to emit the greatest discharge of any animal relative to its size, we might be tempted here to see in this claim an attempt to justify lighter skinned people as the standard of what is properly human. However, Aristotle claims that this quantity can be made to vary through diet, thus making the difference external and contingent, as opposed to a difference in capacity that would indicate a psychic difference.<sup>440</sup> Moreover, he claims that women with darker skin produce healthier milk,<sup>441</sup> which seems to be out of a step with a notion of people with darker skin being a kind of deviance from the norm of light skin. We can find the reason for these assertions in what Aristotle takes to be the cause of whiteness: vaporous air.<sup>442</sup>

According to Aristotle, when the matter that composes a thing, even something like human skin, has a high water content, it tends to be lighter in

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<sup>439</sup> *HA* III.9 517a18-20; III.22 523a14-18.

<sup>440</sup> *HA* VII.2 583a5-14.

<sup>441</sup> *HA* III.21 523a10.

<sup>442</sup> *GA* V.6 786a12-13.

color, while objects with lower water content tend to be darker. It is for this reason that lighter skinned people emit a greater discharge, and that this amount varies according to diet, as lighter skinned people are held to possess a greater amount of water in their bodies to begin with, and this amount can be augmented by eating foods with high water content. It is likewise for this reason that the people in hot and dry regions have darker skin, and why Ethiopians have curly hair, for the sun and the wind darkens the skin, and dryness curls the hair.<sup>443</sup> Thus, while heat determines the nature of the skin and the hair, Aristotle seems to hold that these differences between the color of skin and the texture of hair are not differences of the heat in the soul, which would indicate a difference of position along the animal scale, but differences of heat in the external environment, which are contingent and variable in a way that does not necessarily effect the movements of the soul. In this light, despite his frequent pairing of *leukos* and its cognates with “human,” it is unsurprising that Aristotle will claim that being *leukon* is “accidental” to human beings, for it does not appear to have a bearing on human nature.<sup>444</sup>

Aristotle’s thoughts on hair and skin color serve to give some perspective to his pairing of certain physical and character traits. That is, Aristotle’s comments about the shape of eyes and ears ought not to be dismissed as the repetition of his society’s stereotypes, for he is quite willing to reject received

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<sup>443</sup> *GA* V.6 785b10; V.3 783a1-2.

<sup>444</sup> *Meta.* IV.4 1007a31-32.

wisdom where he can satisfactorily demonstrate it to be false.<sup>445</sup> Rather, it would appear that insofar as human activities that are directed by and compose the soul must occur in a certain environment, they are subject to the variety of material contingencies of that environment. These contingencies are capable of physically altering bodies, and in so doing, altering the capacities of a soul as we have seen above, but not all physical alterations alter the soul. The shape and position of eyes, ears, and tongue, along with the resiliency of the flesh, are all important material supports for the psychic powers of sensation, discrimination, and intelligence, bending as they do toward the divinity of thought. Even flat feet, which to an extent inhibit movement, and the shape of the forehead, which takes its shape from the skull and which we have seen to be molded by the heat rising up from the heart and lung, suggest psychic differences. Skin color apparently does not suggest a psychic difference, for Aristotle notes no evidence that it either limits or enhances some capacity.

Insofar as a physical trait is seen to be caused by a psychic capacity, it can be paired with a character trait. Characters are the products of habits, and habits are particular tendencies in activity. The soul, as we have already seen, is activity. Thus character traits concern the habitual activity of a soul, which is both caused by and causes in turn psychic capacities. That is, Aristotle thinks it likely that a good character follows from a good soul, for a good soul is one

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<sup>445</sup> Consider, for example, Aristotle's dismissal of Herodotus' notion that Ethiopian men emit black sperm (*HA* III.22 523a15-18; *GA* II.2 736a10-12).

endowed with the fullest capacities available to a human, which for Aristotle means to be most attuned toward thought and the intellectual capacities. Insofar as the activity of a soul is directed by thinking it will produce the kind of character most likely to engage in the fullest activity of the soul: like the body that is shaped by the soul in the manner best suited to support the activity that makes that soul the kind of soul that it is, so is character shaped by the soul in order to support the kind of activity that makes the soul the kind that it is. Both a good body and a good character are necessary for a good soul to be a good soul, and therefore a defect in body or character can, to an extent, serve to inhibit the powers of the soul, denying it the fullest range of activity available to a soul of its kind. In this way, certain physical traits can be seen to indicate particularities of character, and these can be seen as expressions of the quality of a given soul.<sup>446</sup>

From the above descriptions we can therefore begin to discern the appearance of Aristotle's ideal human: male, with a low voice, rounded forehead, green eyes, ears of medium size and position, a medium sized tongue, soft flesh, and arched feet. Though this list is short, vague, and presumably open to some variation—nowhere to my knowledge does Aristotle make these traits actual criteria for anything—it nevertheless does paint a picture of what Aristotle thinks the best pupil, and perhaps also philosopher or ruler, should look like. In giving such a particular outline of what Aristotle takes to be the best human being, we

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<sup>446</sup> On this point see Judith A. Swanson, "Aristotle on Nature, Human Nature, and Justice," in *Action and Contemplation: Studies in the Moral and Political Thought of Aristotle*, eds. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 227-228.

may here get the feeling of having painted an ancient Greek statue—accustomed as we are to seeing Aristotle’s best human being stripped down to practice and habit, work and virtue, it may offend our aesthetic sensibilities to see the grey on grey of the soul clad so garishly in the colors of bodily matter. Yet, just as statues were in Aristotle’s time painted, so is his ideal of the best human being so physically adorned, and to deny or trivialize this is to overlook the bodily dimension of his thought—that is, the *aesthetic* dimension of his thought— and the way in which the activities of the soul serve to distinguish themselves among others.

*Conclusion: Knowledge, Sensation, Animality, and Art*

Before I might conclude Part II, one more dimension of Aristotle’s thought concerning the best kind of human being remains to be examined in order for our portrait to be complete: the particular relation of the best humans to thought, and the kind of relationship this legitimizes between different human beings. In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle makes a distinction between people with experience (*empeiroi*), and people with knowledge (*eidotos*). While experience may often have the appearance of science (*episteme*) or art (*techne*), Aristotle holds it to be different in that the capacity for experience is produced by memory: experience is a kind of narrative forged out of “many memories” (*pollai mnemai*), and as such,

does not extend to the “why”—it cannot grasp causes.<sup>447</sup> Knowledge, on the other hand, like art and science, concerns causes, and as such, is turned toward the most (*malista*) general (*katholou*), attempting to know all particular things in this general way.<sup>448</sup> Herein lays their key difference: experience depends on memory, and memory on sensation (*aisthesis*), while knowledge of the general is farthest from sensation. Unlike experience, then, knowledge possesses a kind of life independent of the knower, and as such can be taught, while experience remains bound up with the senses of the person. It is thus the mark of the knower to be capable of teaching; one without knowledge can, at best, hope to become a pupil.

However, the inequality between the person of knowledge and the person of experience goes deeper than simply teacher and pupil. Though Aristotle appears to suggest in the *Metaphysics* that the chain of “many memories” needed for experience is particular to human beings, writing that animals other than humans “have little connected experience,”<sup>449</sup> we have seen above that in other writings Aristotle indicates otherwise: memory, imagination, and sensation are all capacities humans share with numerous other animals. In the light of these writings, nothing that Aristotle says about experience in these passages from the *Metaphysics* suggests it to be a power particular to humans. Moreover, Aristotle does not appear to hold memory in such high regard: it is the power of

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<sup>447</sup> *Meta.* I.1 980b26-981a5; 981a27-28.

<sup>448</sup> *Meta.* I.2 982a21-25.

<sup>449</sup> *Meta.* I.1 980b26-27.

recollection (*anamnesis*), not memory (*mnemne*), that is particular to humans—not only does Aristotle assign a greater power of memory to women, but he also claims that “slow people” (*bradeis*) have better memories, while the “quick-witted and clever” tend to excel at recollecting.<sup>450</sup> Thus it would appear that the activity of the experienced person has much in common with other animals, drawing upon basically the same capacities as they do, while the activity of the knowledgeable person, being farthest from the senses, leads away from the animal toward independent knowledge, and is thus more properly human. Like manual workers (*cheirotechnon*), the experienced people act without knowing what they do, just “as fire burns,” following their habits as the inanimate follow natural compulsion, while knowledgeable people, like master-workers (*architektonas*), act in light of the causes, and thus know in the truer sense.<sup>451</sup> As one can only ever be a pupil, and so receive the instruction of a knowledgeable person, if one is properly habituated to do so,<sup>452</sup> insofar as the experienced blindly follow their habits many lack even the capacity to learn: instead, they must obey.<sup>453</sup>

In this manner Aristotle draws a distinction between people according to their relation to knowledge, making the knowledgeable the rulers of those possessing only experience. Moreover, the knowledgeable are more completely

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<sup>450</sup> *OM* 1 449b6-8.

<sup>451</sup> *Meta.* I.1 981a27-981b4.

<sup>452</sup> “The effect which lectures produce on a hearer depends on his habits” (*Meta.* II.3 994b31).

<sup>453</sup> *Meta* I.2 982a18-19.

or distinctly human than those who possess only experience, as their knowledge is closer to the independence of divine thought, while human experience remains within the sphere of capacities humans share with certain other animals. We must then see Aristotle's earlier pronouncements on the physical appearance of the best human in this light: there is a certain animality in the large forehead, the narrowed eyes, and the large and turned-out ears of some people—it is as if what is human in them has not mastered what is animal, unlike the features of the best sort, which clearly indicate the distinction of the human. And indeed, this is the conclusion we ought to draw concerning the major distinctions between human beings Aristotle examines in his non-political writings: some humans are more perfectly human than others. These are more perfectly human thanks to their relation with the divinity of thought, which depends not only upon good habits and education, but the quality of their souls, which, to a certain extent, is revealed in their physical appearance. Those who can be called less than perfectly human bear a greater resemblance to animals than their betters, and like animals, must accept their rule. But how are they to be ruled? Such a question would appear to be answerable only by appeal to notions of justice, which are not broached either in the *Metaphysics*, or in Aristotle's biological works.

So it is that we must return to Aristotle's more conventionally political works, and the statement with which my examination of Aristotle began: that “a human being is by nature a political animal.” In asking after what Aristotle

means by an animal, and consequently, by a human being, and reconstructing Aristotle's discussion of the natural differences that serve as marks of distinction between human beings and between humans and other animals, we must note the extent to which these distinctions have depended upon analogies to the arts. It is the capacity of sensation (*aisthesis*) that separates an animal from a plant, and it is its dependence on sensation (*aisthesis*) that separates experience from knowledge. That is, it would appear animal life is aesthetically bound, and the knowledge that exceeds the animal in the direction of the divine is itself a kind of art: it is as a kind of master-worker that the wise are able to grasp causes and so transcend the experience of the simple laborer, and it is as a kind of demiurge that the male is in principle superior to the female.

These differences are natural for Aristotle in that nature too, is a kind of artist, and to be more natural, as the most perfectly developed human is, is to imitate this artistic capacity. In this way, we are thrown back upon the claim I made in the first chapter, that surely as aesthetics imply a kind of anthropology, so does anthropology imply a kind of aesthetic. Aristotle's attempts to separate what is uniquely human from what humans share with other animals, and the way in which what is uniquely human is thought to shape virtually everything about what is human, right down to numerous physical details we might otherwise consider trivial, are deeply dependent on aesthetics, not only in the literal sense of *aisthesis*, but in the sense as that which pertains to the arts.

Aristotle's considerations of art in his *Poetics*, along with the various practices that compose political life, also deeply concern themselves with the production of men most like Aristotle's ideal type, and that the best life is as such inseparable from a *beautiful* life.

In this sense, while Aristotle's biological works serve to turn the world of poetic myth upside down through a radical re-conceptualization of the human-animal distinction, what has persisted through this overturning is a certain relation between the human-animal distinction and the arts. While we have seen how Aristotle would, like Plato, challenge poetry as the authoritative mode of knowledge, unlike Plato, Aristotle systematically applies his philosophy to the knowledge available to him concerning humans and other animals, thus making philosophy the arbiter of their distinction in a way Plato never does. In this sense Aristotle moves decisively beyond Plato on the question of the human-animal distinction; however, the influence of the arts return in the metaphors he uses to describe the world he articulates in his philosophy. Thus, while the natural world may be according to Aristotle ordered from best down to worst, from god, to humans, to less complex animals, down to plants, the intelligibility of this world, and even the roles played by different creatures therein, are thoroughly woven together with ideas taken from the arts and the artifice they represent. Thus questions of how to establish a community within this world, who to include and exclude among these animals, and how to rule them—namely: the *ur*questions of

politics—are inseparable from questions of the arts and the ways of doing, making, and judging of which they are composed. Aristotle’s statement that the human is by nature a political animal designates the human as a being whose nature points toward artifice, and thus whose politics are inextricable from art. In this light, in Part III I will consider Aristotle’s *Poetics* along with his conventional political works in an attempt to grasp how Aristotle’s particular theorization of the human-animal distinction and its relation to art can be seen to translate itself into political thought.

## **Part III.**

### **Art, Politics, and the Best Human Life in Aristotle**

#### *Introduction*

In Part II, the anthropological invariant thought to lie at the base of the Western tradition and its understanding of both art and politics exemplified in Aristotle's claim that "a human being is by nature a political animal," provided the impetus to re-examine Aristotle's biological writings and ask what, for Aristotle, is an animal in the first place? Here it was found that most generally, an animal is a living creature bound by sensation or *aisthesis*—it is through sensation that animal life surpasses the potential of plant life, and it is through the inability to move beyond this realm of sensation, to know more than what might be made available to a soul through sensation, that merely animal life falls short of human life. Insofar as humans are themselves constituted through sensation in myriad ways, they too, are animals.

However, what Aristotle considers to be most uniquely human is a particular relation to divine thought, which endows humans with capacities that allow them to reach beyond other animals, making them privy to knowledge that surpasses the realm of sensation. Thus politics or art would be exclusive to human beings only insofar as they might be based on this divine thought. Yet

Aristotle does not consider politics or the arts as they are usually practiced to exceed the realm of sensation in this way; rather, without specific intervention, they remain bound up with capacities humans share with other animals. Thus, the thinkers who take Aristotle to lie at the source of a tradition where politics is based on a philosophical anthropology—that is, on a theory of human capacities—have neglected important aspects of his thought. Political activity is not for Aristotle an exclusively human activity: politics itself is possible among a wide range of animals and can be said to be human politics only where it is directly related to the uniquely human capacities. Thus, we might say that politics for Aristotle appears to lie on a *zoological* invariant, in that it is always practiced by some kind of animal, but this alone does not make politics human.

Yet here we might ask: if what is most human is divine thought and the capacities most closely associated with it, and politics and the arts (that is, the different crafts concerned with the performance of the activities that compose human society) are for the most part not based on divine thought, then the majority of human beings are not, by Aristotle's lights, as human as they take themselves to be—or more pointedly, as human as some. That is, most humans spend their lives engaged in activities that are only human in an indirect sense, actually bearing in many cases greater similarity to other animals than to what is most uniquely human. This fact becomes a problem when seen next to Aristotle's claim that the knowledge that surpasses sensation ought to be authoritative—that

it must be in a position to command or to order (*epitattein*), and not be persuaded by those lacking such knowledge.<sup>454</sup> Truly human politics, then, would need to incorporate the human relation to divine thought, and not all humans could be expected to participate in it—at least not all to the same extent.

This claim seems to imply that the best community would be one where knowledge is enthroned, not unlike Plato's Kallipolis. Such a view would run contrary to much of the literature on Aristotle and the understanding of his politics: Aristotle is by most accounts taken to be the more practical or pragmatic of the two philosophers, a thinker eminently concerned with actually existing regimes and the possibilities available to each in their own specificity, not "castles in the sky" like Kallipolis. Recent work has even gone to some lengths in appreciating the democratic elements of Aristotle's political thought, though most stop short of arguing that Aristotle was himself a supporter of democracy.<sup>455</sup> However, these positions do not, to my mind, sufficiently account for what Aristotle has to say about biology, or about art. This is not to say, however, that Aristotle is in fact advocating a regime quite like Kallipolis. Rather, as I shall argue, it is the regime Aristotle calls "polity" (*politeia*) that proves itself most suitable to what is best in human life, and this is a life of contemplation, for it is

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<sup>454</sup> Recall *Meta.* I.2 982a18-19.

<sup>455</sup> See for instance, Jill Frank, *A Democracy of Distinction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); David Keyt, "Aristotle and Anarchism," in *Aristotle's Politics: Critical Essays*, ed. Richard Kraut & Steven Skultety (Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield, 2005); Josiah Ober, "Aristotle's Natural Democracy," in *Aristotle's Politics: Critical Essays*; Steven C. Skultety, "Competition in the Best of Cities: Agonism and Aristotle's *Politics*," *Political Theory* 37.1 (2009): 44-68; Jeremy Waldron, "The Wisdom of the Multitude: Some Reflections on Book III, Chapter 11 of Aristotle's *Politics*," in *Aristotle's Politics: Critical Essays*.

contemplation that most completely actualizes the human capacity for divine thought. Yet polity only makes this life possible by using the arts to integrate the natural inequalities Aristotle discovers in his biology in a manner that allows each to flourish to the extent their natures allow. In this sense, it is the arts, specifically those of tragedy and of politics, which make the life that is naturally best for a human being possible.

Aristotle's biology, as we have seen, suggests that humans are only unique among animals due to their relation with the divine. This relation not only makes possible the other capacities that Aristotle understands to be uniquely human, but serves even to organize the human body, to give shape to the matter of which the human body is composed. Thus the particularities of human anatomy have their source in the human capacity for divine thought. Yet insofar as humans do not all share equally in this capacity for divine thought, that is, that better and worse souls exist within the sphere of a single *eidos*, defects or deformities of this anatomy can be considered evidence of a worse soul, evidence that one is naturally *phaulos*. One who is "base" in this manner, a "low sort," bears more in common with other animals than what is best in humans. In this way, it appears Aristotle imports aesthetic judgments into his biology, with political consequences: physical features considered beautiful or ugly according to aesthetic standards can be said to indicate something of the soul, and so one's

relation to divine thought, and consequently one's humanity, and with these one's place in the political community.

The consequences of this are potentially far-reaching in terms of the direction of contemporary political thought. While it is easy to dismiss what Aristotle considers the best physical features as no more than either a quirk or a reflection of the standards of physical beauty of his society, if art is not simply the product of human capacities, but the nature of human capacities is likewise recognized through art, then the reversals of the priority of art and human attempted by Nietzsche, Heidegger, and their progeny—that humans do not make art, but art makes humans—are without the force they were thought to have, for a version of this idea is already contained within Aristotle. In this sense, rather than overturning the place of “Man” in the Western tradition and ridding it of the “anthropological invariant” upon which it was built, these thinkers have instead brought to light an un-recognized aspect of this tradition, one that does not so much as go beyond or behind Aristotle, but rather attempts to radicalize certain elements of Aristotle's thought.

If art and standards of beauty distilled from artistic practices already shape what Aristotle understands to be to an extent innate to the best human being—i.e., his physical features—then art and its standards must also be understood to shape the source of these features and the best human being: they must shape *nature*. That is, if “a human being is by nature a political animal,”

and what is known of nature and its workings is impossible to grasp without reference to artifice, the nature that makes humans political, and the arts that serve this same function, come to coincide. While the statement that “a human being is by nature a political animal” suggests that the human is among the animals naturally in need of or at least prone to the artifice of politics, if nature is itself a reflection of our arts, then to say the human being is naturally one way or another is already to say that the human being has been *created* to be one way or another: in this way human nature is inseparable from artifice, its condition of intelligibility. If all that can be known and conceptualized of the workings of nature is mediated through our understandings of our own arts, then what we call nature is a kind of reflection of artistic practices, which is then taken as an autonomous power upon which the arts are modeled.<sup>456</sup> The arts thus create and subsequently alienate that which will become their own standard and limit: it is really art that posits the nature upon which the arts are modeled, and in this sense art in Aristotle is the most sovereign creative force, as it is in Nietzsche and in Heidegger, only that in Aristotle this artistic power goes unrecognized.

In this light, Aristotle’s conception of nature, which has proved so influential in the development of western thought, can in fact be seen to conceal within it the creative power of the arts: this autonomous and overarching conception of nature is in fact a kind of reification of artistic powers, a point

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<sup>456</sup> For Aristotle, that nature both tends toward some purpose (*eneka*), and the fact that it can fail in achieving its purpose, are ideas taken from art (*techne*): as art has purpose, yet makes mistakes, so does nature. See *Physics (Phys.)* II.8 199b30; 199a33-199b1. These points are further developed below.

betrayed by Aristotle's reliance upon metaphors drawn from the arts. While one might be tempted to dismiss these metaphors as ornaments Aristotle adopts in order to better communicate with his perceived audience, that poetic metaphors in Aristotle's work are otherwise relatively infrequent ought to give one pause. If the Aristotle we encounter in his writings is one who appears to address his audience directly, then we might understand his use of metaphors to reflect a difficulty, perhaps even impossibility, of conveying his ideas in any other way.<sup>457</sup> Moreover, Aristotle claims in his *Poetics* that good metaphors allow one to "see" or theoretically grasp (*theorein*) similarity within difference, and that poetry itself, like philosophy, attempts to express universals.<sup>458</sup> If metaphors serve an important role in poetry, and poetry can express universals, it does not seem like such a leap to think universals might be grasped through metaphor. In fact, we might consider this an important difference between poetry and philosophy: that poetry seeks to grasp indirectly through metaphor what philosophy would grasp directly through argumentation. While philosophy for Aristotle remains the higher of the two disciplines, this general superiority should not preclude the possibility of there being spheres of knowledge in which poetic expression is more appropriate, or in some cases, the only possible form of expression.

Thus it might be said that the metaphors drawn from the arts that Aristotle uses to describe natural processes are constitutive of these processes—

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<sup>457</sup> *NE* I.3 1094b12-14.

<sup>458</sup> *Poetics* 22, 1459a6-8; 9, 1451b5-10.

not simply ornamental speech “tacked on” to natural phenomena for the purposes of communication. In this sense it is possible to claim that rather than grasp the degree to which humans create themselves through the activities that compose their societies, Aristotle associates this creative force with a power that stands beyond humans, a force which they can at best try to imitate in order to mold it to some degree toward their own aims (aims which this force has itself given them).<sup>459</sup> In this way, the overarching conception of nature that underwrites both Aristotle’s studies of biology and of politics is ultimately dependent on the arts: it is the arts that serve to create the human animal in the way that he is created, and so it is the arts that serve both to make the human being political, both naturally, and, as we shall see, “artificially,” through their use in political education. While nature, like a good craftsman, makes humans to be political, as we have seen, this is true of a good many other animals as well. Consequently, it is up to humans to imitate the creative powers of nature, and employ various arts in order to make humans political in the manner suited to the particularities of their cities, and to facilitate the flourishing of what is naturally best in human life.

Defending these claims will require that I show three things: 1) that Aristotle understands what I have called the “zoological invariant” of politics, that

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<sup>459</sup> Or as Castoriadis claims, as he wrestles with the antinomy of *physis* and *nomos* in Aristotle: “society presupposes society—which is tantamount to saying that society is its own creation; something which Aristotle *does* not, and *cannot* say.” See “Value, Equality, Justice, Politics,” in *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, trans. Kate Soper and Martin H. Ryle (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), 304.

is, the animal capacities necessary for politics, and here by extension, their movements and the bodies that support them, in terms of human arts; 2) that nature, or at least what can be known and so conceptualized of it, is for Aristotle itself a kind of art or artist, and that human arts are best when they most closely imitate nature; and 3) that Aristotle requires the arts in order to distinguish the best possible human life and the most likely candidate to live it, and these in turn require a certain form of political organization, which I identify as polity. The first two of these claims will be argued in chapter 8, while chapters 9 and 10 will develop and defend the last claim.

In light of these three claims, Aristotle's statements that "a human being is by nature a political animal" says that human politics is bound to the arts twice over: insofar as the human is a creation of nature, the purpose of the art of politics will be to imitate nature in bringing forth what is best, and this imitation, or *mimesis*, will require the use of a variety of other arts (including what we call today the "performing" arts, or more specifically, tragedy) to accomplish this end. In this way, the human being is an "aesthetic animal," not only in the literal sense in which all animals are defined as such through *aisthesis*, through their capacity for sensation, but through their relation to the arts. What is natural for the human being is for Aristotle created through artistic practices that provide the measure of what is best and worst in this nature, and these are enabled or obstructed by political organization.

In arguing that both Aristotle's conception of the best human life and the nature that ensures this life is best are in fact creations of the arts, I conclude that the reversal endorsed by Nietzsche, Heidegger, and others that would overturn the place of "Man" relative to politics and the arts is found to be less a reversal of the tradition inaugurated by Aristotle than different mutations of it, mutations that perpetuate certain modes of domination found therein. If one would liberate the aspects of Aristotle's thoughts on humans and animals, and art and politics that would go beyond these forms of domination, we must turn, I claim, to the work of Theodor Adorno on the human-animal distinction and its relation to identity, nature and history, and the role of art and aesthetics.

## Chapter Nine:

### Natural Artifice and the Artifice of Nature

In attempting to show the dependence of Aristotle's concept of nature on the arts, in this chapter I argue the first two claims cited in the above introduction: that Aristotle's understanding of the nature of animal bodies and their movements depends upon metaphors drawn from various human arts; and that nature is itself conceived by Aristotle as a kind of artist whose work provides the measure of the arts as they are practiced by humans. In this sense, humans are naturally disposed to engage in artifice, and human artifice is best where it is most like nature. Aristotle gives an account of the nature of animal bodies and their movement which is profoundly *technical*, in that its intelligibility is dependent on the various *technai* that this account draws upon in metaphor. Yet while an account of the nature of animal bodies and their movement in terms of artistic practice and organization might seem to imply an historical dimension, no such dimension is to be found in Aristotle. Nature may be wed to *techne* through the metaphors upon which Aristotle's account depends, yet as practices emerging from nature and striving towards its imitation, it is nature that comes to stand in the place one might expect history to be, as both their origin and their regulating power. Nature itself is thus seen as a kind of artist, the producer of natural works, binding together the different human arts, from the crafts and the

performing arts to politics, while at once concealing the history of their development and thus their artificiality.

### *The Artificial Body*

Aristotle's biology has been considered a response to mechanistic theories of nature that had become popular in his own day;<sup>460</sup> however, Aristotle himself uses a significant number of mechanical, and more broadly, *technical*, analogies in describing the structure and functioning of the body. That is, Aristotle draws upon metaphors and comparisons to various *technai*, or the arts that compose the activities that organize the life of human society, in order to grasp conceptually the workings of animal bodies, and more broadly, as we shall see, the workings of nature. For instance, Aristotle compares the movements of animals to those of mechanical puppets: like *automata* which have something like the potential for movement stored in them, requiring only an external touch to begin their motions, so does the act of procreation serve as the external touch that sets the semen to work in the embryo, beginning the chain of movements that constitute the given animal.<sup>461</sup> Yet the analogy goes beyond this generality, to touch on particulars. Aristotle will compare particular organs to pieces of technical equipment, thus adding "flesh" to this idea of *automata*, presenting the

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<sup>460</sup> Etienne Gilson, "Aristotelian Prologue," in *From Aristotle to Darwin and Back Again*, trans. John Lyon (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 5.

<sup>461</sup> *MA* 7 701b2; *GA* II.1 734b10-17.

animal body as a kind of technical wonder—a composite of tools that is at once natural and artificial.<sup>462</sup>

The heart, as the body’s “central source of heat,” is like a hearth, the vessel of the kindling flame that is in the natural body the breath or spirit (*pneuma*).<sup>463</sup> Along with the lungs, the heart is “constructed like the bellows in a smithy,” so that these not only serve to house the vital heat, but to distribute it throughout the body.<sup>464</sup> Like pottery clay, bodily matter is heated by the “bellows” of the heart and lung, hardening as it cools into flesh, bone, and sinew.<sup>465</sup> The bones thus become like pegs and iron, and the sinewy tendons like strings connecting them, exerting pressure with their tightening and slackening so as to give movement to the body.<sup>466</sup> Yet Aristotle’s *automaton* is not only composed of such explicitly mechanical parts: he also uses the products of the agricultural arts, such as dykes and irrigation networks, to describe the operation of blood vessels.<sup>467</sup> In this way, the general metaphor connecting the movements of animals and the movements of *automata* is supplemented by metaphors that establish a connection between particular organs and tools, making the human animal technical in both a general and a particular sense, similar to the manner Aristotle relates humans to other animals by analogy in his biological works.

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<sup>462</sup> Or as Pratt writes in a similar vein, Aristotle’s “approach to the animal,” resembles “that of a design engineer.” See Vernon Pratt, “The Essence of Aristotle’s Zoology.” *Phronesis* 33.3 (1984): 271.

<sup>463</sup> *PA* III.7 670a23-27.

<sup>464</sup> *OYOA* XXVII.21 480a20-21.

<sup>465</sup> *GA* II.6 743a8-11; 18-21.

<sup>466</sup> *MA* 7 701b6-10.

<sup>467</sup> *PA* III.5 668a28-668b1.

The political implications of this union or harmony between the general *automaton* and its particular organs, along with the range of arts drawn upon to give this account, are perhaps best understood in a passage from the *Movement of Animals*:

And the animal organism must be conceived after the similitude of a city with good laws [*polin eunomoumenen*]. When order is once established in a city there is no more need of a separate monarch to preside over each several task. The individuals each play their assigned part as it is ordered, and one thing follows another because of habit. So in animals the same thing happens because of nature, each part naturally doing its own work as nature has composed it. There is no need then of a soul in each part, but it resides in a kind of origin of the body, and the remaining parts live by being naturally connected, and play their parts because of their nature (MA 10 703a29-703b2).

Here we see that the technical harmony of the animal body is at once a political harmony. That is, not only can the animal body be understood in terms of human handiwork such as mechanical puppets or the craft of pottery, but in terms of that most important of human constructions: the city. Just as a city with good laws serves to synthesize the diverse interests of its various denizens, allowing each to pursue their different ends for their common good, so must the organs of an animal exist for the sake of the animal, according to its natural designation. The technical skill that brings together different tools in order to create a single *automaton*, like the good crafting of laws that hold a city together, are not only forms of art that produce an artificial object, but they are for Aristotle at the same time *natural*. That is, it is natural to engage and develop the skills that produce

artifice, and the best artifice will most precisely imitate nature. Nature is thus made both the source and the goal of artifice.

Insofar as the various particular arts and the manner of their development in Aristotle's world serve to shape the language and images Aristotle has at his disposal to conceptualize the workings of nature in animal bodies, so the nature of the workings of animal bodies are conceptualized according to this artistic development and its organization. In this sense, the conceptualization of the animal body is a projection of the artistic organization of society, or more precisely, as the above quotation makes clear: of the *city*, the political *regime* and its ways of doing and making. Yet in alienating this organization and its creative power in the concept of nature, which is in turn seen as both the source of these arts and the goal toward which they strive, the arts come to arbitrarily limit the possibilities available to them by making themselves subject to a power whose own artificiality they cannot recognize. To recognize the artificiality of nature would be to recognize the way in which what is understood as natural has itself come to be in the manner that is at least in part through the arts. Though Aristotle's descriptions of nature suggest its artificiality, he himself will not make this claim. Insofar as what is understood to be natural is a projection of a way of doing and making particular to Aristotle's society, in becoming a regulative ideal of this doing and making, nature itself comes to be seen as a kind of artist, the greatest artist whose creative prowess is to be imitated if a human artist is to

excel at her or his art. To grasp this relation between nature, artist, and artifice as Aristotle sketches it, we must examine in greater detail the manner in which Aristotle conceives nature to be a kind of artist.

### *Nature as Artist*

Nature as an overarching concept distinct from natural things has been considered an important feature of ancient Greek thought, and this concept underwent considerable “elaboration and systematization” in Aristotle’s hands.<sup>468</sup> For Aristotle, nature is a kind of self-moving creative principle whose work is always directed toward some end, and whose work is itself always best.<sup>469</sup> However, the term “creative principle,” while not inaccurate if we think of principle in terms of *arche*, both the source and guiding rule of the creative process, nevertheless describes nature at a greater degree of abstraction than Aristotle himself frequently does. For Aristotle, the creative processes of nature are very much like the artistic processes undertaken by craftspeople: in focusing

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<sup>468</sup> Recall G.E.R. Lloyd, *Aristotelian Explorations*, 110; 125.

<sup>469</sup> *Meta.* V.4 1015a13-19; *Phys.* II.8 199b16-18. Or as Collingwood writes, for Aristotle, “Nature as such is process, growth, change,” but where this change tends to transpire in “certain definite ways.” See R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of Nature* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 82-83. That nature’s work is always directed toward an end, and consequently does not do things without purpose or ‘in vain,’ is a common theme in Aristotle’s writings, as is the idea that nature’s works are always best. See *OS* II.4 415b15-17; *OYOA* IV. 469a29-30; *PA* II.13 658a9; II.14 658a24-25; IV.11 691b4-5; IV.13 695b19-20; *Prog.* 2 704b14-17; 8 708a9-11; 12 711a16-17; *GA* I.1 715b15-16; II.4 739b19; II.5 741b4; IV.6 775a20-21.

its efforts toward the realization of the ends of that which it creates, nature is like an intelligent (*eulogos*) craftsperson (*demiourgei*).<sup>470</sup>

Like the carpenter with his timber and the potter with his clay, nature must consider the matter upon which its movements impart form, sometimes using the same organ or part for multiple purposes, while other times specializing in order to bring about the best end of the work.<sup>471</sup> In this way different works require nature to practice different arts: in some cases nature uses the breath (*penuma*) as a tool in the same way that a smith uses hammer and anvil, while in others nature is more like a potter, foregoing tools and using instead its own parts (*autes moriois*).<sup>472</sup> This view of nature further reinforces the connection between artistic processes and political ones, for not only is nature like an intelligent craftsperson, but nature also, in seeking a harmony of form and matter, acts as would any “prudent man” (*anthropos phronimos*).<sup>473</sup> That is, nature seeks to balance excesses, subtracting from one part and giving to another, ensuring always that one has what is necessary to be what one is—no more, and

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<sup>470</sup> GA I.23 731a24-25. Salkever disputes the relevance of the demiurge metaphor, claiming instead that nature is like a doctor doctoring itself. However, I see no good reason for the doctor metaphor to displace or even contradict the notion of nature as demiurge. Salkever bases his claim entirely on *Phys.* II.8 199b30-32, though Aristotle uses metaphors drawn from the arts to describe nature both in *Phys.* II and in many other places throughout his work, as I will show below. Moreover, both doctor and demiurge are for Aristotle artists, practitioners of *techne*, and as such there is no clear basis for a rigorous distinction between them. See Salkever, *Finding the Mean*, 49.

<sup>471</sup> GA I.22 730b5-8; *OYOA* 17.11 476a16-19; *PA* III.1 662a19-20; IV.6 683a22-26.

<sup>472</sup> GA V.8 789b9-12; I.22 730b29-31.

<sup>473</sup> *PA* IV.10 687a12-23.

no less.<sup>474</sup> In this way nature is also a kind of law-giver to the world, for it is only within the bounds set by nature that there can be harmony between form and matter, and things can be what they are.

Yet just as art can only create within the bounds given in the matter, that is, just as the law-giver is limited by the habits of the people, and the potter is limited by the quality of the clay, so nature appears for Aristotle to be limited by what is in being (*ontos*).<sup>475</sup> While nature is both matter (*hule*) and form (*morphe*),<sup>476</sup> its place in giving definition to that which is should not lead us to mistake it for the primary substance (*proten ousian*), or being as such. Nature for Aristotle is “only one particular genus [*genos*] of being [*ontos*]”: the being or substance (*ousia*) of self-moving things.<sup>477</sup> Even nature, it would appear, while something like the ideal craftsperson or law-giver, is not without its limits, and being appears to be both nature’s limit and its condition of possibility. As Aristotle writes: “For neither will that which exists potentially be made except by that moving agent which possesses the actuality, nor will that which possesses the actuality make anything out of anything whatever; the carpenter would not make a box except out of wood, nor will a box be made out of the wood without the

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<sup>474</sup> *PA* II.7 652a31-34; II.14 658a36; III.2 663a17-18; III.14 674b30-3; *GA* III.10 759b3; 760b28; IV.2 767a16.

<sup>475</sup> Or as Hankinson writes: “nature is circumscribed in what it can achieve by material constraints, but within those constraints it always strives to produce the best available design-solution.” See R.J. Hankinson, “Science,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 159.

<sup>476</sup> *Phys.* II.8 199a31-32.

<sup>477</sup> *Meta.* IV.3 1005a33-1005b1; V.4 1015a13-19.

carpenter.”<sup>478</sup> In this manner, it appears that Aristotle considers the work of nature to be the actualization of the potential of being. Nature is both craft and craftsman, the principle of creation and movement necessary to actualize the potential of a thing given in its being. It is for this reason that Aristotle considers nature that which tends to hold in most cases, and why it is possible for things to exist contrary to nature: nature may be the perfect craftsman, but that which is in being and so given to nature to work upon can still remain obstinate before it, and where nature fails to perfectly impart form to matter, so are things generated that are contrary to nature.<sup>479</sup>

Nature, then, is for Aristotle a kind of artist—the ideal artist that most capably brings to flourishing that which is. This conception of nature binds nature both to art and to politics, in such a way that craftspeople and law-givers are best where they most closely approximate the designs of nature.<sup>480</sup> As it is the work of nature that serves to distinguish humans from each other and from other animals, and establish the prevailing hierarchy between them, and nature is itself a kind of art for the actualization of being, it would appear that in understanding the political implications of the natural distinctions Aristotle makes between humans and between them and other animals, we cannot divorce art from politics. That is, in examining the biological basis or context of

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<sup>478</sup> *GA* II.6 743a22-26.

<sup>479</sup> *GA* IV.10 778a6-9.

<sup>480</sup> “One should be guided by a natural division, since every craft and every sort of education is intended to supplement nature” (*Pol.* VII.17 1336b41-1337a2).

Aristotle's famous statement that the human being is a political animal, we have gained an understanding of what kind of animal Aristotle has in mind, but the manner in which the distinction is drawn indicates that what is political about this animal is also the product of art. That is, to understand human politics, we must also understand human art. Just as nature is the craft that serves to shape the human from animal matter, further refinement of this natural endowment can only be accomplished by a like craft: consequently, if the human being is political, it must also be artistic.

In this way the first two points of the three announced in the above introduction have been satisfied: the animal body and its movement shaped by the soul are understood by Aristotle in the terms given by various arts—they are in this sense “artistic” or “technical,” in that they are made intelligible through the arts, the various *technai* of Aristotle's day. Further, these artistic metaphors cannot simply be discounted as modes of communication Aristotle employs for the sake of his audience, but rather these artistic metaphors must be understood as constitutive of the manner in which the objects of study are understood, for nature is itself an artist whose creations are the objects of the natural world.<sup>481</sup> Animal bodies can be understood as the products of *techné* because they are natural, and nature itself is a kind of artist. Nature is the artist that shapes the various possibilities given in being into what they naturally are, and their

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<sup>481</sup> Recall the importance of metaphor and poetry as an expression of universals: *Poetics* 22, 1459a6-8; 9, 1451b5-10.

functioning is like the products of human arts, only to a far more perfected degree. This conception of nature stands in place of history, for rather than give an historical account of the development of *techne* as a means to understand animal bodies and their movements, Aristotle need only show the degree to which they are natural or not. Following this presentation of the first and second points outlined in the introduction, it remains to examine the third: that Aristotle requires the arts to distinguish the best possible human life, both to the extent that this life is natural, and to the extent that humans must themselves employ various arts to realize the potential given in this nature, a task which, as *political animals*, cannot be divorced from political organization.

## Chapter Ten: Art and the Most Choiceworthy Life

What Aristotle regards as the best and most choiceworthy for human life continues to be a matter of debate. I have argued that Aristotle's biological writings attempt to define the human in terms of a capacity for divine thought absent in other animals, and superior to those other capacities humans and other animals share. This definition suggests that the best human life would be one where this capacity is most fully actualized, and insofar as the best in humans is their capacity for divine thought, it would appear the best for human beings is some kind of contemplative activity. Yet the human is also, of course, by nature a political animal, and as noted above, Aristotle's conception of nature is unintelligible without artistic metaphors. In this way, "nature" is a kind of reflection of these arts, a great artist as opposed to a power operating in a manner qualitatively different from human beings. Thus, if humans are *naturally* disposed to politics, and have a naturally good end or best possible life, these are not possible or intelligible without the arts.

Below I will argue that the importance of the arts in understanding nature means those with the best natures, and consequently those examples of the best human life, must live a beautiful life, which for Aristotle means to live a life devoted to activity that is an end in itself. Such activity must be leisured activity, and insofar as political activity is without leisure, this suggests that the best life is

indeed one of contemplation, a claim that would appear to be supported by Aristotle's biological writings. Yet, I argue, politics cannot be simply forgotten, for contemplation as a way of life cannot come about without the city, in the sense that the city provides an individual with a greater arena in which to practice virtues related to contemplation, and so attain this best life. The city thus offers a third way of sorts, a form of life that is at once political and contemplative, and this is the most completely virtuous human life. I find this third way in Aristotle's *Poetics*, wherein Aristotle offers a philosophical reinterpretation of tragedy that enables him to claim that the tragic hero is an imitation, or *mimesis*, of the best human life. In this sense, the arts, both in terms of politics and the performing arts that compose tragedy, are not simply the expression of human nature, an anthropological invariant, but rather serve an integral role in creating the very life that Aristotle will consider most choiceworthy.

### *Beauty, Labor, and Leisure*

For Aristotle, life is activity, and so the best human life will be that constituted by the best kind of activity. The best among the various goods toward which human activity aims will be the most complete and self-sufficient good; consequently, one will need a complete range of activities, along with their virtues and supports, in order to live the good and excellent, that is, the best human life. In the *Politics*, Aristotle writes that there are three things through which one becomes good

(*agathoi*) and excellent (*spoudaios*): Nature, habit, and reason (*phusis ethos logos*).<sup>482</sup> While scholars have spilled much ink developing the ways in which habit and reason relate to living the good life, far fewer, at least among modern commentators, have chosen to focus on nature. Perhaps a reason for this concerns the view that, while habit and reason seem malleable insofar as one can through practice become better, it is thought that one can do little about one's nature. Nature is thus ignored on this view because there is nothing worthwhile to say about it: a focus on nature's role in relation to what is best in human beings is either deterministic or trivial. Indeed, the role Aristotle claims that nature plays in making one good and excellent is through the fact of one's birth as a human and not some other animal, and so to have the body and soul of a certain sort (*poion*).

Yet while contemporary readers might perhaps see nothing in this passage to contradict the modern notion of natural equality between humans, in light of what has been shown of Aristotle's biology, this distinction here between humans and other animals requires a second look. If some humans are more animal than others, then the line drawn here between human and animal is not where moderns would tend to draw it: being human and animal here too, concerns one's relation to divine thought, and Aristotle's subsequent remark about having the

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<sup>482</sup> *Pol.* VII.13 1332a39-40.

body and soul of a certain sort serves to underline the point.<sup>483</sup> Furthermore, if nature is for Aristotle, as I have claimed, a reflection of the arts of his day, then we can expect that to focus on how nature relates to the good and the excellent will reveal how the good and excellent are themselves only possible through the arts, thus upsetting the view that Aristotle sees the arts as simply expressions of an already-constituted human nature—an anthropological invariant, as noted above.

As we have seen, some souls are naturally better than others, and these natural differences in psychic capacity also to an extent make themselves visible in bodies. In this sense, certain individuals are naturally more disposed to being good and excellent than others, and these individuals can, to an extent, be identified through their physical appearance. However, this is not to say that one's nature is absolutely determined for Aristotle, nor is it to say that physical features are the most important factor in identifying the best dispositions. Rather, as we are naturally the kind of creatures to form habits and use reason, we are naturally changeable to some, difficult to determine, extent. As we have seen, the quality of one's soul is known through one's physical appearance and through one's actions: where our actions become habits that shape our bodies, so these indicate the quality of our souls, and the nobility of our lives. "The noble,"

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<sup>483</sup> Cf. *Eudemian Ethics* (*EE*) VII.2 1236a4-6: "as the child or brute [*therion*] is to the adult [*anthropon katestota*], so are the base and foolish [*phaulos kai aphron*] to the equitable and wise [*epieike kai phronimon*]." Translation modified. See "Eudemian Ethics," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle* Vol.2, Oxford Revised Translation, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

Aristotle writes, “is that which is both desirable for its own sake and also worthy of praise.”<sup>484</sup> But the noble (*kalos*) is also the *beautiful*—moral correctness and physical beauty unite in this term, making the noble life one characterized both by beautiful deeds *and* physical beauty. The best life for a human being, then, is a beautiful life, one devoted to activities which are ends in themselves. Yet what kinds of activities might be considered ends in themselves, and how might beauty be recognized through them?

While Aristotle does not in the *Politics* offer a list of best physical features when discussing the best human life like the one gleaned above from his biological writings, this point concerning the beauty of different bodies in relation to the best human life is made earlier in the *Politics* in Aristotle’s discussion of natural slavery. For Aristotle, nature makes the bodies of slaves and free people different according to the different activities to which their souls are best suited—the natural slave, like a domestic animal, is made to labor with his body, and thus built in a manner suited to these strains, while the free person stands without back bent for hard labor, but upright, in order to engage in political life.<sup>485</sup> This distinction should not suggest that Aristotle thinks that those who labor do so because their backs are crooked; rather, certain bodies are more capable of withstanding the punishment of labor, while others are more capable of persuading others in a political assembly. Just as the body of a human is built for

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<sup>484</sup> *Rhetoric (Rhet.)* I.9 1366a33-34.

<sup>485</sup> *Pol.* I.5 1254b22-31.

thought, and the body of a bird for flight, so human bodies shaped by souls less apt to engage in divine thought are defined instead in terms of the work most appropriate to them. In this sense, the mutilations of labor cannot be separated from the natural activity of the inferior soul. However, it is precisely these mutilations—the physical features formed through base activities such as manual labor—which serve as the marks by which one might recognize a base soul.

It is for this reason—that labor is the activity of the inferior soul—that the mere fact of political freedom is not enough to indicate a natural separation of the citizen from the animal condition of natural slavery. Only a soul free from labor can be seen to flourish in the manner most appropriate to a human being—only such a soul and body are as beautiful as a human being can be. For Aristotle it is thus not only the natural slave, but also manual laborers who betray their natural baseness in their physical demeanor. Though Aristotle claims that slaves exist by nature and craftspeople do not,<sup>486</sup> he also claims that “vulgar craftsmen”<sup>487</sup> used to be slaves or foreigners and only became citizens with the rise of “extreme democracy” (*prin demon genesthai to eschaton*).<sup>488</sup> The connection between labor and the inferiority of a soul shows that the rise in status from slave to craftsperson in the “extreme” (*eschaton*) form of democracy indicates a

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<sup>486</sup> *Pol.* I.13 1260b1-2.

<sup>487</sup> Though Reeve’s rendering of *banausos* as “vulgar craftsman” effectively captures the normative dimension of this term, Lord’s “manufacturing artisan” is perhaps clearer from a strictly descriptive perspective: that is, the *art* performed by the *banausos* is manual labor. The natural suitability to manual labor is where the vulgar craftsman and the natural slave overlap.

<sup>488</sup> *Pol.* III.4 1277b1-2.

continuity between the natural slave and the manual laborer found in their natural suitability to labor, not that the craftsperson was only a slave by convention.

Both the natural slave and the manual laborer are constituted as such by nature insofar as their souls and bodies are most appropriate to the activities that accord with this station. However, while one might get an idea of a slave or laborer's baseness through their physical appearance, it is primarily through the labor performed that the nature of the slave or the "vulgar craftsperson" is found to be of the sort that it is. That is, nature may make some souls base, but the appropriateness of their labor or servitude to the quality of their soul and hence its status as natural is only confirmed through the activities themselves. It is only through engaging in labor that one is a laborer, which then serves to confirm the baseness of one's soul, now easily recognized in the laborer's mutilated body, which bears the evidence of its activities. Likewise, it is one's willingness to serve another in the manner suited to a slave that serves to confirm one's status as a natural slave<sup>489</sup>—nature here is recognized through the activities appropriate to one for whom they would be natural.

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<sup>489</sup> Or as Bodéüs writes: "The person who is naturally a slave by definition is not such because of a law that condemns him to slavery and deprives him of the rights of citizens—but rather because of a strictly personal inclination not to share the aspirations of human beings *as* citizens. Indeed, as we have seen, the natural slave is recognized by the fact that he does not have any goals in life except to survive—comfortably, if possible." See Richard Bodéüs, "The Natural Foundations of Right and Aristotelian Philosophy," in *Action and Contemplation*, eds. Robert C. Bartlett and Susan D. Collins (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 96. Garver echoes this position, claiming that "Organizing one's life around living rather than living well produces slavishness that goes deep enough to disqualify one from Aristotelian citizenship." For Garver, Aristotle's account of slavery is meant to separate the relation of

In this way, the harmony between nature, habit, and reason Aristotle sees as being necessary to achieve goodness and excellence is one without labor. Not only does Aristotle write that certain forms of labor shape the body and soul in a manner that makes them less suited to a life of virtue,<sup>490</sup> but as we have seen, a life of labor serves to shape the body according to the dictates of labor, according to the dictates of activity directed to ends other than itself, as opposed to those of self-sufficient thought. Though leisure is necessary for an individual to have the time to pursue virtuous activities and so instill in oneself a noble character, it is also necessary to free the body from the shape imposed upon it by labor, the shape imposed upon it by ends lacking in nobility. One who is free by law but not free from labor, then, cannot live a noble life, for the movements that constitute such a person's activities and shapes his body and his character will all bear the stamp of necessity. Bound by labor, the bodies of such people will bear its scars, and so fall short of a noble, self-sufficient life. The noble life, choiceworthy for its own sake, must be one where the body is liberated from necessary labor, devoted instead to the flourishing of its own beauty.<sup>491</sup>

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master of slave from politics, allowing politics to function according to a different logic of rule. See Garver, *Aristotle's Politics*, 24; 18. In a different vein, Schofield writes that "Aristotle's theory of natural slavery is at least potentially a critical theory. A slave owner who pondered it seriously would have to ask himself: 'Is my slave really a natural slave? Or is he too shrewd and purposeful?'" See Malcolm Schofield, "Ideology and Philosophy in Aristotle's Theory of Slavery," in *Aristotle's Politics: Critical Essays*, 100.

<sup>490</sup> *Pol.*VIII.2 1337b9-13

<sup>491</sup> In this way, insofar as Athenian democracy can be seen as based on the free labor of its citizens, this aspect of Aristotle is indeed anti-democratic. See Ellen Meiksins Wood, "Labour and Democracy, Ancient and Modern," in *Democracy Against Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 181; 183; 185; and Ellen Meiksins Wood and Neal Wood, *Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1978), Ch. 5.

In marking the distinction between the noble and the base body, Aristotle opposes the hunched and animal-like body of the natural slave to the upright human body of one suited to politics; however, here we must ask: is politics really the art most suited to bring about the noble—that is, *the beautiful*—life Aristotle considers most choiceworthy? In his considerations of the best possible human life, especially in the *NE* and the *Pol.*, Aristotle considers with considerable seriousness both the active or practical life of politics and the contemplative life of philosophy as possible paradigms of the best human life, defending each in different passages of those works. Consequently, there remains considerable debate among contemporary interpreters as to which of these forms of life ought to be seen as best. For instance, MacIntyre’s espousal of Aristotelian communitarianism against liberal individualism is not so much a revival of philosophy or a turn toward the life of contemplation, but to a life of activity made coherent through the unity of the virtues, one devoted to “the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained.”<sup>492</sup> Even more forcefully, Nussbaum argues that “the solitary life is insufficient for us,” and that “if *eudaimonia* is to include every

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<sup>492</sup> *After Virtue*, 263. Intellectual life in this sense should be understood to mean less a life of contemplation than one devoted to intellectual virtues, which in the *Nicomachean Ethics* includes those which can be taught, opposed to habituated. See *NE* II.1 1103a14-20.

value without which a life would be judged incomplete, it must include the political as an end in its own right.”<sup>493</sup>

But can such a political life coincide with the life of leisure? For Aristotle, the politics to which the upright human body and soul are suited concern both those activities concerning peace, and those pertaining to war.<sup>494</sup> If for Aristotle the politics of community building and virtuous activity are bound up with the activities of war, then they are hardly features of a life of leisure worthy of the name. Even were we to consider that in warrior cultures the warrior must typically have sufficient leisure to practice his arts—that he must be free of “vulgar” labor in order to devote himself to the “noble” arts of war—to posit that politics, including the practices of war, are an end in themselves would be for Aristotle to claim that the human is what and how it is because of war. Such a claim would make war and its associated virtues those that define the human being and so distinguish it from other animals—the human being would stand erect and move in the way it does not to facilitate thought, but to subdue its adversaries. But Aristotle does not so elevate the place of war in human life, or even the martial virtues. “Nobody chooses to wage war, or even prepares for war,

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<sup>493</sup> Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 350. Nussbaum will even go as far as entertaining the idea that the passages in Book X of the *NE* where Aristotle extols the contemplative life as the highest form of human life were inserted by a later editor. See *The Fragility of Goodness*, 377.

<sup>494</sup> *Pol.* I.5 1254b25-32. Concerning ancient Greek society more generally, Vernant writes: “Politics can be defined as the city seen from the inside, the public life that the citizens share within the domain of whatever is common to them above and beyond their individual family differences. War is the same city facing outward, the activity of this same group of citizens now confronting something other than themselves, something foreign to them, in other words—as a rule—other cities [...] The warrior and the man of politics are completely identified together.” See *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, 36-37; and also Jean-Pierre Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 62.

for the sake of waging war,” writes Aristotle: such a person “would seem altogether bloodthirsty.”<sup>495</sup> As we have seen, it is a capacity for divine thought that makes the human what it is: war is for the sake of peace, as labor is for the sake of leisure, and unless politics can be definitively separated from war and the array of instrumental activities with which it is bound, it cannot be part of a life of leisure.<sup>496</sup>

Against the position exemplified by MacIntyre and Nussbaum, interpreters such as Bartlett, Lord, and Salkever all insist that politics for Aristotle is not an end in itself, and that the contemplative life is best, though each has a slightly different idea of what constitutes a contemplative life. For Bartlett, contemplation, or *theoria*, is “transpolitical,” and the philosophic life itself represents the fulfillment of the aim of politics, the good life, that goes “beyond any political association” or best regime.<sup>497</sup> For Lord, on the other hand, the leisured life of philosophy, though higher than the practical or political life, is itself unattainable to most, and consequently a leisured life devoted to the arts of music and poetry represents a kind of second sailing that would provide political

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<sup>495</sup> *NE* X.7 1177b9-11. For an account of how making contemplation higher than politics can be seen as a critique of warrior culture and the prevailing ideal of masculinity in Aristotle’s Greece, see Salkever, *Finding the Mean*, Ch. 4. Koziak likewise finds in Aristotle a critique of the masculinity of his day, though in a different vein. See Barbara Koziak, “Tragedy, Citizens, and Strangers: The Configuration of Aristotelian Political Emotion,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle*, 263.

<sup>496</sup> *NE* X.7 1177b4-16. Cf. David J. Depew, “Politics, Music, and Contemplation in Aristotle’s Ideal State,” in *A Companion to Aristotle’s Politics*, eds. David Keyt and Fred J. Miller, Jr. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 364.

<sup>497</sup> Robert C. Bartlett, “The ‘Realism’ of Classical Political Science,” in *Action and Contemplation*, 304; 309. Cf. Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 49.

men with a reward for their service akin to a life of contemplation.<sup>498</sup> Salkever's view, it would seem, makes it possible to reconcile Bartlett and Lord. For Salkever, the human being can only be said to be a political animal insofar as he is a rational animal: the "political character" of human beings is less fundamental than their "potential rationality." Consequently, the end of politics is to establish the kind of order in which humans can become rational animals, developing the habits that would allow them to live a "thoughtful life."<sup>499</sup> Insofar as the potential for rationality is the *condition* for human political life, it can be said to transcend the particularity of any given political regime, and thus be considered "transpolitical." Yet Salkever also claims that music education "is the most significant though not the most pressing part of political life."<sup>500</sup> Though the distinction here between "significant" and "pressing" is not as clear as it might be, we might say that while the most pressing part of political life is ensuring that one's city has good laws, only with the right education—a musical education—can one hope to instill the kinds of habits in the populace that would allow them to live in harmony with such laws.<sup>501</sup> Thus the rationality that is both the condition of distinctly human political life and the goal toward which it strives will

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<sup>498</sup> Carnes Lord, *Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press: 1982), 197-198; 200.

<sup>499</sup> Salkever, *Finding the Mean*, 180; 185. Cf. Strauss, *The City and Man*, 17.

<sup>500</sup> Salkever, *Finding the Mean*, 82.

<sup>501</sup> Aristotle claims at *Pol.* II.9 1269a20-21: "the law has no power to secure obedience except habit; but habits can only be developed over a long period of time."

necessarily involve artistic education, a kind of proto-philosophy and aid to reason.

In this way, the trend in interpretation that understands the life of contemplation to be higher than the political life appears to better account for the role the arts play in making the best kind of human life possible, especially with regard to the idea that this life is a beautiful one, that is, one farthest from the reaches of labor and tasks devoted to less than noble ends. How then, can we understand the role of politics in this life? Is it, as Bartlett, Lord, and Salkever all argue, possessed only of a certain—though immense—instrumental value, as the art most capable of establishing the conditions in which a noble life can be cultivated? Yet if this were the case, then it is difficult to see how exactly philosophy can exert any influence on politics, and so ensure that politics actually serves ends conducive to philosophy. While philosophy needs politics to secure the conditions of its existence, so long as politics operates according to ends uninformed by philosophy, there will be a disjunction between the political life and the beautiful one.<sup>502</sup> For readers such as Strauss, this gap between politics and the best life is insurmountable. Strauss writes that Aristotle’s “cosmology” is “unqualifiedly separable from the quest for the best political order,” and that the idea of “ascent” that characterizes Socratic philosophizing differs qualitatively in

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<sup>502</sup> Or as Strauss writes: “the peak of the city and the peak of philosophy belong to entirely different times.” Strauss, *The City and Man*, 37.

Aristotle.<sup>503</sup> If the highest excellence might only be achieved by individuals and not cities, then the best politics might offer is to secure the conditions for individuals to flourish as they will *beyond* politics, which is to say, *privately*.

Yet if the role of politics is to secure private life, and let those who would be philosophers become philosophers as they will, then it appears the possibility of the best human life is left to chance.<sup>504</sup> Aristotle himself rejects the notion that happiness could be a matter of chance,<sup>505</sup> and from this we might argue that insofar as the contemplative life is the best human life, it requires a more active political dimension. That is, to see politics solely or even primarily as an instrument for securing private, individual ends is for Aristotle to forsake the most complete justice, justice as the good of another,<sup>506</sup> in favor of justice as doing good to one's self, and thus risk faction and the dissolution of the city.<sup>507</sup> Such politics is not fit for a proper citizen, let alone the most noble and virtuous human being, but is characteristic rather of politics dominated by the base.

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<sup>503</sup> Strauss, *The City and Man*, 21.

<sup>504</sup> Or as Socrates claims in Plato's *Republic*, "the sort of nature that possesses all the qualities we prescribed just now for the person who is going to be a complete philosopher, is seldom found among human beings, and there will be few who possess it." Consequently, if this nature "is not sown, planted, and grown in a suitable environment, it will develop in entirely the opposite way, unless some god comes to its aid." This last clause should be seen less as an endorsement of the principle of divine election, than as an explanation for Socrates' own philosophic nature. See *Rep.* VI 491a-b; 492a.

<sup>505</sup> At *NE* I.9 1099b24, Aristotle claims that to "entrust the greatest [megiston] and noblest [kalliston] thing to chance [tuche] would be excessively discordant," a point echoed at *EE* I.3 1215a11-19, where Aristotle claims: "For if the good life consists in what is due to fortune or nature, it would be something that many cannot hope for, since its acquisition is not in their power, nor attainable by their care or activity; but if it depends on the individual and his personal acts being of a certain character, then the supreme good would be both more general and divine, more general because more would be able to possess it, more divine because happiness would then be the prize offered to those who makes themselves and their acts of a certain character."

<sup>506</sup> *NE* V.1 1129b30-1130a5.

<sup>507</sup> *NE* IX.6 1167b10-15.

If the best life is to be possible, that which is public must be maintained, and so all citizens ought to have an education suited to public life. For Aristotle, this education involves the performing arts, i.e. music and poetry, to serve as a kind of proto-philosophy that might instill in common pupils the disposition necessary to *become* philosophical, at least to the extent that they will appreciate philosophy enough to not want to kill philosophers.<sup>508</sup> Yet even a citizenry educated in music and poetry is on its own not enough to render politics sufficiently philosophical for it to take as its aim the securing of the conditions of the best possible life. Aristotle is clear that music and poetry also have the power to make humans *worse*, and without philosophy it is unclear how the difference between noble and base forms of music and poetry might be discerned.<sup>509</sup> Thus what is needed is an account of the best life for a human being that both demonstrates its dependence on the arts, and shows how philosophy, or the life of contemplation, can inform and even shape political life. Such an account may perhaps come from an unlikely source: Aristotle's *Poetics*.

### *Tragedy and the Best Life in the Poetics*

While turning to the *Poetics* is not strange in terms of our attempt to grasp how the arts relate to Aristotle's conception of the best human life, their relation to the *Politics*, and politics generally, has often been overlooked. Praise for Aristotle's

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<sup>508</sup> *Pol.* VIII.5 1340b11-14.

<sup>509</sup> *Pol.* VII.17 1336b27-33; VIII.5 1340a13-22; 1340b11-14.

*Poetics* has often been ambiguous: crowned for its status as the text in which we can see the birth of art criticism as a distinct realm of academic inquiry (thus making it the ancestor of what we today call *aesthetics*),<sup>510</sup> it is at once dismissed for being a collection of analytic categories whose relevance has long passed, of possible interest only for its historical value.<sup>511</sup> Those who do see a political dimension to the *Poetics* tend to be no more sympathetic to its aims: in his detached, “biological” approach to different forms of poetry, Aristotle is accused of attempting to neutralize or efface their political dimensions—especially those of Greek tragedy.<sup>512</sup> My account of the *Poetics* will take a slightly different tack: while I agree with certain critics of the *Poetics* that the highly unusual account of tragedy therein is politically motivated—perhaps even antidemocratically so, in a certain sense—Aristotle’s account of tragedy serves to align it with his own account of the best human life, thus making the tragic hero not an example of

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<sup>510</sup> Angela Curran, “Feminism and the Narrative Structures of the *Poetics*,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Aristotle*, 291.

<sup>511</sup> “Unless you have these particular historical interests,” Barnes writes, “the *Poetics* will be a disappointment.” See Jonathan Barnes, “Rhetoric and Poetics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 284.

<sup>512</sup> See for example, Edith Hall, “Is there a *Polis* in Aristotle’s *Poetics*?” in *Tragedy and the Tragic*, ed. M.S. Silk (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998), 296; 304-305; and David Wiles, *Theatre and Citizenship* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 47. However, the degree to which tragedy was itself political in anything like a direct sense is itself disputed. For interpretations that focus on the political and even democratic dimensions of tragedy, see Cornelius Castoriadis, “The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy,” in *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, ed. David Ames Curtis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 117; J. Peter Euben, *The Tragedy of Political Theory*; Simon Goldhill, “Collectivity and Otherness—The Authority of the Tragic Chorus,” in *Tragedy and the Tragic*; Jean-Pierre Vernant, “Tensions and Ambiguities in Greek Tragedy,” in *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, eds. Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone, 1988); P.J. Wilson, “Tragic Rhetoric,” in *Tragedy and the Tragic*; and Victoria Wohl, *Law’s Cosmos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010). For dissenting views of Greek tragedy, see John Gould, “Tragedy and Collective Experience,” in *Tragedy and the Tragic*, and P.J. Rhodes, “Nothing to do with Democracy,” *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 123 (2003): 104-119.

monarchical, aristocratic, or oligarchic *hubris* brought low before the gods of the city, but an example of the good and excellent man, the one who most closely approximates what is godlike in human life.

It has been claimed that the aim of the *Poetics* is to counter Plato's treatment of poetry, and especially tragedy, in the *Republic*, and so re-appraise its place relative to the best human life.<sup>513</sup> For our purposes, this will be true in the sense that while Plato was found above to set his philosophy against tragedy while remaining deeply embedded in its terms, Aristotle affirms a certain version of tragedy that goes well beyond what tragedy likely meant to most Greeks of his age. That is, while Plato poetically rejects poetry, and so, in one important sense at least, remains within the sphere defined by the poets, Aristotle works through the terms of poetry with the eye of an anatomist, breaking them down into their component parts and putting them together again in a way that serves to transform them from within, and so force poetry to conform to standards that are his own. In this way poetry, and especially tragedy, become in Aristotle vehicles for his philosophy, illustrating the best life toward which humans might strive, and thus also the way in which the arts are bound up with defining the human, both in its best and worst instantiations.

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<sup>513</sup> See Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 381; Michelle Gellrich, *Tragedy and Theory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 102; 124; Charles Segal, "Catharsis, Audience, and Closure in Greek Tragedy," in *Tragedy and the Tragic*, 156. For an alternate interpretation of the relation between Plato and Aristotle expressed in the *Poetics*, see Elliot Bartky, "Plato and the Politics of Aristotle's *Poetics*," *The Review of Politics* 54.4 (1992): 589-619.

Aristotle begins his account of poetry by noting that what is common to the plurality of poetic forms is *mimesis*, or imitation. Aristotle claims that poetic forms are more than anything modes of imitation, and thus that they differ from each other according to the means of their imitation, that is, the kinds of tools they draw upon in order to carry out their imitation, the object of imitation, or the kinds of things they set to imitate, and the manner in which they set about this imitation—the kinds of crafts that inform their performance.<sup>514</sup> The commonality found in imitation that binds together the different forms of poetry seems for Aristotle to be based in human nature: humans are naturally prone to imitate, and indeed Aristotle claims they are the most imitative of all animals, making use of their mental and physical dexterity to imitate their world from the time of childhood onwards. Moreover, engaging in imitation is how humans first begin to learn.<sup>515</sup> Human beings “by nature desire to know,”<sup>516</sup> and so they naturally derive pleasure from learning,<sup>517</sup> which in turn binds them to poetry all the more, for poetry provides both an outlet for this power of imitation, and a means to learn and so gratify human intellectual desires.

In this sense, poetry appears to be an outgrowth of natural human capacities and inclinations, and so the claims examined above by Nietzsche, Heidegger, and others concerning the anthropological invariant lying at the root

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<sup>514</sup> *Poetics*, 1, 1447a14-17.

<sup>515</sup> *Poetics*, 4, 1448b5-9.

<sup>516</sup> Recall *Meta*, I.1, 980a21-27.

<sup>517</sup> *Poetics*, 4, 1448b13-15.

of the conception of art beginning with Aristotle seem to be justified. If Aristotelian poetics really are based on an anthropological invariant whereby “Art” is created by “Man” and is thereby a reflection of human nature, then a reversal that finds human nature to be a kind of artistic fiction would indeed appear to overturn this tradition and the place of “Man” therein. But here it is worth asking: exactly *what is* imitation? Is poetic imitation a kind of reproduction or representation of actually existing things, or does it serve to create these very things through its own activity?

On this point, Barnes writes: “Gibbon represented a degenerate Empire—and there was a degenerate Empire which he represented. Manet represented a lunch, but there was no lunch which he represented. To imitate, let us say, is to represent not in the Gibbon fashion, but in the Manet manner.”<sup>518</sup> Or in other words, *mimesis* is not a simple imitation or representation of the world as it is, but of the world as it might be—it imitates and so gives flesh to objects of the imagination, which, though based in the sense-experience of a given animal, are in the human case mediated by divine thought and those capacities closest to it. In this sense to imitate is to construct an image of the world refracted through the prism of human imagination, *logos*, and divine *nous*—it is to make the world *human*, which is to say, to endow it with an openness to human knowledge, aims, and desires so as to make it the means of their realization. But this is not to say

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<sup>518</sup> Barnes, “Rhetoric and Poetics,” 275.

that the human existed *as human* prior to this human world. Through poetry, the world becomes a stage—a theatre for human life—but this should not suggest that what is human exists prior to this performance. Rather, we might say that *mimesis* serves to crystallize certain potentials, potentials shared with other animals, giving them shape and so organizing them in a particular manner, which then only subsequently come to be understood as human.

It is to this poetic or *mimetic* transformation of the given, of pre-human potentials, into the human world which Aristotle refers when he claims that “the poet’s function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, i.e. what is possible as being probable [*eikos*] or necessary [*anagkaion*],” and so distinguishes the poet from the historian, placing him next to the philosopher as one concerned with “universals [*ta katholou*].”<sup>519</sup> In this way, poetry appears to be more than simply an expression of human potentials, but rather also appears to be endowed with the creative capacity to transform those potentials into properly human potentials, and so to fashion not only the world but the human being according to a certain image. That is, *mimesis* serves not only to create the world as a human world, but to create the human as the kind of animal that might populate this human world. In this sense, *mimesis* is not simply the expression of human potentials, but the activity that gives shape to that which is recognized as human potential in the first place.

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<sup>519</sup> *Poetics*, 9, 1451a36-1451b10.

But is this creative dimension of *mimesis* really enough to free poetry from an anthropological invariant that would limit it to an *expression* of human capacities? As we have seen, Aristotle considers all poetry to be modes of *mimesis*, differing according to the means, object, and technique employed. Yet Aristotle does not claim these differences in mimetic mode are themselves completely artificial: they appear to owe their origin to the character (*ethe*) of the poet. That is, while Aristotle claims that the distinction between tragedy and comedy concerns primarily the object of their respective mimetic endeavors—that tragedy concerns the imitation of the good or serious person (*spoudaios*) and comedy the base (*phaulos*)—it was originally the *spoudaios* that sought to poetically imitate noble or beautiful actions and the *phaulos* who likewise sought to imitate the base, or the ugly.<sup>520</sup> Insofar as one instills in oneself a base or noble character according to the actions one performs, and one can be naturally more suited to certain kinds of actions than others—i.e. some are naturally suited to be noble, and others base—then it appears a natural kernel remains, buried beneath the layers of artifice that shape and inform the actions that come to one as natural. In this sense, the anthropological invariant thought to lie at the root of the arts is more like a zoological invariant, insofar as the potentials in question—those laying “beneath” these layers of artifice—are shared with other

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<sup>520</sup> *Poetics*, 4, 1448b24-28. The base individuals imitated in comedy are, Aristotle claims, not necessarily base in every sense, but they are base specifically in the sense that they are ridiculous (*geloion*), a species of the ugly (*aischrou*), which Aristotle defines as a mistake or deformity without specific harm or pain. Or in other words, to be ridiculous in a comedic sense is to be ugly in a way that causes neither pity, nor fear—the watchwords of tragedy. See *Poetics*, 5, 1449a32-37; 9, 1452a2-3.

animals. The properly human only distinguishes itself through human activity, which is the set of animal potentials crystallized through *mimesis*. Thus it is only through artifice that human nature comes to be and is called natural. It is only through artistic practice that the natural becomes intelligible as such, and in this way we might say that nature too is a function or even creation of artifice, if we accept that this creation is not *ex nihilo*, but more of a shaping of the given, even if what is intelligible in the given is only its shape.

In this same way, it is the arts that create the standards of beauty or nobility through which the good is recognized as good. The natural bearing of the best human being, including his physical features, are all recognized as such only by those with the right education in music and poetry, and so to dismiss the relevance of physical features in recognizing the noble and good is to overlook the place of the arts in giving these shape. Tragedy, as an imitation of the good and excellent, serves as a kind of moral education to its audience, illustrating for them the human being as he might be, a human being better than those encountered everyday, and so an ideal toward which they might strive.<sup>521</sup> Yet here it may be objected that the moral ideal portrayed in tragedy is one focused on the deeds of the tragic hero in such a manner that the physical bearing of this hero is irrelevant—that, while Aristotle may claim that tragedy teaches moral excellence, this excellence is about action and choice, not one’s physical appearance. As

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<sup>521</sup> Or as Aristotle claims at *Poetics* 15, 1454b8-11: “As tragedy is an imitation of personages better than the ordinary man, we should follow the example of good portrait-painters, who reproduce the distinctive features of a man, and at the same time, without losing the likeness, make him handsomer than he is.”

evidence, one might note that perhaps the greatest and most paradigmatic of tragic heroes, Oedipus and his daughter Antigone, are both deformed: Oedipus, whose name refers to his feet being pierced as a baby before he was exposed and left for dead, and Antigone, insofar as she is a woman, and as such, according to Aristotle, a kind of natural “deformity,”<sup>522</sup> and deviation from the human ideal.

It is true that Aristotle claims that the principal object of tragic imitation is not the various characters of human beings as such but “action and life” (*praxeon kai biou*), whose connection to such details may not be immediately clear.

Aristotle writes in the *Poetics* that the beautiful is found in a certain magnitude; that is, something that is too small or too large becomes indistinct and so lacks perfection or completion in our eyes, and so the beautiful must be a certain arrangement of the parts such as to form a complete and intelligible whole.<sup>523</sup>

Insofar as tragedy sets to imitate the best and most beautiful actions, so it must imitate complete actions. Actions are complete in a tragedy when they convey the passage of the hero from bad fortune to good, or good fortune to bad, and are bound together such that this passage would not be possible without each of its parts.<sup>524</sup> This synthesis of incidents, or objects of action (*pragmaton*), is what Aristotle calls the *muthos*, the “myth,” or story or “plot” specific to a given tragedy, and which is the end or purpose (*telos*) of the tragedy. Thus, while both character (*ethos*) and thought (*dianoian*) are expressed in tragedy, they are done

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<sup>522</sup> Recall *GA* II.3 737a27-29; IV.6 775a14-15.

<sup>523</sup> *Poetics* 7, 1450b34-1451a2.

<sup>524</sup> *Poetics* 8, 1451a31-36.

so in actions, and it is the particular concatenation of actions that serves to convey nobility.

Insofar as tragedy might serve as a form of moral education, this emphasis on action is unsurprising, for while we might strive to become a person of noble character, characters are only accessible to us indirectly, through the actions we might imitate.<sup>525</sup> Human animals instill in themselves certain characters through the actions they perform and the decisions they make, and these characters in turn serve to support the kinds of actions they will perform and decisions they will make in the future. In this sense, actions both precede the identities marked by character as part of the causal structure that gives them life, and follow these identities as their expression. The fragile or tenuous nature of such identity, dependent as it is on the performance of actions that are themselves subject to a variety of external factors beyond the control of the performer, has been noted by scholars,<sup>526</sup> yet the particular factor of physical appearance is typically overlooked. Both Oedipus and Antigone are the children of royalty, each possessed of the pride and even ferocity of those of noble lineage: their actions serve to convey this identity, and as such, their physical “deficiencies” are properly tragic. That is, these deficiencies evoke pity or even fear as individuals who are or ought to be noble but through chance are unable to realize their true

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<sup>525</sup> *NE* III.5 1114b31-1115a3.

<sup>526</sup> See Patchen Markell, “Tragic Recognition: Action and Identity in *Antigone* and Aristotle,” *Political Theory* 31.1 (2003): 6-38; and Patchen Markell, *Bound by Recognition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), Ch. 3; Cf. Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 382.

nature—thoroughly unlike comedic deformities that are without harm.<sup>527</sup> Were Oedipus or Antigone to be portrayed in an undignified or ignoble manner—that is, were they not *beautiful* in some sense that ensured their respective deformities be interpreted not as constitutive of their characters, but as aberrations—their actions would not be tragic, for their deficiencies would color their actions and render them laughable, and their lives comedic.

In fact, it is not terribly difficult to imagine the great tragedies made comedies through a transformation of the physical bearings of the heroes according to the best and worst features Aristotle highlights. We can imagine a short, stocky Oedipus, with bent back and limping gait, his high-pitched voice impotently attempting to command the elderly but upright Teiresias to tell him precisely what he ought not to know, or a slight and effeminate Creon raging against a taller, bulkier, Antigone that he is “no man and she the man / if she can win this and not pay for it,” and insisting that so long as he lives, “no woman shall rule.”<sup>528</sup> That is, while the actions may be the heart of what tragedy would imitate, the perceived nobility of these actions depends upon certain conditions that include the physical features of the hero: if the conditions of the actions

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<sup>527</sup> We should not then, as Barnes does, dismiss Aristotle’s claim that tragedy evokes pity and fear because we do not fear murdering our fathers and sleeping with our mothers—it is the fragility of the good life that is conveyed in tragedy and that causes the spectator to fear the myriad contingencies that might rend his own life, not the particular contingencies that serve to destroy a particular tragic hero. See “Rhetoric and Poetics,” 278. Cf. Lear, “Katharsis,” *Phronesis* 33.3 (1988): 314; 321.

<sup>528</sup> Sophocles, *Antigone*, 528-29; 578. Cf. Markell, *Bound by Recognition*, 74.

conflict with the actions themselves, the mimetic effect is transformed, and tragedy becomes comedy—the good and excellent individual becomes ridiculous.

Thus it is essential that the individual who performs the noblest actions be also gifted by nature with the “supports” of such action, and these include physical beauty, for without such supports the actions risk misrecognition, and the noble becomes the base. Or as Markell writes: “for Aristotle, people are not virtuous or vicious in the abstract, but in relation to whatever is appropriate or fitting to them, as the sort of people they are.”<sup>529</sup> It is not simply that actions define who one is, but who one is perceived to be defines one’s actions, and who one is perceived to be cannot be divorced from beauty. The ugly are ill-equipped to perform noble deeds, for in doing so, they risk extending beyond the range of activities appropriate to what their physical appearance tacitly claims them to be, and the discrepancy or disharmony between what they are and who they present themselves to be is the object of comedy.

Thus while action and its emphasis serves to bring into focus the way in which even the best lives are ultimately fragile achievements, the actions that so give shape to identity are creative in the sense that this identity is a crystallization of pre-existing potentials that would fail to cohere without these actions. While it might be said that action in the Aristotelian sense does not serve to create new possibilities or new identities from nothing, it nevertheless serves to continually

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<sup>529</sup> Markell, *Bound by Recognition*, 76. Cf. *EE* III.5 1232b36-38: “He then who is worthy of the small but thinks himself worthy of the great is blameable; for it is stupid and not noble that he should obtain out of proportion to his worth.”

mold an identity from the possibilities available in the matter given by nature. Like nature, actions mold this identity to varying degrees of success depending both on the degree of their virtuousness and the conditions that make such virtue possible, but one cannot choose the material with which one is to act, the quality of which is not the same for all.

Yet if Aristotle holds tragedy to be an imitation of the life and actions of the best kind of human being, can tragedy likewise be said to be responsible for *creating* the best kind of human being? And if this is indeed the case, does this not mean that the hero tragedy reveals to be an example of the best human life must himself be a kind of philosopher, insofar as it is the philosopher who devotes himself to what is best in human life, namely, contemplation as the realization of divine thought? How, then, is it that the actions portrayed in tragedy can be understood in terms of contemplative activity? And what of all those who will never approach the greatness of the tragic hero—what is the philosophical and political import of tragedy, if any, for its spectators? To these questions, we presently turn.

## Chapter Eleven: Tragedy and Contemplative Action

As we have seen, the good and excellent individual as he (or, as Aristotle ought to admit, *she*)<sup>530</sup> is presented in tragedy seems to be a man or woman of action, a practical person. In this way, the *Poetics* can be said to illustrate a relation between art and the best human life, however, this portrayal as it has been discussed this far says little about the life of contemplation—rather than build on the relation between the arts and the life of contemplation noted above, it appears to give credence to the view that the best life for human beings is the practical, political life. However, a closer look at Aristotle’s interpretation of these actions reveals a different story, one wherein the possibility of a kind of reconciliation between the practical and contemplative lives seems far less remote.

In *Politics* VII, Aristotle begins his discussion of the best political regime with the claim that we cannot clearly know this best regime without first knowing what life is best, or most “choiceworthy”<sup>531</sup> for human beings, for without knowing to what end human life ought to strive, we cannot know what kind of regime would facilitate or obstruct this striving. Aristotle thus begins to outline the best human life, which he finds to be a life of action (*bios praktikos*), where

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<sup>530</sup> That is, Antigone is very clearly a tragic hero on par with any other tragic figure; however, even here Aristotle claims that “it is not appropriate in a female character to be manly, or clever” (*Poetics* 15, 1454a22-24). What, then, are we to make of Antigone?

<sup>531</sup> *Pol.* VII.1 1323a14-16

“action” is defined broadly enough to extend beyond those actions that directly “involve relations with other people,” or that “we engage in for the sake of action’s consequences.” Action, we find here, includes the self-sufficient activities of “study and thought [*theoria kai dianoeseis*].”<sup>532</sup> In applying this expansive definition of action given in the *Politics* to the actions that make up the central object of imitation in tragedy, both the relation between the practical and the contemplative lives, and thus how it is that tragedy can display an imitation of the best human life, come into sharper focus. In order to grasp the relation of these forms of action to tragic action, it is worth focusing on each of these terms in turn.

I begin by examining thought as it is presented as an action in tragedy, arguing that for Aristotle the nobility of actions represented in tragedy can only be identified as such insofar as they are seen to be the expressions of thought. Thought is made manifest in tragedy through the speech of the hero, which serves to establish the nobility of the hero and consequently the nobility of his actions bound to the *muthos* of the play. In this sense, it is the “speech act” of the hero as it is framed in the context of tragedy that reveals the excellence and goodness of the hero as the best kind of human being, thus separating him *qua* human from other animals. Yet while on one hand tragedy serves to so define a best kind of human being in relation to a lower, animal sort, it at once provides a

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<sup>532</sup> *Pol.* VII.3 1325b13-23.

possibility for a kind of reconciliation between them. While tragic speech serves to identify the hero as the best and most noble human being, tragic spectatorship, I argue, provides an avenue for even the base to reach toward what is best in them, by exercising their own capacities for “theory” or contemplation (*theoria*) as spectators of the play. Insofar as these actions and the sphere of their possibility require a certain political organization, I argue that it is Aristotle’s polity, providing as it does official roles for both noble individuals and the base multitude, that is most conducive to the best life made possible through tragedy. In defending the place of polity as a condition of the best life, I argue that equitable and just activity are necessary to round out the political dimension of the contemplative life, and these are again best facilitated by the political integration of noble and base found in polity. Thus the best life as it is made manifest in tragedy reveals polity to be the best political regime, and so the role of the arts of politics and tragedy in making possible the best life are reinforced.

### *Thought as Action: Tragic Speech*

Aristotle claims that after the action and the actor, the third element of tragic imitation is thought (*dianoia*). Thought, as it is expressed in tragedy, is “the power of saying whatever can be said, or what is appropriate to the occasion. This is what, in the speeches in tragedy, falls under the arts of politics and rhetoric.”<sup>533</sup>

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<sup>533</sup> *Poetics* 6, 1450b3-5.

There is much to be untangled in this brief passage. If, following the *Politics*, we can understand thought to also be a kind of action, then thought as it is expressed in tragedy as speech seems to become a kind of supplementary action to the main actions that tragedy serves to imitate and whose synthesis constitutes a tragedy's *muthos*. That is, while the actions imitated in tragedy are said to be noble and so convey the nobility of the one acting, without speech these actions appear to be incomplete, and as such, even ambiguous. As Aristotle holds that the right actions will vary significantly depending on the circumstances, it is thus the thought behind them that serves to make them complete and definitively establish their nobility. Thought, as it is expressed in the tragic speech, thus serves to give an account of the actions, and so convince the audience of their nobility, and of the goodness and excellence of the character of the one acting and speaking.<sup>534</sup> Secondly, if thought as it is expressed in tragedy, or *tragic speech*, is “the power of saying whatever can be said,” it seems to coincide with *logos*, which was argued above to be the rational potential of language in contrast to its actuality, *dialektos*. *Dialektos* without *logos* is akin to the chirping of birds—it is sound produced by bodily organs, rooted in sensation and imagination but without the rational link to divine thought that serves to separate human language from the sounds made by other animals. Insofar as tragic speech is the expression of thought, it is unique to human beings. While this statement may at

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<sup>534</sup> We get a hint here of the link between tragedy and legal proceedings. See *Rhetoric (Rhet.)* I.2 1358a2-10; Cf. Wohl, *Law's Cosmos*, xii; 17; 22; 115-116.

a glance seem obvious—other animals do not stage tragedies, and consequently we might expect that everything involved in them is uniquely human—however, we must recall that not all humans share equally in thought. Thus not all are equally suited for tragic speech—some must be content to listen, regardless of whether or not they get a turn to speak.

Yet this power of saying is not sovereign in anything like an absolute sense, for “whatever can be said” is limited by “what is appropriate to the occasion.” That is, the nobility of the speech can only be judged in the context in which it is given, and so requires considerable powers of discrimination and practical reason on the part of the speaker, and perhaps also on the part of the listener. While the speaker is charged with speaking in a manner worthy of thought, of choosing the appropriate words to express in human terms that which is mediated by the divine, the listener must also exert himself so as to be able to hear the divine reverberate in these words. Where the divinity of thought is successfully conveyed from speaker to listener, the speaker reveals his excellence and the listener recognizes it as such—this is a political speech in the properly human sense, that is, it is politics rooted in *logos*.<sup>535</sup> Where the speaker fails to convey the divinity of thought, and his words are understood simply as expressions of some particular interest, then they remain bound by imagination and sensation,

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<sup>535</sup> *Pol.* I.2 1253a6-18. Cf. Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought*, 49-50.

and fall short of properly human speech. These words are simply rhetoric.<sup>536</sup> In this sense we can understand Aristotle to be noting a decline in the quality of tragedy with the advance of “extreme” democracy when Aristotle claims that the poets of old made their characters like citizens (*politikos*), whereas contemporary poets make their characters more like orators (*retorikos*).<sup>537</sup> Moreover, we ought to see here in the distinction between the good and excellent man and the ordinary one a distinction between what is closest to the divine, and so most human, and what is closer to the animal.

In this way, tragedy’s role in moral education is also made clearer, for the performance of tragic action serves to make the actor a good human being, and in so doing, serve as an example for others of what a good human being must be.<sup>538</sup> Put differently: if thought is an action, and tragic speech is the expression of thought, then tragic speech is also an action—the kind of action particular to the

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<sup>536</sup> Aristotle defines rhetoric as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion.” Focused as it is on persuading a given audience, this definition does not preclude the possibility of rhetorical speech being true and rational, given one’s audience finds such things persuasive. However, in focusing on persuasion in this manner, rhetoric concerns itself primarily with *appearances*, and consequently the senses and the imagination, rather than divine thought. One might use rhetoric to *appear* to be a good person, and make another *appear* to be bad. To call something “simply rhetoric,” then, is to say it is speech concerned with appearances before truth. See *Rhet.* I.2 1355b27; III.7 1408a20-23; III.19 1419b17-18.

<sup>537</sup> *Poetics* 6, 1450b5-7.

<sup>538</sup> *Contra* Lear, who contests the centrality of pedagogy in Aristotle’s conception of tragedy. Though Lear’s discussion of tragedy concerns primarily the role of catharsis, whereas mine focuses on the philosophical and political importance of tragedy more broadly, a key objection Lear brings against the pedagogical reading of tragedy more broadly is that the spectator of tragedy is a “virtuous man” and thus has no need of such education. However, while Aristotle does think that tragedy is a mimesis of the actions of the best sort of person, there is little evidence to suggest that Aristotle thought that only the best kinds of people would form the audience, and this was certainly not the case in Aristotle’s Athens. As I will show below, it is precisely tragedy’s ability to appeal to the best in both good and bad spectators that lends it its importance. See Lear, “Katharsis,” 315; 321.

politics practiced by the good and excellent, and through which one is recognized as such. This connection brings us close to contemporary theories of the “speech act.” The words of the tragic speech, similar to the pronouncement of a legal verdict, serve to make the good and excellent man what he is: good and excellent.<sup>539</sup> Without pronouncing the words he remains unknown, and if they miss their mark he becomes ridiculous: he reveals himself to not have been good and excellent in the first place. Tragic speech thus serves as a kind of speech act marking the passage of the hero from an unknown or at least ambiguous state to one of being good and excellent—in this way tragic speech is the action that imbues the speaker with the kind of character that might support similar noble deeds in the future. Read in the context of Aristotle’s biology, we might see this unknown or ambiguous state of the hero’s character prior to his deeds to play upon the ambiguity of human life: the hero is apparently human, but whether or not he tends more towards the animal side of human nature or stretches out toward the divine will only be revealed in his actions. In this sense, the actions, in revealing the hero to be noble, serve to separate him from the animal condition of the base, and so serve as an imitation of the best human, as a kind of poetic fiction, not unlike Manet’s lunch as Barnes noted above, yet which now serves as

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<sup>539</sup> According to Ober, “Athenian politics operated quite overtly according to pragmatic, discursive, speech-act principles. By making proclamations in the Assembly and in the law courts, the Athenian demos self-consciously establishes and reiterated social and political realities, and it did so without much worrying about the ontological status of the realities so created.” See Josiah Ober, *The Athenian Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 11.

a standard to be expressly emulated, and implicitly, serves to shape the evaluative measure of human life.

However, like a legal judgment, the possibility of revealing one's excellence or nobility through speech requires a number of conditions. According to Austin, in order for such speech acts to "work," that is, in order for a performative utterance to have the effect it is meant to have, it generally requires that "the *circumstances* in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, *appropriate*, and it is very commonly necessary that either the speaker himself or other persons should *also* perform certain *other* actions, whether 'physical' or 'mental' actions."<sup>540</sup> That is, tragic speech is linked to the other actions that constitute the tragic *muthos* and whose character it serves to clarify. While the main actions are incomplete without the account given in tragic speech, tragic speech itself requires these actions to animate the words spoken. Moreover, the words themselves require a certain context: not only must the right words be spoken, but they must be spoken by the right person, at the right time, and in the right manner in order for the desired effect to be made manifest. Certain conventions are required to give order to the context and so clarify the conditions or standards that permit one to identify and evaluate the utterance, and with it the person making the utterance. Thus we must consider what Austin calls the "total situation" of the "total speech act" in order to understand how utterances

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<sup>540</sup> J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 8. Original emphasis.

and statements either achieve their desired ends or go wrong.<sup>541</sup> In the case of tragic speech, the conventions that directly order the context of the speech and establish conditions that make identifying and evaluating possible are those of Greek tragedy itself, of which the *Poetics* is an account. Thus for Aristotle, the success of the tragic speech in making thought manifest depends on how it relates to the elements of tragedy: foremost, the other actions that make up the overall *muthos* of the play, and the character giving the speech and to whom they speak, and, to lesser degrees, the melody and the spectacle.<sup>542</sup>

Thus we might say that tragedy for Aristotle is an art that allows for the organization of language and gestures such as to represent an image of the human being that might serve as a normative ideal worthy of imitation, one that strives toward what is most divine and so best in human life. Yet this ideal human being is precisely that—an ideal, if not an *Idea*: even if we grant that, unlike Platonic Ideas, this human ideal is rooted in actually existing things, it represents an image of humanity that is not simply an expression of anything already existing in the human world. It is only in striving toward this ideal, and the particular capacities it is seen to express, that something like this human and its capacities comes to exist and distinguish itself from the animal. We might thus see tragedy as a kind of “human guise” that teaches the human animal to be

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<sup>541</sup> Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, 52.

<sup>542</sup> These latter two conditions Aristotle sees as being less important, for while they provide pleasure to the spectator, they address particulars that can be changed without the core of the tragedy being altered, and involve crafts that are farthest from poetry. Aristotle will even go as far as claiming that the effect toward which tragedy strives is possible without these elements. See *Poetics* 6, 1450b15-20.

human through assuming a human role,<sup>543</sup> either directly as the actor on stage, or indirectly, as a spectator identifying with the actions performed. While the speech and gestures may be nothing but “play-acting” at first—nothing more than a kind of game of gestures—Aristotle’s insistence that it is divine thought and its related human capacities that shine through these actions, and not the gods themselves, would serve to transform the reasons for acting in the way that one does, supplanting the logic of the world of poetic myth with Aristotle’s own philosophy.<sup>544</sup>

In this way Aristotle would use tragedy to rewrite the human-animal divide as it prevailed in the world of poetic myth and from which even Plato was unable to extract himself. Aristotle’s account of tragedy, and of poetry more generally, thus serves as the other side of the coin whose tail was revealed in Aristotle’s biological writings. Poetry, and tragedy most specifically, would according to Aristotle’s account serve the same role in the sphere of moral education as his biology would in the sphere of natural philosophy: to radically redraw the boundaries between human and animal. Whereas tragedy was previously seen as a continuation of the mythic relation between human and animal, wherein a human will enter into proximity with an animal in order to distinguish himself from other humans and identify himself as a hero or master,

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<sup>543</sup> See Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 380.

<sup>544</sup> Thus Aristotle’s exclusion of the gods from his discussion of tragedy is a result of his philosophical and political project, and probably not, as Vernant claims, that Aristotle and his contemporaries “no longer understood tragic man.” See Vernant, “Tensions and Ambiguities in Greek Tragedy,” 29. Cf. Edith Hall, “Is there a *Polis* in Aristotle’s *Poetics*?” 296; Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, 117.

in Aristotle's account tragedy serves to separate the human from the animal by offering an image of the noblest human actions. The tragic hero for Aristotle is thus not one who forms a kind of pact with an animal or animals to establish himself as a hero, but one for whom the distance between himself and other animals is greatest.

Like Aristotle's biology, his poetics appear to cut both ways on the question of equality: while both Aristotle's biology and his poetics appear to undermine the particular manner in which aristocratic distinction was established in the world of poetic myth, they at once establish a new hierarchy, one arguably even more rigid than the one they would replace. In terms of biology, this hierarchy concerns the idea that some humans are more human than others: that they are naturally better equipped for practicing what is best for a human being. What we have seen of Aristotle's *Poetics* does not contradict this—in fact, it would appear that insofar as recognizing those kinds thought naturally to be higher or lower depends upon the appearance or the physical features of the higher and the lower, then what is “natural” conceals within it aesthetic standards of beauty derived from the arts. The existence of tragedy and comedy attest to a higher, more divine kind of human, and a lower, more animal kind, and these serve as archetypes of the human form.

Politically speaking, then, it appears that the arts accomplish and perpetuate a division between higher and lower human types, but here we might

ask: what then, holds these two types together? It was found that while the life of contemplation may be higher than the political life, it requires an active political dimension in order to be possible. While tragedy displays the best human life, a life that is at once active and contemplative, it is less clear how tragedy as the expression of this life might relate to those unsuited to live it. If politics also concerns, as Aristotle claims, the production of friendship, and the friendship of the best kind of human being is the friendship based on excellence or virtue,<sup>545</sup> then insofar as tragedy represents the actions of the best human being and in so doing serves an important role in the education necessary for citizenship, we might also expect it to facilitate the building and maintaining of bonds of friendship based on virtue. Thus we must turn now to what might be called the “popular” dimension of tragedy: tragedy as moral education not only for those who might aspire to the best in human life, but for those who are naturally ill-suited for this life. We must turn then, away from a focus on tragic heroes, and focus instead on tragic spectators.

### *Theory as Action: Tragic Spectatorship*

My account of tragedy in the *Poetics* to this point has focused primarily on the relation between thought and speech as forms of action performed within the play itself; in this way, I attempted to elucidate the relation between thought and

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<sup>545</sup> *EE* VII.1 1234b23-25; VII.2 1236b1-2.

practice, and thus philosophy and politics, which in Aristotle's account is a central function of tragedy. However, this account suggests a passive role with respect to philosophy and politics for most citizens: as spectators, they learn to recognize who is noble and who is not, but not necessarily to be noble themselves, or even to be as good as they might be. Yet if tragedy is to serve a role in moral education to more than the few who actually perform in tragedies, then it must also provide spectators themselves with a chance to act nobly, or the rough analogue of noble, particular to the individual spectator. Put more bluntly: why teach spectators to recognize the noble, if they are without avenue for acting themselves? Is Aristotle's goal simply to use tragedy to teach compliance—to make the base obedient to the noble? Or is it possible that tragedy might also provide a stage for the base to be as good as they are able, and thus make a kind of friendship between them and the best sort possible? I turn here to the first part of this last question, contending that Aristotle does indeed see tragedy as providing a venue or serving as an example of how "the many" might also act as well as they might, but in order to understand how, we must return to the expansive idea of action in *Politics* VII.

Recall that for Aristotle, theory or "study" (*theoria*) is among the highest contemplative activities, and in *Politics* VII, Aristotle writes that it is an *action*, thus suggesting that theoretical activity can be both political and philosophical. Moreover, as both Vernant and Euben have noted, theoretical activity is

intimately related to the performing arts, as both theory and theater share a common root. Euben writes that the Greek “*thea* means see, sight, gaze, look upon, behold, admire, and contemplate. As a feminine noun, *thea* suggests a view or thing seen, a sight or a spectacle. It is related to the verb *theaomai*, to gaze at, to behold, especially with a sense of wonder and admiration.” Here Euben relates this definition of *theaomai* to its use in texts by Plato and Aristotle, noting that it “is not limited to physical vision but can include mental activity.”<sup>546</sup> Euben further notes that *theoria* “is the normal Greek for official attendance as a spectator in the political and religious rites of a city,” which included the performance of tragedies. In this way, the “[t]heater provided a place and moment when citizen spectators could judge refracted versions of themselves onstage,” thus contributing to “the self-reflexivity that characterized fifth-century Athens.”<sup>547</sup>

Yet in drawing indiscriminately upon the philosophical texts of Plato and Aristotle and the role theory is known to have played historically, Euben moves a little too quickly in his associations. That is, if the common meaning of *theoria* was to participate in the political and religious rites of the city as a spectator, to view (*theaomai*) and judge the spectacle accordingly, this would indeed suggest that *theoria* and *theaomai* are political and religious terms, but it does not necessarily mean that they were considered philosophical to anyone other than

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<sup>546</sup> Euben, *The Tragedy of Political Theory*, 50. Cf. Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought*, 120.

<sup>547</sup> Euben, *Platonic Noise*, 42; 59.

Plato, Aristotle, and their disciples. Given their *at best* enigmatic relations to democracy, the use of *theoria* by Plato and Aristotle to mean contemplative or philosophical activity cannot be seen as innocent, and so conflated with the “normal Greek.” Taking a hard interpretation of Plato and Aristotle as anti-democrats, one *might* argue that in locating an honored political and religious activity not in its formal role in the civic life of Athenian democracy, but in philosophical activity not accessible to all, Plato and Aristotle would undermine these public rites, claiming that they can only properly be performed by a group of people far more exclusive in membership than the number of citizens who had legal access to their performance in democratic Athens.

In this way, Plato and Aristotle would make a public rite a private one. Rather than allow citizens to judge for themselves what is good, bad, just or unjust in the context of spectatorship, Plato and Aristotle would be saying that only philosophy can properly define these terms and answer the questions associated with them, questions whose consideration were otherwise considered part of the public life of any citizen. In attempting to define a sphere of specialist knowledge properly suited to questions that were previously considered matters of public interest, Plato and Aristotle would thus be effectively narrowing the definition of citizen, rendering the poets and common citizens that ignore this boundary guilty of a kind of *pleonexia*, of overreaching their appropriate

station.<sup>548</sup> Thus, while it is possible that tragic *theoria* contributed to Athenian “self-reflexivity,” Plato and Aristotle’s appropriation of the term would be an attempt to replace tragic spectatorship with philosophy as the bearer of this reflexivity. In this sense, the philosophical *theoria* advocated by Plato and Aristotle is antagonistic to the tragic *theoria* practiced by the common citizens of Athens.

Though Aristotle’s suggestion that the public performance of a tragedy, and so its actual role as a politico-religious rite, is unnecessary to accomplish its tragic effect—that the effect can be experienced from reading the play all on one’s own<sup>549</sup>—appears to corroborate the notion that Aristotle is party to a philosophical high-jacking of tragic *theoria*, I do not believe Aristotle’s intention was to place *theoria* beyond the grasp of the common citizen. Rather, the philosophical dimension Aristotle, following Plato, considers part of *theoria*, allows Aristotle to, perhaps *unlike* Plato, theorize the possibility of something akin to mass or public contemplation—a form of philosophical activity that the many can practice despite their natural deficiencies and unsuitability to becoming philosophers individually. It is important, however, to draw a distinction between the philosophical and tragic or *political* meanings of *theoria* as it is done above in order to recognize that Aristotle does indeed see two

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<sup>548</sup> Cf. Castoriadis, when he writes that the definition of the democratic citizen in Athens and elsewhere “ought to include all those who, irrespective of their profession, try to go beyond their sphere of specialization and actively interest themselves in what is going on in society.” See Castoriadis, “Intellectuals and History,” in *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, trans. David Ames Curtis, 5.

<sup>549</sup> *Poetics* 6, 1450b15-20.

different dimensions of *theoria* and is trying to reconcile them to the degree he thinks possible—a project that is not intelligible if we follow Euben in conflating the philosophical and politico-religious dimensions of *theoria* in the very definition of the word. Thus, while I agree with Euben in his presentation of the politico-religious dimension of *theoria*, its philosophical dimension, as the activity Aristotle takes to be most definitive of the best human life, requires further elaboration if the relation between it and politics that Aristotle is trying to advance is to be understood. Perhaps the most concise statement of the philosophical dimension of *theoria*, the life of contemplation as the best life, comes to us in Book X of the *NE*.

In Book X of the *NE*, Aristotle provides his famous account of contemplation as the best possible human life, an account that appears to some to jut from the flow of arguments in a work otherwise devoted to the centrality of the practical, political life. Indeed, given her focus on precisely this centrality of the practical, political life in Aristotle's thought, Nussbaum sees Book X to be fundamentally at odds with the rest of the work, and even goes as far as speculating that it was inserted by a later editor. In this way, Book X is seen as a fragment likely composed by a youthful Aristotle still under the sway of "ethical Platonism," and opposed to the views expressed by Aristotle "in the bulk of his mature ethical and political writings."<sup>550</sup> For Nussbaum, the divinity of the

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<sup>550</sup> Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 377.

contemplative life extends beyond the practical concerns of human life and Aristotle's deliberate anthropocentricity to the point that "we cannot have a harmonious fusion of the human and the divine."<sup>551</sup> In this respect Nussbaum appears to be in agreement with Strauss concerning the decisive separability of the cosmological and political dimensions in Aristotle.<sup>552</sup> Yet this concern for *hubris* is perhaps a more appropriate description of the tragic poets than it is of Aristotle.

As we have seen in the examination of Aristotle's biological writings above, the human only is human in relation to the divine—it is only the divine *nous* and its related capacities that set the human animal apart from other animals, and what we call "human" is really the attempt to accommodate the divine within the boundaries of the animal. Human life is itself a fusion of the divine and the animal, and while the degree of harmony really possible for humans might be debated, it is clear that Aristotle thinks some degree of harmony in human life is possible and worth striving toward, and this degree of harmony is inseparable from what is divine in human life. That is, all the practical, human things are only intelligible as such in the light of divine *nous*. Aristotle's claim that only humans have the capacities necessary to live a practical life, the uniquely human dimension to these capacities Aristotle gives them in the *NE* as opposed to in the

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<sup>551</sup> Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*, 377.

<sup>552</sup> Recall Strauss, *The City and Man*, 21. For a critique of their respective positions and the implications of their approaches to Aristotle's thought from a methodological viewpoint, see John R. Wallach, "Contemporary Aristotelianism," *Political Theory* 20.4 (1992): 613-641.

biological writings, thus necessitates an account of *nous* and its relation to practical life.<sup>553</sup> Furthermore, we should see the account of contemplative life Aristotle gives in Book X to profoundly *separate* him from Plato, for it is precisely Aristotle's critique of the Platonic doctrine of Ideas—that Ideas conceived as distinct entities from the practical world of things become irrelevant to it<sup>554</sup>—that compels him to offer an account of the practical dimension of contemplation. In this way, we must see Book X as a necessary part of the practical life the *NE* takes as its object of study.

Thus the claim made in *Politics* VII that *theoria* is an action finds resonance in Book X of the *NE*. Aristotle writes that happiness is virtuous activity, and that the virtue of what is best would be the activity appropriate to the most “complete happiness” (*teleia eudaimonia*), and this activity is contemplative (*theoretike*). Yet Aristotle vacillates here on the divinity of this life: is this best thing whose virtuous activity would be the best human life divine *nous*, or some other thing that seems naturally to rule and to command, and “to possess intelligence concerning what is noble and divine [*kalon kai theion*]”? That is, is the best life one defined by activity that is actually divine (*theion*), or activity of “the most divine of the things in us [*theiotaton*]”?<sup>555</sup> This difference

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<sup>553</sup> For example, while at *HA*, IX.10 614b19 Aristotle refers to cranes as being *phronimon*, in *NE* VI Aristotle claims *phronesis* involves *logos* and is thus an exclusively human activity. See *NE* VI.5 1140b2-8; 19-21; 25-28; VI.7 1141b8-9. An account of the practical dimension of contemplative life as given in *NE* X allows us to reconcile these apparently opposing positions, rather than simply reject one of them.

<sup>554</sup> Recall *Meta*. III.6 1002b30; XI.1 1059b3; XIII.4 1079a5-7.

<sup>555</sup> *NE* X.7 1177a12-18.

between the divine and the most divine for a human should be seen not as suggesting doubts on Aristotle's part about the supremacy of *nous*, but rather to indicate the difference between particular humans in their ability to perform noetic activity, along with the precarious nature of this performance in the first place. As we have seen above in the discussion of leisure, Aristotle insists that what is best—what is most noble and divine—is what is most self-sufficient, and consequently the best activities must be leisured activities—they must not be shaped by ends beyond themselves, but devoted instead to the flourishing of the beauty of their own performance. Political activity is bound to the activities associated with war, and war is for the sake of peace, and consequently these activities are not ends in themselves, and thus cannot represent the actualization of what is best in human beings.

Contemplation, on the other hand, aims at no end beyond itself, is more continuous an activity, and even at first glance appears to require fewer external supports than the activities of politics and war—it is how the best person would choose to occupy themselves were they free of the web of instrumental activities that sustain life. In this sense the complete happiness of the human being tends beyond what is merely human, toward the divine. While humans will never actually become divine through contemplation—that is, Aristotle does not think that any en-mattered life could actually be so blessed as to spend its every moment in contemplative activity—that the divine as such is beyond human

grasp does not, as we have seen, preclude divinity from animating what is best in human life. Insofar as one might devote oneself to contemplation, one might through contemplation become *more divine* than one otherwise would be; that is, one might come closer to actualizing the fullness of one's human potential.

Insofar as the human can be said in this way to be the animal that reaches beyond itself, beyond its animal sensibility and toward the divinity of thought, it would be insufficiently human to dwell only upon human things, to allow the divine thought to which humans have access to be limited by the mortality or transience of human animality; one must instead strive "to make oneself immortal, insofar as that is possible."<sup>556</sup> Making oneself "immortal" to the extent humanly possible means to live a life in accord with divine thought (*noun bios*), and it is this life that is the happiest, and the most human (*malista anthropos*).<sup>557</sup>

Yet what does it actually mean to live a life most in accord with divine thought, a life of contemplative activity, to animals that live together and that are not all equally blessed with an aptitude for this activity? To whom is the contemplative life really available? Aristotle's biological writings paint a picture of humans unequal in their respective capacities to engage in the most human of activities, and in the *Politics*, Aristotle writes that while everyone strives toward happiness and the good life, not everyone will attain these things, on account of

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<sup>556</sup> *NE* X.7 1177b30-34.

<sup>557</sup> *NE* X.7 1178a6-8.

either fortune or nature.<sup>558</sup> Further, Aristotle insists that arguments<sup>559</sup> are “incapable of exhorting the many [*pollous*] to nobility and goodness,” for they are accustomed to living according to their passions (*pathei*) and pursuing their pleasures. They only ever abstain from these not from a sense of shame, that is, from a sense of falling short of the goodness to which they might be capable, but only from fear of reprisal. Such people have no conception of the noble, Aristotle continues, for they have never tasted it (*ageustoi*) for themselves.<sup>560</sup>

These statements seem to suggest that only a very small number of people can ever hope to even try to make themselves “immortal,” even only to the small extent possible for a human being. And indeed, Aristotle’s discussion of the best possible regime in Books VII and VIII of the *Politics*, the “city of prayer,” as it is sometimes called, appears to corroborate this notion. There Aristotle excludes most of those who would have made up the ranks of Athenian citizenship from political participation, including craftspeople and farmers, leaving political activity to only a small number capable of living a life of leisure, who, beyond their purely civic duties, devote themselves to the leisured activities of music and

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<sup>558</sup> *Pol.* VII.13 1331a40-1332b1.

<sup>559</sup> Though Bartlett and Collins render *logoi* as “speeches,” here I follow Irwin and the Revised Oxford Translation in rendering this term as *arguments*, for it seems to be the rational component of such speech to which Aristotle thinks “the many” will be indifferent, not necessarily speech that makes its appeal in some other manner. See *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terrence Irwin (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999) and “Nicomachean Ethics” in *The Complete Works of Aristotle* Volume 2, Revised Oxford Translation, ed. Jonathan Barnes, 1729-1867 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

<sup>560</sup> *NE* X.9 1179b4-17.

contemplation.<sup>561</sup> For all these reasons, commentators such as Wood and Wood write that “the total picture” of Aristotle’s political thought that emerges “is of an aristocratic conservatism diametrically opposed to Athenian democratic values, one going somewhat beyond the commonly held opinions of educated men of his own class, on some points even exceeding the positions of Socrates and Plato.”<sup>562</sup>

However, we might ask here: to what extent, if at all, is this “city of prayer” considered by Aristotle to be an actual possibility? Moreover, is this “city of prayer” and the radical exclusion it promotes a necessary political consequence of Aristotle’s notion of natural inequality, even in light of comments, such as those also made in the *NE*, that “perhaps even in the base [animals] [*phaulois*], there is something naturally good that is superior to them and that aims at the good proper to them”?<sup>563</sup> Aristotle’s study of regimes in the *Politics* appears to be driven by the tension existing between the fact of there being a best possible life for human beings, and the fact that everywhere this best life is obstructed by politics— that the existing regimes of his political world are “not in good condition,”<sup>564</sup> and so fail to promote the best human life. While some commentators take this state of affairs and the discrepancy between political life and the best human life to be an eternal fact of politics for Aristotle, and so make

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<sup>561</sup> *Pol.* VII.8 1328b34-1329a2. See also Depew, “Politics, Music, and Contemplation in Aristotle’s Ideal State,” 347; 357; 359.

<sup>562</sup> Ellen Meiksins Wood and Neal Wood, *Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory*, 215. Cf. Dorothea Frede, “Citizenship in Aristotle’s *Politics*,” in *Aristotle’s Politics: Critical Essays*, 176.

<sup>563</sup> *NE* X.2 1173a5.

<sup>564</sup> *Pol.* II.1 1260b33-34.

the superiority of philosophy to politics dependent on a kind of “fallenness” of humankind and the impossibility of a truly good city,<sup>565</sup> Aristotle seems here to be more concerned with pragmatic political reform than to fatalistic resignation to what he understands as human animality.

As we have seen, the properly human aims that make up political life are only intelligible in the light of divine *nous*, and so the power of contemplation is in part due to its ability to steer politics toward higher aims than those it would otherwise take as its own, toward actions that reach toward the “immortal.” In this sense, “the city of prayer” is not to be taken as a model to be implemented, or even, at least *primarily*, as evidence of Aristotle’s opposition to democracy, but is instead, as Bodéüs claims, a kind of reminder to legislators that they may not choose the conditions in which they legislate.<sup>566</sup> This does not mean to forsake the best for a safer, “second-best” alternative, but rather, that what is best for humans can only ever develop out of actually existing conditions. There is a best life for human beings, it is a real possibility, but it depends upon certain political circumstances that always exceed the range of one’s own power, and so these circumstances must be taken into consideration as one strives toward the “immortal.”

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<sup>565</sup> A Straussian point echoed by the Woods when they write: “For Aristotle man is fundamentally wicked, and this evil nature is responsible for the troubles and disorders occurring under existing systems of government.” See *Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory*, 215.

<sup>566</sup> Richard Bodéüs, “Law and the Regime in Aristotle.” In *Essays on the Foundations of Aristotelian Political Science*, eds. Carnes Lord and David K. O’Connor (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 248.

It is in this light that we must interpret Aristotelian “polity,” the mean of the regimes he outlines in the *Politics*, combining both elements of aristocracy and democracy. Polity is not a second-best alternative to the impossible “city of prayer,” or even to a monarchy ruled by a kind of god-king, but is rather a form of political organization that might promote the best human life within political conditions very similar to those existing in democratic Athens.<sup>567</sup> Of course, for polity to promote the best human life, it must incorporate or facilitate contemplative activity of some kind, and it is here where we might return to the role of tragedy and the form of contemplation it promotes. Just as Aristotle provides a justification for a limited form of democracy in what scholars today refer to as the “summation argument,” whereby the many can be seen to collectively possess or even exceed the virtues of the few, and so might rightfully claim a share in ruling a city devoted to virtuous life, so might the many claim a share of the contemplative life through tragic spectatorship. While individually the base might be ill-suited to becoming philosophers, overwhelmed as they are by emotions such as fear, driven by their desire for pleasure, and indifferent to feelings of shame or the exhortations of reason, if they might collectively aim at

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<sup>567</sup> Although in the *Pol.* Aristotle claims that monarchy is the best regime for a populous where one individual or family is so much more virtuous than the rest that it would be unjust to submit them to the rule of others (*Pol.* III.13 1284b25-33; III.17 1288a7-10), it seems unlikely Aristotle thought such a situation described any Greek city. Of the five kinds of monarchy outlined in the *Pol.*, only the second, “non-Greek” kingship, and the fifth kind of kingship, which bases itself on household management, seem to be reconcilable to the notion that their kings possess godlike virtue. The second kind of kingship is appropriate to a multitude of slaves, and the fifth kind to a multitude that is at once a family, and thus both deny their populaces a share in the virtues Aristotle clearly thought adult Greek males possessed, and which qualified them for some degree of political participation. See *Pol.* III.14 1285b20-33. Cf. *Pol.* I.2 1252b5-8.

some good that exceeds them, then it is not impossible that they too might strive to make themselves “immortal” by aiming at the good whose divine excess serves to separate the human animal from other animals.

In this way, just as in the summation argument Aristotle claims that when the multitude comes together they are “like a single human being, with many feet, hands, and senses, and so too for their character traits and wisdom,” thus making them “better judges of works of music and of the poets,”<sup>568</sup> so in the actual act of this judgment does the multitude approximate an individual philosopher engaging in contemplative activity. It is for this reason that the capacity to correctly judge works of music and of the poets is thought by Aristotle to qualify one for citizenship, for this activity requires the recognition of the noble and the base, and so the good and the bad, and these are part and parcel of the justice that characterizes the organization of human political communities.<sup>569</sup> Laws, Aristotle claims, “are like works of the political art,” and so one judges correctly where one has the appropriate experience, just as in music.<sup>570</sup> While experience itself (*empeiria*) is an organization of sensation and imagination shared with other animals, insofar as the act of judging is itself contemplative activity (*theoria*), and so related to the capacity of divine thought (*nous*), this animal experience is mediated by the divine and so becomes properly human, and the

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<sup>568</sup> *Pol.* III.11 1281a41-1281b9.

<sup>569</sup> *Pol.* I.2 1253a6-20.

<sup>570</sup> *NE* X.9 1181a17-1181b1.

properly human things—such as an example of the best possible human life—can be recognized.

Tragic spectatorship is particularly well suited to this activity insofar as the specific pleasure bound up with tragedy concerns pity and fear.<sup>571</sup> Insofar as pleasure and its pursuit serve to shape the activities of a given animal, so it plays a role in constituting that animal, and indeed, a particular kind of human being.<sup>572</sup> While the multitude may be, according to Aristotle, indifferent to rational argumentation or aristocratic notions of shame, tragic spectatorship incorporates the pleasure for which the multitude thirst, and which might be said to positively shape their actions, with the fear that serves to negatively shape their actions, making these both objects of contemplation, and part of contemplative activity. Through tragic spectatorship, the multitude comes not only to contemplate the sources of their own pleasures and fears as these are dramatically displayed before their eyes, but they come to experience pleasure in the activity of contemplation. Moreover, insofar as the tragic hero identifies himself as such through speech, and this speech is itself thought, the contemplative activity of the tragic spectator allows for a kind of identification with the hero: despite their differences, both spectator and hero become in a sense united through their respective contemplative activities. It is this degree of similarity between spectator and hero made possible through contemplation that

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<sup>571</sup> *Poetics* 14 1453b11-14.

<sup>572</sup> *NE* X.5 1176a3-12.

enables the spectator to feel pity for the hero and his or her tragic fate, and to plant the seeds of friendship between them.<sup>573</sup> In habituating themselves in contemplative activity, tragic spectators learn to recognize noble and base, good and bad, just and unjust, and so receive an education that is at once political and philosophical.

In this sense, tragedy might serve an important role in political and philosophical education, giving to its spectators the same kind of share in what is best for human life—that is, contemplative activity—as it does in giving these spectators a formal place in the civic and religious rites of the city. A city or regime that enables such activity thus serves to incorporate philosophical activity into its political life, and so promote what is best in human life through the particular conditions available to this activity. More boldly, we might say, *only* a city that manages to incorporate contemplative activity into its political life can be said to practice politics fit for a human being—all other forms of politics remain continuous with those of other political animals. In this sense, the arts instituted in such a manner actually serve to create the human being as human, affecting the separation between humans and other animals accomplished through divine thought. Thus it can be said that Aristotle would use the performing arts, especially tragedy, and the political institutions of the city that promote them, to create human beings as qualitatively different from other

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<sup>573</sup> *Rhet.* II.8 1386a18-19; 25-27; *EE* VII.5 1239b16-21.

animals in the manner made possible through divine thought. Insofar as polity is the regime that seeks to bring together noble and base in its institutions, yet remain oriented toward the virtuous life, then polity appears most suited to the institution of tragedy as public performance, and so the regime most likely to bring to fruition what is best in human life.

### *Equity and Justice in Polity*

Yet there remains one last piece to be placed for this puzzle to be complete and the question of the role of art in the best life to be answered: we must consider once more the place of the best individual human being in this regime. We have seen that tragedy provides both a stage for the mimetic dramatization of the best human being, and an avenue for the multitude of the baser sort to at once recognize what is best and exercise what is best in themselves, thus suggesting that a regime where participation in such performances forms an integral part of civic activity would be the best and most fitting for human beings. In the case of Athens, a city formed of an unequal *Greek* multitude, and thus to Aristotle's mind a multitude wherein the gap between best and worst is not so great as to place some share in the best utterly beyond the worst, polity, as the regime which, in combining aristocratic and democratic elements, integrates the flourishing of the best sort with the virtuous activity of the multitude, seems to represent an ideal toward which Athenian lawmakers might strive.

Yet, it is not difficult to imagine opposition to Aristotle's polity from two sides. The democratic side is perhaps the most obvious, in that while polity reserves a role for the multitude in civic life, it clearly represents a less directly democratic form of political organization than the "extreme democracy" that existed in the Athens of Aristotle's day. One can expect these democrats would have opposed reforms that would have excluded most citizens from direct participation in lawmaking, and limited their role to one of choosing lawmakers, rulers, and sitting on juries.<sup>574</sup> But we might also imagine opposition from one who takes Aristotle's ideas on natural inequality and the supremacy of leisure and contemplation seriously in that polity appears to require that the best sort of human being spend considerable amounts of time devoted to activities whose ends are less than noble. That is, life in Aristotle's polity, even for the best sort, would be less leisurely than it otherwise might be, especially with regard to politics, where the old identification between citizen and warrior is maintained.<sup>575</sup> Consequently, the best sort will not be able to completely devote themselves to contemplation, and so not be as happy in polity as they otherwise might be. By ensuring a share in the contemplative life for the multitude, one might argue, the

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<sup>574</sup> Indeed, polity seems like an attempt to return to a bygone time, past the reforms of Pericles or Cleisthenes, to something very much like the constitution credited to Solon, whom Aristotle claims gave the people "only the minimum power necessary, that of electing and inspecting officials." The officials themselves were drawn from "among the notables and rich" (*Pol.* II.12 1274a14-21). Though its authorship is now disputed, more on (what might have been) Aristotle's views of Solon can be found in the *Constitution of Athens*, para. 7-11, with a concise overview of the eleven changes to the constitution of Athens that brought about its particular form of democracy at para. 41. See Aristotle, "Constitution of Athens," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vol. 2, Revised Oxford Translation, ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

<sup>575</sup> *Pol.* III.17 1288a13-15.

best and most suited to the life of contemplation find that they are not able to flourish to the fullest of their natural endowments. Who, then, is polity really for? If contemplation really is the best activity for human beings, and some are more apt to it than others, then perhaps it is not polity, but a regime like Kallipolis that would best facilitate what is best in humans after all.

Incidentally, in the construction of the Kallipolis, Adeimantus brings a similar complaint to Socrates, claiming that the best in his best city do not seem to be flourishing to their fullest extent. Socrates' response is well known: that the goal of legislation is not to ensure that only one part of the city—even the best—flourishes, but to ensure that the city as a whole flourishes.<sup>576</sup> Regardless of the sincerity of this claim, or possible contradictions with what Socrates will subsequently tell his interlocutors, we might note that Aristotle's response to our version of this problem is not to simply subordinate the good of the individual to the good of the whole, but rather, to find a way of reconciling their respective goods. Just as Aristotle sought through tragedy to reconcile both the lower and higher types of human being in common though differing degrees of contemplative activity, so Aristotle would attempt to reconcile the best individual with the whole. Polity is not a regime that is best for the whole, yet shortchanges the most virtuous of human beings; rather, polity especially provides the best and most virtuous human beings the greatest opportunities to practice their virtues.

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<sup>576</sup> *Rep.* IV 419a-420c.

To understand exactly how polity serves the best human beings in this way, we must turn to Aristotle's conceptions of justice and equity.

In the *NE*, Aristotle claims that justice is the greatest (*kratiste*) and most complete of the virtues (*teleia malista arête*), for it concerns virtue related not only to one's own flourishing, but to the flourishing of another (*heteron*)—justice is the good of others, of all who share in the community (*koinono*).<sup>577</sup> However, as Aristotle notes, justice is also *politikon*, a “political matter”: it concerns the “organization” (*taxis*) of political community, wherein justice itself judges (*krisis*) what is just.<sup>578</sup> Thus, how the good of these others is understood will vary between different forms of political organization. Each different regime, whether organized around the rule of one, few, or many, depends on an idea of justice particular to it, which then serves as the measure against which different aspects of its organization, particular laws, the deeds of its citizens, or possible changes are evaluated: it is in this way justice judges what is just. Likewise, justice will also concern the distribution of offices and resources among the members of the community, based on the particular merit (*axian*) espoused by the regime: for democracies, Aristotle claims the merit according to which office is distributed is freedom, for oligarchy, wealth, and for aristocracy, virtue.<sup>579</sup> Justice in each of these regimes, then, is the fittingness of the good of their citizens with the good of the regime—it is the cultivation of virtues that support its form of organization. If

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<sup>577</sup> *NE* V.1 1129b27-1130a5.

<sup>578</sup> *Pol.* I.2 1253a37-1253b; *NE* V.6 1134a31-32.

<sup>579</sup> *NE* V.3 1131a24-29.

polity is indeed the best regime for the best human being, it must accord the best human being with goods suited to his complete flourishing. If the needs of the best human being for his flourishing are not met in polity, that is, that his capacity for virtuous activity, especially contemplative activity, is limited by the lesser members of this community, then polity would in this sense be unjust.<sup>580</sup>

As we have seen, polity seems to be reconcilable with Aristotle's philosophical interpretation of tragedy, and so allow for a kind of activity that is at once political and philosophical. However, this kind of political activity is not the only kind required of the best people in polity, and insofar as political activity is *askolia*, activity that is without leisure and devoted to ends beyond itself, such as those concerning war, it requires that the best people spend considerable time away from that to which they are naturally most suited, contemplation. In this sense, by compelling the best people to accept a share of the goods of their city that does not allow them to flourish most completely, while at the same time allowing for the baser sort to reach beyond their animality through a share in contemplation, polity does indeed appear to go contrary to what is proportional for each, and is thus unjust and potentially unstable.<sup>581</sup> Yet such an interpretation forgets what Aristotle has to say about equity and its relation to justice. Aristotle's conception of equity, I will argue, can be a virtuous activity

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<sup>580</sup> *NE* V.5 1134a1-6; V.3 1131b16.

<sup>581</sup> *Pol.* V.1 1301b2632; V.7 1307a25-27.

involving taking less than one's share, and so makes it possible for even the best human type to flourish to the utmost of their natural capacities in polity.

Equity, we might say, is the other side of justice. Aristotle claims that the equitable (*epieikes*) is like the just, and in many ways they are the same thing, yet where they differ, equity is in fact superior (*kreitton*).<sup>582</sup> Where justice and equity differ, concerns primarily their relation to law. Both justice and law concern the general (*katholou*)—they attempt to formulate in broad strokes what is good and so regulate human actions accordingly.<sup>583</sup> However, the complexity of particular events does not always allow for harmony with the general case to which law is addressed. If things can for Aristotle exist contrary to nature, how much more so can they exist contrary to the justice humans would enact through law—not simply in the sense of actions breaking the law, but in actions being concatenated in such a way as to disjoin the law from the justice of its intention. In this way, particulars might fail to coincide with the general such that to follow the letter of the law in some cases would be to prescribe actions or solutions that are in fact unjust, and so make the law accomplish the opposite of its aim.

It is for this reason, the complexity of particular events and the actions of which they are composed, that equity is higher than justice: equity is, Aristotle claims, “the sort of justice which goes beyond the written law.”<sup>584</sup> Faced with the complexity of particular events, the necessarily general nature of law can compel

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<sup>582</sup> *NE* V.10 1137b10-12.

<sup>583</sup> *NE* V.7 1135a6ff.

<sup>584</sup> *Rhet.* I.13 1374a36-37.

justice to err, and so justice requires equity to correct the “legally just [*nomimou dikaiou*].”<sup>585</sup> In this sense, while equity reaches beyond the general case and so is greater than the justice of the merely written or positive law, it is not greater than the justice animating the intention or aim of the law, which Aristotle calls “unqualified” (*haplos*) justice.<sup>586</sup> Yet, in so discussing the relation of equity to justice and law it appears justice has been split in two, for we have now a distinction between the imperfect justice that may result from following the prescribed letter of the law in certain cases, and the perhaps closer to perfect justice whose aims are thought to animate the letter of the law. This distinction between justice as it exists in any given city’s laws, and a kind of ideal justice, is apparently given greater weight in the *Rhetoric*. There Aristotle claims that “the principles of equity are permanent and changeless and that the universal law does not change either, for it is the law of nature, whereas written laws often do change.”<sup>587</sup> Though the distinction Aristotle draws here between natural law and positive law will prove influential on law and jurisprudence in the Western tradition, given Aristotle’s criticism of the Platonic doctrine of Ideas, we ought to be wary of any interpretation of Aristotelian justice that would place it beyond the realm of actually existing things.

Indeed, Yack argues that the word “*haplos*,” or “unqualified,” is contextually specific, such that what is *haplos* is distinguished only from the

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<sup>585</sup> *NE* V.10 1137b10-14.

<sup>586</sup> *NE* V.10 1137b24-27.

<sup>587</sup> *Rhet.* I.15 1375a31-32.

particular qualifications earlier introduced in the discussion in question, and so does not suggest that the *haplos* exists independent of any qualifying conditions whatsoever. In this sense, to speak of “unqualified justice” is to speak of justice beyond the qualifications Aristotle earlier used to discuss it, such as the legal qualifications mentioned above, but this should not be understood to mean that unqualified justice exists beyond and independently of actual instantiations of justice. Rather than indicate some higher order of justice than that found in positive law, unqualified justice is meant to indicate justice in the more general sense in which it is usually discussed—something more like the sum-total of judgments made concerning justice, rather than an ideal existing apart from such judgments.<sup>588</sup> Insofar as justice concerns political organization and the way in which offices and resources are distributed in a city, and these are done in a great variety of ways, natural justice or “natural right,” Yack claims, refers to all the different judgments concerning justice humans are capable of making in accordance with their nature.<sup>589</sup> Unlike the written laws of a city, which are subject to as many changes as its citizens are capable of bringing about, natural right does not change because it is based in human nature, which, while subject to all the vicissitudes of its particular instantiations, remains for Aristotle the

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<sup>588</sup> Bernard Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 135.

<sup>589</sup> Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal*, 143.

actualization of an eternally given set of animal potentials.<sup>590</sup> On this reading, natural and positive or “conventional” right do not represent higher and lower forms of justice, but simply justice viewed from different perspectives.<sup>591</sup> Equity, for its part, cannot then be higher than justice as it is found in written laws, but rather attempts to offer corrections to legal justice according to the aims of the laws.<sup>592</sup>

Yet while this view of natural and conventional right effectively dispels any notion of justice as an Idea existing independently of just things, such as laws, and just practices, such as the interpretation and application of laws, it ignores in the process Aristotle’s claim that equity is *greater* than merely legal justice—that is, that activities that would bring about the justice to which the laws aim in circumstances where they would otherwise fall short are *better* than literal applications of the law. This tension between the laws of a regime and their equitable interpretation can perhaps best be understood in light of Yack’s claim that Aristotle “never distinguishes a science of ethics from a science of politics, nor does he treat ethics and politics as subdivisions of a more comprehensive science.”<sup>593</sup> If Yack is correct, then we would expect the equitable to concern at once political and ethical activity, in the sense that insofar as *we* might make an

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<sup>590</sup> For an argument against the changlessness of natural right, see William Clare Roberts, “All Natural Right is Changeable: Aristotelian Natural Right, Prudence, and the Specter of Exceptionalism.” *The Review of Politics* 74 (2012): 261-283.

<sup>591</sup> Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal*, 144.

<sup>592</sup> Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal*, 194; Bodéüs, “The Natural Foundations of Right and Aristotelian Philosophy,” 73.

<sup>593</sup> Yack, *The Problems of a Political Animal*, 18.

analytical distinction between ethics and politics, and Aristotle does not, we would expect the Aristotelian concept of equity to be both ethical and political. And indeed, it does appear that the equitable concerns both political and ethical activity in this sense, though Yack does not pursue these implications.

Aristotle discusses equity primarily in terms of the *equitable* (*epieikes*), being both a kind of activity and a kind of person. As activity, the equitable concerns the interpretation of a city's laws in a given context such that justice will be preserved. As a kind of person, the equitable is one possessed of an equitable character (*ethos*) and equitable habits (*hexis*) that mutually reinforce one another, making the equitable person one who is "disposed to take less for himself even though he has the law on his side."<sup>594</sup> The equitable in this sense are more just than the laws in that while justice aims at the good of others, of the entire political community, the laws always represent an interpretation of this good according to the way the political community is organized. The laws always represent the interests of the ruling part of the city, whether it be the one, the few, or the many,<sup>595</sup> whereas equity involves one attempting to go beyond the justice as it is expressed in the laws. In this sense, the equitable person, through their activity, reaches beyond the justice expressed in the laws and toward the justice that would enable the flourishing of the entire community.

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<sup>594</sup> *NE* V.10 1137b36-1138a1.

<sup>595</sup> *Pol.* III.5 1278b8-13.

It is thus equity that enables the best human being to find his place in polity, a city whose citizens are unequal in virtue, for equitable activity represents a domain of virtue denied to those who live only among those equal to themselves. The inequality of the virtue of the citizens of polity allow for both the worst citizens and the best to reach beyond themselves and so attempt to make themselves “immortal” through the practice of virtuous activity they would otherwise be denied. All excellent or “serious” (*spoudaiai*) activities arise from virtue and divine thought (*nous*), and these do not, Aristotle claims, require that one hold power (*dunasteuein*).<sup>596</sup> Through equitable activity, the best human being is able to relinquish the claims most tempting for his kind: the claim that he ought rightly to rule lesser human beings as a god-king, beyond the confines of the political community, or to exempt himself from service to the political community through complete devotion to divine contemplation. Both roads involve striving to make oneself “immortal,” but in each one is led to forsake the political community, and so deprive oneself of the opportunity to practice the particular virtues associated with it, and so narrow the range of virtuous activity and thus happiness.

Polity allows for its citizens to reach toward the “immortal” in the manner most appropriate to their natural disposition to virtue while remaining political animals. Thus the lower sort might extend beyond their animal desires and up

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<sup>596</sup> *NE* X.6 1176b18-19.

toward the divine through a share in contemplation, while the best kind of human being might, in obedience to *nous*, recognize that only through the city, as a political animal, might he reach toward the divine, and so actualize his fullest potential as a human being. As a member of a city, then, he may be called upon to defend both its laws and its walls, and while the activities involved in such defense are less than noble in the sense that they possess ends beyond themselves, that he engages in these not by mistaking them for goods in themselves, or for the honors associated with them, but for the sake of making the contemplative life possible for both himself and his fellow citizens, serves to bend these activities toward the immortal as far as is possible. Put differently: in subordinating the ends of less than noble activities to those of the noblest activity and end-in-itself, contemplation, less than noble activities are elevated—they reach up toward the divine.

It is for this reason that Aristotle claims that the equitable relates to the entire city and the good of all of its citizens, both better and worse.<sup>597</sup> Equity keeps the best devoted to a city that accords citizenship to baser sorts in that it transforms this apparent liability into a strength: only in a city where citizenship is shared by those unequal in virtue can the noble demonstrate his nobility by justly serving the good of those lacking his nobility.<sup>598</sup> That the justice of polity

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<sup>597</sup> *Pol.* III.13 1283b36-1284a1.

<sup>598</sup> *Contra* Frank, who sees in polity the possibility of creating a middle class wherein the substantial differences articulated in proportionate equality are dissolved beneath a more fundamental equality and similarity (*homonoia*). While polity and the institution of tragedy make possible enough similarity between

allows both noble and base to flourish in the manner appropriate to their natures facilitates friendship between them, for in sharing in tragic performance and spectatorship they share both in the civic and religious rites of the city and in the highest activity available to humans, contemplation, and so likewise adopt the same ideal of the best human being against which they will measure themselves. Bound to this ideal of the best human being, not only can the best and the worst share in friendship, but this friendship is what Aristotle considers the best kind of friendship, as it is one based on the virtuous activity of what is best in human life, and so enables these friends to flourish in the way particular to human beings, thus separating them from other animals.<sup>599</sup>

Equity thus allows the noble to overcome the gulf separating them from the base that might obstruct such friendship not by making the two identical, but by allowing the noble to preserve their nobility, and so a degree of distance, from the base. The friendship expressed from the best to the worst goes beyond the friendship based on utility that tends to characterize the friendship between citizens, and which is found among other animals, for the friendship expressed from the best to the worst seeks nothing in return: as self-sufficient as a human being can be, the best human seeks others to share his enjoyment, others whom

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the best and worst in order to facilitate a community of justice and friendship between noble and base, they must remain noble and base in order for this order and the best life it makes possible to exist. See Frank, *A Democracy of Distinction*, 175.

<sup>599</sup> *EE* VII.2 1236b1-12. Cf. *NE* IX.9 1170b11-13.

he might benefit.<sup>600</sup> The only reward the equitable receive from equitable activity is the demonstration of their own nobility—the flourishing of the beauty of their lives as good in themselves. Insofar as there are forms of justice and friendship particular to different regimes,<sup>601</sup> the justice of equitable activity and the friendship it makes possible is that specific to polity. That polity facilitates the flourishing of both its best and worst citizens makes it the happiest city, and this happiness it owes to the arts of politics and of tragedy.

*Conclusion: From Aristotle to Adorno*

For Aristotle there is a zoological invariant lying at the root of politics and other arts: that is to say, the practices of these arts are expressions of animal potentials rooted ultimately in *aisthesis*. In chapters 9 and 10, it was argued that in order for politics to be practiced in a manner that can be considered specifically human, its practice must integrate the activity that is most definitively human, that is, an activity in accordance with divine thought. It was found that for Aristotle activity that is at once political and contemplative can be found in tragedy—tragedy provides thought with a stage, and compels contemplation from its spectators, both in the context of civic and religious rites. To participate contemplatively in tragedy is thus to engage in political activity worthy of both a citizen and a philosopher: this is the activity that is political in the specifically human sense. It

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<sup>600</sup> *EE* VII.12 1244b10-18. Cf. *NE* VIII.7 1159a9-13.

<sup>601</sup> *EE* VII.9 1241b12-17.

was further argued that polity provides the political conditions conducive to tragedy, for each share similar aims: to integrate both the best and the worst into a common life devoted to what is best in human beings. In this way, the best human life is only made possible through the arts, and so what is natural for humans requires the arts. Or put differently: human nature can only flourish mediated by art. Yet as it was argued in Chapter 8, the arts are also mediated by nature.

In Chapter 8 it was found that the movements of animal bodies and their parts through which animal potentials are understood are described by Aristotle in terms of human arts. Insofar as these metaphors between various human arts and animal bodies and their movements serve to facilitate what is known of these bodies and their movements, it can be said that the various human arts, by way of poetic metaphor, serve to constitute what these bodies and their movements are at the conceptual level. In this way, artistic activity can be seen as the model for natural processes, and Aristotle will even go as far as claiming that nature is itself a kind of artist, the greatest artist, and so by analogy human arts ought to strive to imitate natural processes. Thus it can be said that the arts serve to create the standard, nature, that will mediate their own activity and serve as the standard by which their excellence or baseness are judged. In this way the creative powers of the arts are sovereign: they create both the standard and its realization, though this sovereignty remains obscure and unrecognized in Aristotle.

Thus what is best in human being, the individual who most closely approximates a life that exercises what is best, and the characteristics associated with his nature, are created by the particular manner in which the arts of his society are organized, and their realization is either enabled or obstructed by these same arts. That Aristotle fails to recognize the radically constructed nature of his concept of nature means that he mistakes the limits of politics: Aristotle would use politics to enable the flourishing of what is best in human nature, without realizing that this nature could itself be otherwise. In this way, Aristotle's attempt to reconcile the unequal plurality of human life to a system of rule that would insist each flourish to an unequal extent actually serves to perpetuate a constructed inequality, rather than accommodate this plurality. The reconciliation promoted through polity and tragedy between the naturally best and worst human beings can be seen as *forced* reconciliation, for the natural inequality that is being accommodated is itself the product of politics and the other arts.

Perhaps most emblematic of the violence wrought through this conception of nature, the forced reconciliation it enables, is the claim that thought would conceptualize the world in the same manner as one carving up a sacrificial animal: according to its "natural" divisions.<sup>602</sup> Just as nature is only intelligible through the arts, here what is natural is known only through the practice of

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<sup>602</sup> Though it is Plato that makes this claim, it was found in Part II that this view metaphor is adequate to Aristotle's philosophy as well. See Plato, *Statesman* 287c. Cf. *Pol.* VII.17 1336b41-1337a2.

cutting flesh and bone at the points of least resistance. This lack of resistance, the acquiescence of the corpse to the skill of the one wielding the knife, is natural and so without violence, as it is only through the acquiescence of matter that the skill of the form-giving activity is displayed. But just as an animal body will no more fall into pieces convenient for human use without butchery, that is, just as animals only become *meat* through the art of butchery, so does the potential known as *human* only come to be through the arts of politics and tragedy. Insofar as the artificiality of nature goes unrecognized, so does its role in facilitating arts whose practice depends on the domination of some by others, for the very symbol of non-violent relations, natural relations, is itself predicated on the violence of domination. Thus the flourishing of both the best and worst sorts of human being that Aristotle would make possible through tragedy and polity depends upon the construction and maintenance of their inequality, on their unequal share of what is properly human.

Insofar as the Aristotelian conception of nature can be seen as the product of the arts, one that would camouflage the oppression of some by others and so facilitate their domination, one might perhaps welcome a break from this tradition, embracing instead the artificiality of nature and the socio-political relations it would sanction. However, the main philosophical sources of the turn against Aristotle and the tradition he inaugurates fail to recognize the way Aristotle's conception of the human being and his nature depends upon the arts,

and so they fail to effectively confront the domination this conception of nature carries. Insofar as Aristotle does not conceive art and politics as simple expressions of human capacities, thus underwritten by an anthropological invariant, but rather that human potentials are themselves the product of the creative powers of the arts, both explicitly, in the sense that they need tragedy and politics to be realized, and implicitly, in that the very nature that is being realized is at once an artistic production, so it can be said that the great reversal of the Aristotelian tradition attempted by Nietzsche and Heidegger is without the force these thinkers would like it to have. Nietzsche and Heidegger, rather than overturning or breaking from the Aristotelian tradition, represent instead different kinds of radicalization of this tradition in response to Aristotle's conception of the human being.

Nietzsche's attempt to go behind or beyond the human through pre-individual aesthetic experience is one that would attempt to forge a creature that is more animal than the human, a radicalization of Aristotle's conception of the human as a political animal. Yet while Aristotle's political animal expressed an egalitarian vector in identifying *all* humans as political animals, thus undermining the relation between human and animal that characterized the world of poetic myth, while suggesting, in this moment, the artificiality of particular political regimes, the animality that Nietzsche would revive seems to bear more in common with the human-animal divide as it was found in the world

of poetic myth. That is, the Nietzschean *overman*'s relation to animality seems to recall how warriors would distinguish themselves in the world of poetic myth: through deeds that served to bring them into proximity with a given animal, the warrior would establish himself as a master, one who might rule human beings as one does animals. In this respect Nietzsche seems to be more necromancer than innovator, in that his *radicalization* of Aristotle is indeed a return to the root, or *a root*, of Aristotle's conception of the human being, but it cannot be said to be altogether new. From the perspective of the human-animal distinction and the relation between this distinction and the creative powers of art, Nietzsche's insights appear to be the reaction of myth to the egalitarian vector expressed in the Aristotelian conception of the human, one that would revive the myth of the tragic hero in order to rule over the chaotic masses of post-Christian Europe.

Heidegger, on the other hand, moves in the opposite direction. For him, it is not that the Aristotelian political animal was not animal enough, but rather that the divine thought that serves in Aristotle to separate humans from other animals is not *divine* enough—that the divinity of thought as it is actualized in the human remains too poor in the world to really be called thinking. For Heidegger, what we call human is bound up with the metaphysics of subjectivity and experience, which are themselves dependent upon the senses and so continuous with the animal, while the *poiesis* of thinking is prior to anything so creaturely. If one were to address oneself to what is given to the senses to shape into subject

and object and so call human, one must turn toward that which gives, the Being that is prior to the beings that we are. While Heidegger claims that Being is not higher than beings, and that the human, as the shepherd of Being, is not as such higher than animals, the human is, as shepherd, other than animal in a more radical sense than he is in Aristotle. Thus, while Heidegger would apparently undermine the hierarchy of the living established by Aristotle, he does so by placing the human on a different plane than other animals, thus transforming the human-animal divide into an abyss. What does one *feel* for another, on the other side of an abyss prior to feeling? Though Heidegger does not advocate the rule of “Man” over “Animal,” he strips the human of all that relates him to others beyond Being’s play of light and shadow, reducing questions of ethics to so many *koan* to be bandied between shepherds as they dine on their flocks. Domination remains unperturbed.

Yet, if the main philosophical attempts to decisively move beyond the Aristotelian paradigm of human-animal relations have failed to reformulate this relation in a manner that might seriously challenge the domination sanctioned therein, rather than break from this tradition, might it be possible to instead draw progressively on Aristotelian resources? Indeed, there appears to be a growing appreciation of the complexity of Aristotle’s thoughts on the relation between humans and other animals,<sup>603</sup> perhaps best exemplified, again, in the

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<sup>603</sup> See Frank, *A Democracy of Distinction*, 38n51.

recent work of MacIntyre and Nussbaum. Though MacIntyre was initially dismissive of Aristotle's biology,<sup>604</sup> he has since sought to recover elements of this aspect of Aristotle's thought, even claiming it an "error" to think that a complete account of moral life might be separable from the biological conditions of its possibility. Moreover, MacIntyre claims the biological conditions of human moral life concern human continuity with other animal life, both in terms of human animality, that is, a relation to ourselves and our animal past and its remnants, and in terms of human relations to "other intelligent animal species."<sup>605</sup> Yet MacIntyre's turn to biology, though perhaps serving to better authenticate his Aristotelianism,<sup>606</sup> has done little to address the domination I have claimed is harbored within the core of Aristotle's conception of human being.

While MacIntyre contends that "[h]uman identity is primarily, even if not only, bodily and therefore animal identity," and that "[m]uch that is intelligent animal in us is not specifically human,"<sup>607</sup> this way of searching for human capacities in animals and so elevating their status as creatures approximating ourselves serves only to expand the ranks of second-class citizens. Where similarities can be found between the capacities of other animals and our own, so

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<sup>604</sup> See *After Virtue*, 162.

<sup>605</sup> See *Dependent Rational Animals*, x.

<sup>606</sup> Salkever claims that the idiosyncrasies of MacIntyre's Aristotelianism in *After Virtue*, including his rejection of Aristotle's biology, serve to align him closer to the Nietzsche against whom MacIntyre mobilizes Aristotle, rather than Aristotle himself. See *Finding the Mean*, 32.

<sup>607</sup> MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals*, 8; 40.

those animals are admitted to the moral community, to the degree to which they can be called similar. MacIntyre's phrase, *intelligent* animal species, is telling, for insofar as the apex of human capacities is the human susceptibility to divine thought, only those animals possessed of some kind of recognizable intelligence exert any moral weight. While this greater appreciation of animal life might encourage more humane treatment of other animals, it does not shake the foundation upon which domination in Aristotle is based: the identity of the best human being, which serves as the measure of what is valuable in the lives of both humans and other animals. This basic problem can likewise be found to run through Nussbaum's recent work on the moral community we share with "nonhuman animals," despite her more thorough account of the problem.

Like MacIntyre, Nussbaum's consideration of the limits of the moral-political community and the admission of other animals to it serves to revise her early Aristotelian stance, which, while largely dismissing the role of contemplation in human happiness and emphasizing instead the practical life, espoused an explicit and even celebratory anthropocentrism. Chastened by an apparently logical conclusion of her capabilities approach—that "nonhuman animals" also deserve moral consideration—Nussbaum has sought not so much to reject her earlier anthropocentrism than to revise it in a manner that recognizes the capabilities of "nonhuman animals," according them some degree of moral standing as creatures who, like humans, require certain conditions if

they are to flourish in the manner specific to their natures. Indeed, the Aristotelian conception of justice as the good of others will here inspire Nussbaum to claim that “the point of justice is to secure a dignified life for many different kinds of beings.”<sup>608</sup> Yet while Nussbaum does away with the divinity of thought, this attempt to facilitate the flourishing of different forms of life, to do justice to others, makes another similarity, *sentience*, the “threshold condition of membership” in the community of those who have claims to be treated justly.<sup>609</sup>

While sentience is indeed a far lower threshold for community membership than access to divine thought, we cannot forget here that the plurality of human life organized under the similarity that is the common capacity for thought allows for a hierarchical organization of plurality beneath that similarity, and this same basic structure prevails under the similarity of sentience. For Aristotle, those who excel in the capacities most definitive of membership in a community can rightly claim a greater share of authority in that community. Just as some humans can be said to have greater access to divine thought than others, so is sentience organized more complexly in some beings than others, and those with the most complex organization of sentience have more complex forms of flourishing, and consequently more complex ways of suffering impediments to their flourishing.<sup>610</sup> If the point of justice is indeed to

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<sup>608</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, “Beyond ‘Compassion for Humanity’: Justice for Nonhuman Animals” in *Frontiers of Justice* (Cambridge: Belknap, 2006), 350.

<sup>609</sup> Nussbaum, “Beyond ‘Compassion for Humanity,’” 362.

<sup>610</sup> *Ibid.*, 361.

facilitate the most complete flourishing of different forms of life, then it would appear that the moral claims of beings with more complex forms of flourishing would have more weight than those with less complexity. Insofar as humans can be considered the most complex beings,<sup>611</sup> then their claims would outweigh those of other animals, thus allowing humans, despite “the respect and even wonder” they feel for other animals, to engage in their “humane killing” and forced sterilization.<sup>612</sup>

Yet this gap between humans and nonhuman animals is perhaps to be expected, for the similarity between humans and other animals found in sentience must also be separated by fundamentally fixed “species norms,” if Nussbaum is to avoid conceding that different human individuals have more or less complex organizations of sentience. If different human individuals could be found to require fundamentally different things in order to flourish according to their different natures—that is, if there were varying degrees of sentience within human nature—then on Nussbaum’s view, just as humans and nonhuman animals do not have equal moral claims, so would an inequality persist between the moral claims of different humans.<sup>613</sup> Though Aristotle does not consider this

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<sup>611</sup> On the arbitrariness of biological “complexity,” see Richard Levins and Richard Lewontin, *The Dialectical Biologist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 17.

<sup>612</sup> Nussbaum, “Beyond ‘Compassion for Humanity,’” 328; 371.

<sup>613</sup> Partly to avoid this problem, Donaldson and Kymlicka object to Nussbaum’s static notion of species norms, claiming that their own theory of animal rights is independent of any “account of the essence of being human” (33). Donaldson and Kymlicka identify instead “selfhood” as the necessary condition for being accorded inviolable rights, a way of experiencing the world from the “inside” they claim to be common to humans and many other animals (25-33). Yet in simply identifying in other animals that which in humans demands moral consideration, Donaldson and Kymlicka would expand the community of

natural inequality between humans a problem—rather, it is a condition of human flourishing—if the Aristotelianism of Nussbaum’s capabilities approach is to indeed be “a form of political liberalism,”<sup>614</sup> then humans must be fundamentally equal among themselves, and so they must require the same basic things to enable the flourishing of their common human nature. Yet if the complexity of human sentience is equal between humans according to a shared “species norm,” then it is of a fundamentally different character than that of nonhuman animals, who would have norms specific to their own species. Insofar as there can be no conception of cross species norms beyond the basic demands of sentience, and humans are *more sentient* than nonhumans, nonhumans will forever be measured against a standard that is not their own, and so beneath human yoke. Despite Nussbaum’s best attempts to argue that justice for nonhuman animals would mean the enabling of the flourishing of their natural capacities, the recognition and evaluation of these capacities remains according to human standards.

In her joint emphasis on sentience and species-norms, Nussbaum would thus attempt to make nature the basis on which both membership in the moral-

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individuals to whom justice is due without changing the way in which justice relates these individuals. In a society characterized by formal equality and substantial inequality, according, say, dogs, equal rights to human beings allows for certain individuals to use their animal companions to advance their own interests, especially with regard to the use of public space. Donaldson and Kymlicka cite approvingly a case where dog-owners collectively organized to illegally walk their dogs without leashes in order to chase off drug users and prostitutes from a public park. In identifying the rights of humans and animals in the manner they do, rather than seeing a quasi-aristocratic *use* of animals to bring other humans to heel, Donaldson and Kymlicka see only the salutary *enabling* of animal citizenship (115). See Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, *Zoopolis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>614</sup> Nussbaum, “Beyond ‘Compassion for Humanity,’” 388.

political community is recognized, and the goals toward which the moral-political community is oriented. Like Aristotle, Nussbaum recognizes that nature requires artifice to both establish the conditions in which it might flourish and to aid its cultivation, but also like Aristotle, she does not recognize that this nature is itself artificially produced. Rather than recognize the degree to which what is understood to be expressions of sentience among animals depends on the ways in which human beings have been constructed in their own respective political communities, and thus, that not only species-norms, but the creation of the boundaries between species, is an ongoing production, a political and artistic work, Nussbaum instead opts to attempt to place these outside the realm of politics, making politics something more like the bureaucratic implementation of what we would all know to be natural for human beings, if only we were to sufficiently reflect upon it, rather than an ongoing contest concerning the very limits of the game and the eligibility of the players. In this sense, Nussbaum envisions right politics as a “humanocracy,” as one commentator refers to it<sup>615</sup>: the flourishing of an idea of human capacities incarnated in the power of political institutions. Thus the oppression of other animals by humans, and the domination of human by human, is in Nussbaum given human face.

Yet I contend that the progressive potential of Aristotle’s insights has not, for all the efforts of his champions, been exhausted. Despite the inability of

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<sup>615</sup> Wallach, “Contemporary Aristotelianism,” 629.

contemporary Aristotelians to shake the anthropocentrism that would ensure the value of all others is measured against a certain human standard, as I have attempted to show, their attempts at re-thinking the relationship between humans and animals have inherited Aristotle's conception of nature with little variation: none recognize the degree to which this conception of nature can be said to be the reflection of the arts of Aristotle's day, and so none recognize the creative power of the arts harbored therein.

Aristotle's insights that humans are political animals, and that political animals are those that share a common work, or life activity, without being identical to one another, and so might flourish in a plurality of ways; that justice is the good of others, even beyond the laws and the power enshrined therein; and that the best life activity is leisured activity divorced from self-preservation, all point toward an image of reconciliation, of animal life lived free of its most destructive tendencies. It is these insights that are worth preserving, insights that together appear to make up a life lived in common, devoted to one another and the myriad ways in which each might flourish above and beyond the necessities that would enslave one to others or even the baseness of a life devoted only to its own persistence. Yet Aristotle's conception of nature ties these insights together in a manner that subjects certain animals to others, making the greatest expression of this life available only to a few. An alternate conception of nature, one that might release from their entombment the creative powers of the

arts, and thus the radically artificial conception of this nature, might liberate these insights from the ties of domination that bind them.

It is in the light of this hope that I turn to the work of Adorno. Adorno's own conception of the human-animal distinction and its relation to identity and non-identity, his theorization of the relation between nature and history, and his work on art and aesthetics, specifically with respect to the constitution of a collective subject and the relations of this subject to politics, all might be mobilized to transform the Aristotelian tradition. In this way, both the elements of Aristotle that would be overcome by Nietzsche, Heidegger, and their progeny, and the elements of Aristotle promoted by contemporary Aristotelians, might be superseded. Adorno's work, I shall argue, makes possible this supersession, and consequently a new relation to the tradition and the way in which we think about its future trajectory, and the animals we might become.

## Part IV. Enter Adorno, Stage Left

*Introduction:*

*Adorno and Some Assorted Technical Problems Concerning Time-Travel*

But the *aporia* of our thinking points to a knot in the object.

-Aristotle, *Metaphysics*

To go from Aristotle to Adorno in a single bound, we find ourselves now, as Rousseau put it, “flying like an arrow over the multitudes of centuries”<sup>616</sup>—we are time-travelling again, and the world we find upon arrival, despite certain uncanny similarities, is profoundly different from the one we leave behind. The “excessively unpleasant” and “peculiar” sensation of time-travel as described by Wells in 1895 is fitting for one living on his side of the First and Second World Wars, but for us it takes more than a “switchback” to conjure the feeling of horror suited to this world’s legacy.<sup>617</sup> Pynchon’s time machine in *Against the Day* is perhaps more appropriate. Old and worn, this time machine does not so much propel itself into the future as *sink* into it: its passengers are swallowed by an image of the world as it might be, as they experience “a kind of vibration, less

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<sup>616</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, “Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality Among Men,” in *Basic Political Writings*, trans. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), 62.

<sup>617</sup> Wells, *The Time Machine*, 77.

from the physical chamber itself than from somewhere unsuspected within their own nervous organizations.”<sup>618</sup> This reduction of human agency and the meaning that sustained it to a corporal reaction is the world in which we live, one wherein the promise of Aristotle’s philosophy is stranded. Adorno, however, in taking as his starting point the mangled state of this agency, offers a theorization of how this world might be otherwise.

I am not alone in highlighting Adorno’s relevance to the questions concerning the relation between the human and the animal, politics, and art as Aristotle posed them, but transformed in our world. A number of the contemporary thinkers examined in Part I for their connections to Nietzsche and Heidegger acknowledge the importance of Adorno’s contributions here, though mostly to crown him with laurels and send him on his way. Though passing mention to Adorno can be found in Foucault and Nancy,<sup>619</sup> Derrida gives some focus to the place of animals in Adorno’s work, while Lyotard, Rancière, and Badiou all engage with Adorno’s thoughts on art and aesthetics. For his part, Derrida reads along with Adorno, noting how his indictment of Kant based on Kant’s view of animals brings Adorno closer to Nietzsche.<sup>620</sup> Though for Derrida these insights on the place of animals in idealist philosophy will lead him to formulate his own theory of an expansive, non-anthropocentric humanism as

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<sup>618</sup> Thomas Pynchon, *Against the Day* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 403.

<sup>619</sup> Nancy, *Multiple Arts*, 27. As for Foucault, it is really no more than a brief reference to the ‘left Weberians’ of the Frankfurt School. See Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, trans. Graham Burcell, ed. Michel Senellart (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 105-106.

<sup>620</sup> Derrida, *The Animal that Therefore I Am*, 100-103.

noted in Part I, in Chapter 13, I argue that both these prongs of Derrida's reading fall short of the radical nature of Adorno's project with respect to 'the philosophy of consciousness' and its possible transformation.

Concerning art and aesthetics, though Lyotard's uses of Adorno in *The Inhuman* are occasionally salutary,<sup>621</sup> elsewhere he criticizes Adorno's adherence to dialectic as a theological hangover from Hegelian idealism,<sup>622</sup> and a version of this argument is echoed by Rancière.<sup>623</sup> For Rancière, it is not so much dialectic as such that is the problem, but rather what he calls the "theology of time" that underwrites Adorno's "ethical configuration" of the aesthetic. Interpreted in terms of a "primordial trauma or a salvation to come," the role of art becomes one of maintaining its distance from society and hence its purity so as to bear witness to the world as it is while waiting for the world to come—this is art's ethical imperative. Against this imperative and its claim to purity Rancière would give back to art its "ambiguous" and "litigious" character—its fundamental contamination with society, politics, and their negotiation.<sup>624</sup>

However, as I shall attempt to show in Chapter 14, Adorno's understanding of aesthetic autonomy is never *pure*, for artworks are always semblance, illusion, and hence are never free from ideology—though this does

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<sup>621</sup> Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, 32; 103; 109.

<sup>622</sup> See Lyotard, "Adorno as the Devil," trans. Robert Hurley, *Telos* 19 (1974): 127-137. For a critique of Lyotard on this point, see Dan Webb, "If Adorno Isn't the Devil, It's Because He's a Jew," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 35.5 (2009): 517-531.

<sup>623</sup> Though Rancière considers Lyotard and Adorno both guilty of this charge. See Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, 134-138.

<sup>624</sup> Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 132.

not mean that all art is ideological in the same way or to the same degree. Moreover, Adorno's aesthetic theory is not, strictly speaking, ethical, but *moral*, and in its morality, deeply entwined with politics. Thus not only is the "fantasy of purity" Rancière opposes in Adorno indeed a *fantasy*, but Adorno's conception of aesthetic autonomy allows us a more precise understand of how different artworks are ambiguous and litigious in different ways and to different degrees, rather than in the shadowless light of Rancière's theoretical noonday wherein all paintings are white.

Lastly, in his *Five Lessons on Wagner*, Badiou praises Adorno for "having invented something new" in the philosophical project to be found in *Negative Dialectics*, which he credits with having anticipated many of the major theoretical trends which rose to prominence in the 1980s.<sup>625</sup> However, we must view such praise to be something like the 'black-ops' which precede the official battle's opening salvo, for it is precisely the theoretical trends that rose to prominence in the 1980s—for Badiou, chiefly post-structuralism and the philosophy of difference—*against* which Badiou positions his own philosophy, pre-occupied as it is with ontology, truth, and a re-furbished conception of the subject. By making Adorno the precursor to the sophists his own brand of Platonism has already overcome, Adorno's philosophy is introduced into Badiou's text stillborn,

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<sup>625</sup> Badiou, *Five Lessons on Wagner*, 28.

and he need only catalogue its parts as a kind of administrative exercise, rather than directly confront it as a living philosophy.

Thus Adorno is accused of making a fetish of the suffering body, which Badiou associates with victimhood rather than lived experience,<sup>626</sup> and the innovations Adorno makes to such concepts as the subject and truth are conveniently passed over.<sup>627</sup> Below I argue that although Adorno's philosophy does indeed understand itself to be thoroughly entwined with suffering bodies, the expression of this passivity is always bound to active moments related to truth and necessarily subjective, thus denying any attempt to reduce it to a generic 'philosophy of difference' unconcerned with truth or subjective transformation. In this way, many of the contemporary thinkers laboring within the Nietzschean-Heideggerian attempted reversal of the Aristotelian problematic see Adorno to be an important interlocutor, but all misrepresent his contributions. Part of my goal in Part IV is thus to demonstrate that Adorno's work reaches beyond these criticisms, and offers a truly novel way of understanding and responding to the Aristotelian problematic, though I often opt to do so more in the greater context of this problematic, rather than direct consideration of the aforementioned thinkers.

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<sup>626</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>627</sup> On the difference between Adorno and post-structuralism more generally, see Peter Dews, "Adorno, Post-Structuralism, and the Critique of Identity," in *The Frankfurt School* Vol.IV, ed. Jay Bernstein (London: Routledge, 1994).

As for the manner in which my own discussion of Adorno's work will proceed, I treat Adorno's *oeuvre* as more or less a coherent whole. I do this not in alliance with the view that sees Adorno's philosophical concerns, from his earliest work until his last, to be "monolithic, hewn of a single block,"<sup>628</sup> nor in necessary opposition to the view that sees a break between his early and late work,<sup>629</sup> and certainly not to ignore the objective contradictions Adorno's individual works attempt to articulate which may be said to resist their reduction to a systematic or even non-contradictory whole.<sup>630</sup> Rather, I aim to examine Adorno's work as constellated around the Aristotelian problematic I have attempted to elucidate in Parts II and III above, such as to reveal a way to unbind the knot found therein. I aim to theorize a way of transforming the relation between human and animal, art and politics, such as to think the possibility of the subject transformed, one no longer constituted by and through the violence of self-preservation and the domination that frequently accompanies it—one for whom the word 'human' would be an anachronism.

In this way I broadly follow Adorno in his 'method' of arranging a combination of concepts around a center that will, through their combination, be opened up to the patient reader. I do not, however, adhere to these dictates as rigorously as does Adorno, for the reader will find, perhaps to her or his relief,

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<sup>628</sup> Robert Savage, "Adorno's Family and Other Animals," *Thesis Eleven* 78 (2004), 105.

<sup>629</sup> Jane Bennett, "Modernity and Its Critics," in *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory*, eds. John Dryzek, Bonnie Honig, and Anne Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 219.

<sup>630</sup> Martin Jay, *Marxism & Totality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 266.

that I proceed much more linearly and progressively than does Adorno, making no sado-masochistic attempts to ensure that each line is equidistant from the constellation's center. Moreover, the center has been explicitly stated, another luxury Adorno denies his readers. In this way I have perhaps made too many concessions to the instrumental necessities of communication at the expense of truth: it might be objected that aping Adorno's 'method' in this manner fundamentally misunderstands him, for what I am calling Adorno's 'method' is not a method at all, but a technical response to the taboos placed on communication by society itself, colonized as it is by violence and domination.<sup>631</sup>

If thoughts, actions, and the identities to which these are tied are all the expressions of a social whole organized around the requirements of domination, then simply stating one's aims and pursuing them is to fall precisely into the trap laid by domination, and so to articulate oneself in ideological terms. In refusing to state the center to be revealed, and by rigorously attempting to bring each statement into line with this center such as to grind the progression of the argument to a standstill, the constellated statements of which the text is composed remain open to reinterpretation, for their grounding center must be posited anew by each successive interpreter, who in so positing casts new light on the constellated statements. In this way Adorno attempts to use the cunning of reason to outwit himself, the ideological self which is the expression of socio-

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<sup>631</sup> Cf. Robert Hullot-Kentor, "Suggested Reading," in *Things Beyond Resemblance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 225; 230.

political domination. This is what it means to structure one's philosophy as a 'message in a bottle': a note for future time-travelers that might, in revealing the historical contradictions captured in the message, reveal the distortion in their own time, and so the necessity of transforming it. For my part, I am simply trying to read this message in light of the Aristotelian problematic I have outlined above, and so offer a way of theorizing a response. I leave it to the reader to decide whether or not these half-measures undermine my attempt to such a degree that it might no longer accomplish its aim.

Another theoretical problem arising through the use of Adorno's philosophy concerns the individual status of his concepts. The importance of concepts such as dialectic, non-identity, or *mimesis* for Adorno is difficult to underestimate, not only because of their frequent appearance throughout his writings, but for Adorno's own tendency to resist giving his concepts independent treatment or definition. It might even be said that individual concepts are so deeply woven into the texture of Adorno's thought that to attempt to isolate any one of them—to pull at them, as if they were loose threads—might threaten to unravel the fabric in which they are found. Consequently, the discussion of individual concepts is something of a delicate process: too analytic an approach will only serve to isolate discreet threads, telling us little about the coat Adorno weaves, while too diffuse an approach will give us only a glance at this coat, and so deny us the opportunity to grasp it and get a feel for its texture.

Adorno provides a clue for solving this problem in his discussion of the émigré in a foreign country learning to speak its language: overwhelmed by the ubiquity of strange words, one must learn to read without relying upon appeal to the definite authority of a dictionary or the rules learned in school, which serve only to formalize and inhibit direct contact with the foreign. Instead one must learn to recognize correspondences between words, combinations of words, and their different contexts. Despite the inevitable errors and blind alleys such a passage will entail, only through this kind of groundless engagement with particulars might the meaning of words in their interrelation begin to take shape.<sup>632</sup> I thus propose to place my treatment of Adorno's concepts in relation to other statements in Adorno's work, and additionally to those of a variety of other authors as well, in order to weave these threads into similar garments, though slightly different to the one Adorno presents, and so test its durability in smaller, more concentrated articles: more of scarf here, and a pair of mittens there, to continue with this metaphor, which, hopefully, will complement Adorno's coat.

It will be remarked that the various articles I weave here downplay some of the most prominent of Adorno's materials: Marx, Freud, and Weber, along with other members of the Frankfurt School, such as Horkheimer and Marcuse. While I would not deny the importance of these figures for Adorno's ideas, or even their

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<sup>632</sup> See Adorno, "The Essay as Form," *Notes to Literature*, Vol. 1, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 13. *NL1* hereafter; Adorno, *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993) 107. *HTS*, hereafter.

relevance to the Aristotelian problematic, their relation to Adorno's thought has been much commented upon, and while that in and of itself does not necessarily indicate its saturation, I opt instead to illuminate other aspects of Adorno's thought, and thus bring him into contact with a few of the numerous other thinkers Adorno references in his writings, along with a few others which, as noted above, have either sought to engage directly with Adorno or whose work relates thematically or conceptually to Adorno's project. In interweaving discussions of these various thinkers I intend no definitive statement about what is of canonical importance in Adorno's thinking; instead, I use each only to help illustrate more localized problems as they emerge in my discussion of the concepts in question.

I begin my discussion in Chapter 11 with an account of Adorno's possible relation to Aristotle and the way in which his ideas of dialectic and negative dialectic, identity and non-identity, thinking in constellations, and solidarity with metaphysics all can be seen to be bound to the Aristotelian problematic and what they might intimate as a possible response. I attempt in Chapter 12 to apply Adorno's theoretical innovations to the concept of humanity by examining different ways in which 'human' and its related terms appear in Adorno's work, arguing that Adorno uses humanity in multiple senses, and that it is only his idea of a 'reconciled humanity' that represents for Adorno genuine progress, which is for Adorno the possibility of a subject constituted through objects not beholden

to self-preservation, violence, and domination. Yet insofar as humanity was constituted by and maintains itself through violence and domination, Adorno's 'reconciled humanity' must be understood as a subject that is not, strictly speaking, human.

Chapter 13 aims to develop this claim that reconciled humanity would not be human by examining the different roles animals play in Adorno's thought, attempting to show that animality is the non-identity of the human which the human must repress in its self-constitution, and thus that if this future subject is to be one not constituted through the kind of repression bound up with violence and domination, it would become some other, new kind of animal. Chapter 14 attempts to show how one might strive toward this future animal subject by attempting to live *as if one were a good animal*, and thus concerns the moral and political dimensions of this subjective transformation. It is here that the importance of art in moral-political education is ironically revived by Adorno, no longer to be used to produce what is human out of the animal and reconcile that within an ordered, hierarchical whole as it was in Aristotle, but instead to liberate the animal from the human through aesthetic experience.

In this way Adorno's solution to the Aristotelian problematic is the production of an *aesthetic animal*, an animal constituted not simply through its senses (*aisthesis*), but through its relation to artworks, such as to build the kind of solidarity between subjects that might make possible the kind of socio-political

transformation that could displace the centrality of violence and domination, and usher in new forms of life. This is the future toward which Adorno's theoretical contributions gesture, constellated around the Aristotelian problematic. In this way, Aristotle appears less as a figure from which Western philosophy descends, but a messenger from its possible future, one wherein humanity has become an animal for whom life is no longer constituted through its breaking upon the wheel of its history.

## Chapter Twelve: Jewgreek is greekjew: Aristotle, Hegel, and Adorno on the Perils of Dialectic

### *Adorno's Aristotle*

Adorno is not known as a reader of Aristotle, or as a scholar of the Ancients. Though affinities between Adorno and Aristotle have begun to be noted,<sup>633</sup> Aristotle and the Greeks are still largely seen to be at best peripheral to the concerns that animate Adorno's work.<sup>634</sup> The use made of Homer in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, or *Minima Moralia's* "ironic inversion" of the teaching of the good life in Aristotle,<sup>635</sup> are less attempts to elucidate antiquity as with most classical scholarship than they are attempts to understand modernity. It is modernity, not antiquity, which fascinates Adorno. Geuss goes as far as claiming that for Adorno, "relevant 'history' starts with Haydn in music, Goethe in literature, and Kant in philosophy." Apart from occasional mentions of Bach or Homer, or "isolated throw-away remarks about Plato and Aristotle," readers will find "no discussion of any work or figure before the middle of the eighteenth

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<sup>633</sup> The most sustained study of this affinity to date is Fabian Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), Ch. 9. See also Gerhard Schweppenhäuser, *Theodor W. Adorno*, trans. James Rolleston (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 49; Ray Brassier, *Nihil Unbound* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 40.

<sup>634</sup> Indeed, a number of the major works that introduced Adorno's thought to the English-speaking world make no particular reference to the possible importance of Aristotle or the Greeks. See for instance, Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics* (New York: The Free Press, 1977); Martin Jay, *Adorno* (New York: Fontana, 1984).

<sup>635</sup> J.M. Bernstein, *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 40-41.

century.” Indeed, Geuss claims, “it was precisely the *absence* of the Greeks from Adorno’s mind and philosophy” that gave him the freedom to focus on the themes that he did.<sup>636</sup>

Geuss’s claim, that a kind of productive forgetfulness lay at the heart Adorno’s thinking, is provocative. Such a reading would make Adorno’s philosophy structured around the absence of the Greeks, the very origin of philosophy, thus emphasizing the anti-foundational aspects of his thought along with his attempt to think “the new,” both in music and elsewhere.<sup>637</sup> However, such a reading might also risk making the Greeks into the repressed that must return, a vast reserve of vital drives upon which Adorno’s philosophy perches precariously, unconsciously following their directives. If Adorno’s philosophy is only possible through the absence of the Greeks, then their appearance in “isolated throw-away remarks” are like nervous tics, or symptoms, perhaps, of the repressed trauma of origins that Adorno would all-too-happily escape, if he could. The return of the Greeks then, would spell either Adorno’s destruction, or his reform, as the therapeutic intervention he needs to overcome the damages of life, to put down roots, and to cultivate virtue. In other words, the introduction of the Greeks into Adorno’s thought would make a good Greek of Adorno—they might give foundation to his thought and system to the moral and political

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<sup>636</sup> Raymond Geuss, “Outside Ethics,” in *Outside Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 61n56.

<sup>637</sup> In his early essay, “The Idea of Natural History,” Adorno provisionally defines history not as a search for origins, but as the movement in which that which is qualitatively new appears. See Adorno, “The Idea of Natural History,” trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor, *Telos* 60 (1984), 111. Cited as *INH* hereafter.

practices Adorno claims have been set adrift. In this vein, reading Adorno in light of the Greeks is either to dismiss him outright, or to find in him a reluctant colleague of MacIntyre, Nussbaum, and Salkever. Yet another view of this relationship to the Greeks, and to Aristotle in particular, is possible.

We might say that antiquity for Adorno is not *forgotten* at all, but *alienated*—the Greeks, and Aristotle in particular, are appropriated less as the sources of philosophy, and so necessary precursors from which Adorno’s own thought organically grows, than as objects foreign to it. The Greek *thaumazein*, or “wonder” that precipitates philosophy in Aristotle, is in Adorno a “shock” that serves not as origin but as disruption and re-orientation of thinking around the object that impinges.<sup>638</sup> As “isolated throw-away remarks,” references to Plato and Aristotle in Adorno’s work are like the scattered contents of a thief’s pockets: torn from their own context and placed into one they could have scarcely fathomed, Plato and Aristotle are alienated from their traditional place of authority in the history of philosophy, becoming foreigners in Adorno’s texts.<sup>639</sup> As such, references to them might be treated as Adorno does foreign words.

In an early text, Adorno claims that against the “purism” that sees language as a natural or organic growth, foreign words must be defended as

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<sup>638</sup> Aristotle, *Meta.*, I.2 982b12-13; for an equation between *thaumazein* and shock, see Adorno, *INH*, 118.

<sup>639</sup> Cf. Adorno, “The Actuality of Philosophy,” in *The Adorno Reader*, trans. Benjamin Snow, ed. Brian O’Connor (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 35.

“foreign bodies assailing the body of language.”<sup>640</sup> True words are not “buried ur-words” that can be “mythically evoked,” that is, they do not lay at the origin through which what is has come to be, and whose discovery is therefore necessary in order to understand what has come to be. Rather, true words can for us only be “the artificial words,” the “made words,” which serve to express the alienation of language from itself, the alienation of language split between the demands of communication, and the possibility of a true name.<sup>641</sup> For Adorno, communication mobilizes words as tools to work upon things, and is ruled by an authority which assigns its means and ends, while the possibility of a true name is the possibility of a peaceful accord between words and things, and so a language not treated as an instrument. It is this later conception of truth, an excess irreducible to the exigencies of communication, which gives foreign words their force. Foreign words capture this division at the heart of language, but the antagonism they express toward the body of a language can only be legitimated in a different conception of language, the true naming that for us exists only in negative, in the fragments of the disintegrating body of language. These

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<sup>640</sup> Adorno, “On the Use of Foreign Words,” in *Notes to Literature*, Vol.2, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholzen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 288. Cf. Adorno, “Words from Abroad,” *NL1*, 186.

<sup>641</sup> While Benjamin’s influence has been noted here, one can also find Hegelian reasons to praise foreign words. In his *Science of Logic*, Hegel notes that Latin terms often serve as technical terms in philosophy due to their less immediate, and more “reflected” character. The dual pull Benjamin and Hegel exert on Adorno’s thought will be further discussed below. See Shierry Weber Nicholzen, *Exact Imagination* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 67; Lisa Yun Lee, *Dialectics of the Body* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 64; Hegel, *Hegel’s Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (New York: Humanities, 1976), 107. Cited hereafter as *SL*.

fragments continually undermine and threaten to overtake this language, as though they were “the language of the future” germinating.<sup>642</sup>

If references to Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle in Adorno’s texts can be treated as he does foreign words, then they are not meant simply to point backwards, to what philosophy has been, and so to explain the present as their descendents. If foreign words exist as fragments at the fraying edges of a language, and stand, as Adorno claims, not for a past from which this language has organically grown, but for the possibility of the language transformed, of its future incarnation, then Plato and Aristotle appear in Adorno’s writings as messengers from the future. But for what future might Adorno’s references to the Greeks possibly stand? Ironically, it is in an attempt at communication that a possible answer to this question is given clearest definition. Adorno gives his most sustained treatment of any Greek thinker in a series of lectures he delivered on metaphysics in 1965: for a good portion of the first two thirds of these lectures, Aristotle is Adorno’s object of study.

For Adorno, the relevance of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* revolves around two interrelated issues: 1) the manner it relates the universal to the particular, or form and matter; and 2) the possibility of change.<sup>643</sup> Neither of these are for

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<sup>642</sup> Adorno, “On the Use of Foreign Words,” 288-291. Cf. Adorno, “Words from Abroad,” 190. For a more thorough consideration of Adorno’s ideas on language than is possible here, see Samir Gandesha, “The ‘Aesthetic Dignity of Words,’: Adorno’s Philosophy of Language,” *New German Critique* 97, Vol. 33.1 (2006): 137-158.

<sup>643</sup> See Adorno, *Metaphysics: Concepts and Problems*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 25; 81. Hereafter cited as *MCP*.

Adorno purely theoretical questions, but have strong moral and political implications.<sup>644</sup> With respect to the first issue, Adorno claims that Aristotle rejects the Platonic separation between universal Ideas and the world of particular things, attempting instead to bring these two together and so attempt to think the universal through instances of particularity. In thus insisting on the necessity of particulars to grasp the universal, Aristotle opens up the question of *mediation*, the question of how exactly it is that a universal inhabits something particular, and can be known through it. Adorno will hold, however, that despite posing the problem of mediation “with extreme clarity,” Aristotle nevertheless fails to achieve a genuine concept of mediation.<sup>645</sup> Without a concept of mediation, Aristotle ultimately remains unable to grasp how change is possible.

For Adorno, change happens through extremes: it is only in surpassing the limit that binds a thing, the point at which a given object defines itself, that something can be said to change. Dialectic, as the thinking of passage, of the movement between terms, thus presents itself as the means of thinking change. A dialectical understanding of mediation would be one capable of grasping the unity of opposites—the identity of extremes. Only by pursuing these extremes past their limits might a third term, something *new*, appear. Aristotelian

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<sup>644</sup> In an earlier lecture series on moral philosophy, Adorno claims that “the central problem of moral philosophy” is the relation between the particular and the universal, and that moral philosophy is itself closely connected with practical activity and the political sphere. See Adorno, *Problems of Moral Philosophy*, ed. Thomas Schroder, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 18; 2-3. Cited as *PMP* hereafter.

<sup>645</sup> *MCP*, 46.

mediation falls short of dialectical mediation because it posits a middle term as something existing between the two extremes, not through them. That is, rather than grasping the extremes, of moving through them to see where they lead, Aristotle turns back from these extremes and seeks refuge instead in a “happy medium,” a point that is neither too close to the limits of one side or the other.<sup>646</sup> The mediating term is thus one available among the existing options lying between the two poles at opposite extremes, rather than to something new arising from the extremes as they surpass their limits. Adorno thus argues that Aristotle is not a dialectical thinker, and moreover that “the dialectic did not exist at that time,”<sup>647</sup> a claim that seems to abruptly contradict much of what is thought about Aristotle and the Greeks today. While vastly different contemporary scholars have referred to Aristotle’s dialectical use of concepts,<sup>648</sup> the idea that the dialectic did not even exist in Aristotle’s day seems to be an even stranger claim that is worth attempting to clarify, if we are to understand Adorno’s reading of Aristotle and consequently the place of Aristotle in Adorno’s works.

In his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle distinguishes between the sophist, the philosopher, and the dialectician (*dialektikoi*). Although all three concern themselves with many of the same objects of study, Aristotle claims that the philosopher uniquely concerns himself with the being (*on*) common to these

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<sup>646</sup> *MCP*, 47.

<sup>647</sup> *MCP*, 31.

<sup>648</sup> See for instance Jill Frank, *A Democracy of Distinction* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 7; Carnes Lord, *Education and Culture in the Political Thought of Aristotle* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press), 30.

things, and thus has a claim to real knowledge, whereas the sophist merely imitates the knowledge of the philosopher, differing from him with respect to his choices.<sup>649</sup> The dialectician, on the other hand, differs from the philosopher in that he relies on a different power or capacity (*dunameos*) than the philosopher, remaining “merely critical” of things rather than knowing them in their being.<sup>650</sup> Though Aristotle does not say precisely here what capacity it is that the philosopher relies upon that the dialectician does not, if what separates the philosopher is knowledge of the truth of what *is*, then given the above discussion of the powers that compose human beings, it must be commune with the divine *nous* that enables the philosophical grasping of being, and to which the dialectician is indifferent.

That the dialectician engages with the objects of philosophical study in a manner that remains beneath that of *nous* and philosophy would appear to be in accord with what Aristotle has to say about dialectic elsewhere in his work, especially in the *Rhetoric*. There Aristotle claims that dialectic is closely related to rhetoric: both refuse to be limited by any single branch of study, but concern themselves with virtually all objects of knowledge—all objects “that call for

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<sup>649</sup> That is, the sophist is a kind of *crude* philosopher, one whose choices show a lack not in philosophical ability but in practical wisdom. In this sense, the sophist is a kind of *upstart* who applies philosophical methods of questioning in ways he ought not. Cf. Aristotle, *Rhet.* I.1 1355b17-18. Adorno also makes a similar claim regarding the relation between dialectic and sophism in his *Minima Moralia*. See Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 2005), A152, 244. Cited hereafter as *MM*.

<sup>650</sup> *Meta.*, IV.2 1004b15-26.

discussion.”<sup>651</sup> Dialectic concerns itself with deductions, real and apparent, and so it also concerns arguments that, while established among people as reputable, may in fact be spurious.<sup>652</sup> Moreover, Aristotle claims that along with rhetoric, dialectic is the only art capable of drawing opposite conclusions from its premises.<sup>653</sup> In this sense, while dialectic must be closely related to *logos*, it is bound to the particular utterances of language, *dialektos*, that may not necessarily be reducible to that which is in being, and thus might even be said to speculatively overreach being, in a manner similar to poetic fiction.

That the above distinctions appear to relegate dialectic to a space beneath philosophy suggests Aristotle did not consider himself a dialectician, or at least not *merely* a dialectician. However, it remains to be seen exactly what is missing in Aristotle’s definition of the dialectic to legitimate Adorno’s claim that not only did Aristotle not think dialectically, but that such a form of thinking was not available to him. Indeed, much of what Aristotle says about dialectic above resonates with Adorno’s ideas concerning dialectic: namely, its critical bent, indifferent to the knowledge of being or *ontology*, along with its close ties to language and to rhetoric.<sup>654</sup> The crucial element missing in Aristotle’s account of the dialectic and that for Adorno is sufficient to say that dialectic did not exist in

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<sup>651</sup> *Rhet.*, I.1 1354a1-5; 1355b6-9; I.2 1358a10-17; 1356b33-1357a3.

<sup>652</sup> *Rhet.*, I.1 1355a8-10; 1355b16-18; II.24 1402a3-8.

<sup>653</sup> *Rhet.*, I.1 1355a34-35.

<sup>654</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, 2007), 136; 55-56. Cited as *ND* hereafter.

antiquity at all, is the absence of a concept of constitutive subjectivity.<sup>655</sup> That is, the objects available to dialectic are transparent to Aristotle in a way they are not to Adorno: dialectic is for Aristotle a way of making deductions concerning speech-objects that are directly connected to the objects themselves. Or put differently: the concepts considered by Aristotle to be available to speech and so to the dialectic are not projected upon objects by a speaking subject, but rather the concepts available to speech inhere in the objects themselves.<sup>656</sup> It is for this reason that Adorno calls Aristotle a thinker of both immediacy *and* mediation, for though Aristotle thinks universals are necessarily mediated through particulars, he sees this mediation as existing simply and immediately at an ontological level—a particular object is what it is and can be known as such through the inherence in it of a universal concept.<sup>657</sup>

Dialectic is for Aristotle less exacting than philosophy because it focuses on the speech-objects irrespective of their truth or falsity, irrespective of how they relate to being. In this manner, Aristotle reduces the speculative excess of dialectic to simple falsity: where dialectic draws conclusions about speech-objects that fail to correlate with an object at the ontological level—that is, they refer to something that *is not*—then these conclusions are false. If the speculative excess of dialectic is simply false, then dialectical deductions are true where their conclusions correlate with what is. Dialectic might thus be said to overlap with

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<sup>655</sup> *MCP*, 48-49.

<sup>656</sup> *MCP*, 55-56.

<sup>657</sup> *MCP*, 31.

philosophy where it concerns correct deductions related to being, but where it speculates on that which does not correlate with anything in being, there it exceeds philosophy to the detriment of knowledge. By reducing the speculative excess of dialectic to the false, and truth to what correlates with being, Aristotle renders dialectic incapable of grasping movement and change, for the coming to being from nothing that is becoming is only intelligible on the side of being—the speculative excess necessary to grasp the passage of something coming into being is excluded in advance as false. Thus Aristotle is capable of writing that one *becomes* a certain way because that is the way one *is*: “the process of becoming attends upon being and is for the sake of being, not *vice versa*.”<sup>658</sup> Change is thus not transformation, but the successive revealing of what already is. Dialectic as the compulsion of thinking to grasp change is thus denied in Aristotle.

However, despite the anti-dialectical bent of Aristotle’s conception of mediation, Adorno thinks this conception nevertheless does fortuitously gesture toward that which is excluded from its conception, and thus the possibility of thinking change. Adorno finds this possibility most readily apparent in Aristotle’s formulation of the conceptual pair of form and matter. Recall that for Aristotle, form gives shape to matter, which on its own is indeterminate and lifeless: form is the actuality of matter, while matter is the potentiality of form. Yet in stripping matter down to simple potentiality, to an empty state of potency

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<sup>658</sup> GA, V.1 778b4-6.

prior to all determination, Adorno claims Aristotle has given conceptual articulation to something non-conceptual.<sup>659</sup> By defining matter as an indefinite striving toward definition, something that lies on the other side of form but without which form could not be, the power of form as actuality is made dependent on a second power, the power of matter to become actualized in form.

Insofar as the actual is what is, and the potential what might be, or that which has the power to be something other than it is, it would appear Aristotle has here inadvertently subordinated being to becoming. Matter, though a concept in its own right, refers to the non-conceptual whose own lack of determinacy gestures toward determinacy—it points toward the concept of form through which it will be organized and known. As the indeterminacy upon which determinate form depends, matter also contains the potential for the actualization of form to go awry, to fail to hit its mark or realize its *telos* in the fully flourishing actuality of form. Thus Adorno will claim matter (*hule*) becomes a kind of repository for mythical categories displaced by form: namely, fate (*anagke*) and chance (*tuche*). The question of change and transformation, whose mythical articulations in the concepts of fate and chance were banned by “the Greek enlightenment” and its philosophical inquiry into being, return in the concept of matter.<sup>660</sup> Though Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* fails to grasp the concept of change, its failure nevertheless indicates the point or departure from which a

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<sup>659</sup> *MCP*, 67; 80.

<sup>660</sup> *MCP*, 75.

possible solution to the problem of change might spring: one must look to that which is excluded from the concept, the indeterminate array of material that Adorno will call the non-conceptual, or the non-identical.

It is in the light of the non-identical, of that which the concept excludes, that the isolated references to Aristotle and the Greeks scattered throughout Adorno's writings must be interpreted. Held together in a kind of force field, Adorno's references to the Greeks point toward the future in which they might be redeemed, both as obstacles to its realization, and promises of its possibility. For instance, from this perspective Aristotle is guilty of being complicit with domination for his insistence on the superiority of contemplative to practical activity: as the greatest good, contemplation becomes indifferent to the task of changing the world, and is thus colonized by the dominant political forces of the day, as witnessed in the fall of the *polis* and the form of *praxis* particular to it that accompanies Aristotle's praise of the life of contemplation.<sup>661</sup> Yet this emphasis on contemplation that allows for complicity between Aristotle's philosophy and the destruction of Athenian political life at once provides a critique of the very life that would replace it, "the resignation of the Hellenistic private citizen," in the promise of "blissful contemplation" divorced from "the exercising and suffering of violence."<sup>662</sup>

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<sup>661</sup> *ND*, 244; *MCP*, 92.

<sup>662</sup> *ND*, 267.

Likewise, Adorno finds Aristotelian aesthetics to be complicit with “ruling interests” in their theorization of the task of art being to provide an “aesthetic semblance” of the satisfaction of the needs and instincts of the public. In this sense, Aristotelian catharsis is a “substitute satisfaction,” akin to what will be appropriated and managed by the culture industry over two millennia later.<sup>663</sup> Nevertheless, in seeking “the effect of art in the affects of individuals,” Aristotelian aesthetics preserve a kind of experience irreducible to political exigencies, and thus make, despite their complicity with domination, a promise that things might be other than they are.<sup>664</sup> And perhaps most importantly with respect to politics, while Adorno accuses Aristotle of having fused “inner worth” with the status made possible through property and enshrined in law, thus making the “good man” one “who rules himself as he does his own property,”<sup>665</sup> Aristotle will also limit the power of the rule of this law through his concept of equity (*epieikes*). Against the “abstract legal norm,” in equity we see a turn toward the particulars that cannot be subsumed under the generality of the law, and so assimilated to the order of property over which the “good man” rules. In the light of the non-identical, equity becomes the promise of justice beyond the

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<sup>663</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 238. Cited hereafter as *AT*.

<sup>664</sup> *AT*, 202.

<sup>665</sup> Adorno, *MM*, A119, 185.

rule of what can be equalized as property, and it is for this reason that Adorno claims Aristotle's concept of equity is to his "imperishable glory."<sup>666</sup>

In thrall to the non-identical, to that which eludes the concept, Adorno's references to Aristotle form a "force field" of statements concerning the relation of metaphysics to the possibility of a transformed world. This transformed world, the future of which Aristotle is made to speak, is one that he both denies and promises—his conceptual innovations militate against their own transformation, and so the transformation of the world, yet in doing so they produce a remainder that points in the opposite direction—one that suggests something else is possible. Insofar as Adorno finds in the origin of metaphysics the kernel of its other, the non-identical which carries within itself a compressed history of displaced origins, the origin of metaphysics is found to be no origin at all. Rather, it is a reference point in the trajectory of domination, carrying in it the scars of this domination while at once gesturing toward something else. Just as Adorno writes in the "Finale [*Zum Ende*]" to his *Minima Moralia* that "the only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in the face of despair" attempts to contemplate all things "from the standpoint of redemption," so his references to Aristotle and his metaphysics are attempts to "displace and estrange" Aristotle's thought, and so reveal "its rifts and crevices, as indigent and distorted as it will

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<sup>666</sup> *ND*, 311. Cf. *PMP*, 124. To make a pedantic note: the Greek *epieikes* or *epieicheia* is mistakenly printed as *eikotes* in Ashton's translation of the *ND*. Scott and Liddell list no such Greek word, and *epieicheia* appears in the German edition. Cf. Theodor W. Adorno, *Gesammelte Schriften Band 6* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 305.

appear one day in the messianic light.”<sup>667</sup> So illuminated by the light of its other, Aristotle’s metaphysics becomes citable in its relation to this future, to its possible transformation.<sup>668</sup>

Adorno’s famous declaration of solidarity with metaphysics “at the time of its fall”<sup>669</sup> that concludes his *Negative Dialectics* is precisely this: a solidarity with metaphysics through its determinate negation, which both recognizes the contemporary impossibility of a metaphysical system yet continues metaphysical speculation in the form of attending to that which lies beyond the concept, the point at which, as in Aristotle, the material particulars split their conceptual casing, and so compel a transformation of the conceptual world. This determinate negation of metaphysics will have been at the same time a determinate negation of Aristotle’s thought, and as such, an attempt to solve the problems concerning the relation between the human and the animal, and the relation between art and politics, that arose in the above discussion of Aristotle. In this way, Adorno must be seen as a critic of Aristotle, but one bound to the Aristotelian problematic—a thinker whose anti-Aristotelianism takes up the challenge his philosophy poses, and attempts to “string the bow” Aristotle has left for posterity. How Adorno’s fate in this endeavor might differ from the other

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<sup>667</sup> *MM*, A153, 247.

<sup>668</sup> Cf. Walter Benjamin: “only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past—which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments.” We will have further opportunity to examine what such a “redeemed mankind” might look like below. See “Theses On the Philosophy of History,” in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken, 1969), 254.

<sup>669</sup> *ND*, 408.

“suitors” examined in Part I will depend on his approach. In order to better elucidate this approach and the possible consequences of the transformed conceptual world Adorno inhabits, along with the place of humans, animals, art, and politics therein, we must now ourselves turn to the non-conceptual, to that which Adorno calls “non-identity,” and of course, their relationship to identity and to the concepts that form the core of Adorno’s contribution to philosophy.

### *Non-Identity and Dialectic*

As seen above, the core problems Adorno highlights in Aristotle’s metaphysics concerning the possibility of change and the relation between universal and particular remain unresolved, and the moral and political dimensions of these problems remain for Adorno the most pressing of their kind. Adorno claims that the central problem of moral philosophy is likewise the relationship of “the particular interests,” or “the behaviour of the individual,” in relation to the universal, and that this question relates to “the question of the organization of the world,” and the “quest for the right form of politics,” in as much as such a politics is possible today.<sup>670</sup> Aristotle’s claim that a discrepancy exists between the best human life and the best citizen, thus making the best human life dependent upon political organization, becomes revolutionary in Adorno, for whom “wrong life

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<sup>670</sup> *PMP*, 18; 176.

cannot be lived rightly.”<sup>671</sup> That is, the moral quest for the good life cannot be divorced from the political task of changing the world such that life might no longer be wrong, that political organization would no longer be its impediment. Solidarity with metaphysics at the time of its fall is to take up these problems in their interrelation. However, in examining what Adorno takes to be the core problems of Aristotle’s metaphysics, it was found that he relies on a conception of dialectic whose relation to non-identity and the messianic requires further development if the particularity of Adorno’s use of this term is to be understood.

In the preceding look at Aristotle’s metaphysics, it was found that a conception of mediation is required in order to relate universal and particular and so grasp the relation between things and their concepts and how these might change—that is, how to think or conceptualize something that changes. It was also found that Aristotle’s conception of mediation fails in its attempt to grasp the relationship between universal and particular in a manner that might accommodate the possibility of change, and that consequently a dialectical conception of mediation is necessary, for only a dialectical conception of mediation seeks to grasp things as they are and as they pass beyond the limit that defines them as what they are. In this sense, it might be said that dialectical thinking attempts to think objects both in their identity, that is, in the conjunction of concept and object, and in their non-identity, in the disjunction

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<sup>671</sup> *MM*, A18, 39.

between concept and object created by changes in the object. As the object changes, so it sheds its identity with the concept. Dialectic attempts to think this movement by formulating concepts such as to enable their revision according to the changes in the object. Though the object is constantly undergoing changes, dialectical concepts are constantly being revised by these changes, such as to re-establish the identity with the object lost through its change. Thus, non-identity in dialectical thought precipitates identity: it is the open door that dialectical thinking is forever closing. But here we must ask: is this continued attempt to re-establish identity within non-identity consonant with what Adorno has in mind with his turn *toward* the non-identical, to the *other side* of the concept? Is Adorno's attempt to see in things their "rifts and crevices," their indigence and distortion, simply to better capture them conceptually, and so expand the ever-growing universe of the conceptual domain?

We must answer that no, Adorno's turn toward non-identity is not done in the same vein as past dialectical thinking—his aim is not to seek identity in non-identity, and so to simply better conceptualize the world. However, this answer should not suggest that Adorno then makes a fetish of indigence and distortion, to worship or celebrate the failure of the concept to establish identity with its object, as if freedom lay in their discord. Rather, what Adorno denies is the separation between thinking and acting that would make possible the peaceful concord of concept and object in a thinking subject, despite the discord of a world

where that subject's actions are the result of compulsion.<sup>672</sup> So long as our socio-political world remains organized such that we must act in accordance with the exigencies of our unequal standing in that world—either as dominated or dominator—then the very texture of our thinking will be colored by this organization. For Adorno, to think an object is sufficiently captured by a concept is to legitimate its place in the prevailing conceptual order bound to its socio-political order—it is to deny that either the object or the order in which it has definition could be otherwise. To perpetually seek out identity in non-identity, to set out and attempt to conceptually capture that which lies outside the concept, is the cognitive equivalent of a bounty hunter chasing a fugitive.

Yet to recognize a compulsive and even violent element in thinking should not then lead us to the conclusion that it would be better not to think at all—such a life is not possible, or even desirable. Rather, thinking can only abjure violence to the extent that the society in which it takes place abjures violence. In a society where violence is deemed abhorrent and yet perpetuated in multifarious forms each day, we should not be surprised to find thinking present a peaceful accord between concept and object that denies the existence of its remainder. This identity would hide anything that falls outside of the concept, just as public denunciations of violence unconnected to a socio-political change that might inhibit future violence only serve its perpetuation. To turn toward this

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<sup>672</sup> Adorno, "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis," in *Critical Models*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 261.

remainder, the non-conceptual or non-identical, in the manner Adorno would, is to use the violence of thought against itself in order to reveal the radical insufficiency of the prevailing conceptual order, and so compel its re-organization. This thinking is the cognitive equivalent of what would be for the prevailing socio-political organization a revolution. However, it is worth asking at this juncture: how is it possible to *think* a revolution that is not being enacted at the socio-political level, if Adorno denies the separation of thinking and acting that would allow each a sphere independent of the other?

It is here that we must return to the “messianic light” that illuminates the other side of the concept in the “Finale” of *Minima Moralia*. By positing the future as a utopia in which the struggles that animate the present are no more, one is capable of seeing in these struggles what *will have been* the promise of their redemption, but that otherwise go unrecognized. It is for this reason that Adorno can write that “the question of the reality or unreality of redemption itself hardly matters,”<sup>673</sup> for redemption is itself *posited* by thinking in order to think against the thinking bound up with compulsion—it is a ruse, a conceptual trick made at the expense of concepts, possible thanks to the historical possibility of its own redemption. Insofar as the future remains unknown, the possibility of its being radically other than the present cannot be disproven, and so the ruse lives in this unknown, drawing interest from a principal which may or may not prove

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<sup>673</sup> *MM*, A153, 247.

redeemable. In this way thinking is able to orient itself to the world and its own activity such as to work against the compulsion which animates their organization, instigating a revolution in thought that might, hopefully, contribute in some way to a revolution in the organization of society. The political ramifications of this thinking, including its relation to art and aesthetics will be taken up in Chapter 14. At present, it must be seen what this “revolution” means for the dialectic.

Just as certain concerns of Aristotelian metaphysics are illuminated by this messianic light and made Adorno’s own, so is dialectic, especially the Hegelian variety, illuminated and harnessed toward Adorno’s project. While Hegel’s own affinities with Aristotle are noted repeatedly throughout Adorno’s texts,<sup>674</sup> by placing Hegel in relation to Benjamin’s messianic conception of history, Hegel is drawn away from Aristotle and toward Benjamin in manner that allows for the redemption of the promise of the dialectic that had been denied by the dominion of identity. We might say, following a simile used by Adorno to describe Benjamin, that just as “everything that fell under the scrutiny of his words was transformed, as though it had become radioactive,”<sup>675</sup> so the Hegelian dialectic too becomes “radioactive,” mutating or decaying such as to be transformed from what it was in Hegel. This mutated form of the dialectic, one turned not to

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<sup>674</sup> See for example, *MM*, A119, 185; *MCP*, 79; *ND*, 25; 135; 337; *AT*, 108. For a more sustained and systematic attempt to link the philosophies of Aristotle and Hegel than anything attempted by Adorno, see Alfredo Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>675</sup> Adorno, “A Portrait of Walter Benjamin,” in *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990), 229.

establishing identity in non-identity, but in finding the non-identical in the identical, is what Adorno calls *negative dialectic*.<sup>676</sup>

However, Adorno makes little attempt to forge an analytical distinction between negative dialectic and the traditional understanding of dialectic, and will frequently refer to the dialectic and his negative dialectic interchangeably. For instance, in *Negative Dialectics* Adorno claims that dialectic says simply that objects leave a remainder beyond their concept, and so the attempt to conceptualize an object produces a contradiction in the conceptualizing subject between the object of experience and the conception of it. To think dialectically is to persist in this experience of the non-identity between concept and object, driven by the “inevitable insufficiency” of our thinking to erase this contradiction.<sup>677</sup> Or put differently: thinking dialectically is to conceptually reflect upon the gap in our experience that both divides concept and object and promises their possible reconciliation. Defined in this manner, if only provisionally and imperfectly, Adorno’s understanding of dialectic appears to differ little from the Hegelian variety. The dialectic that animates Hegel’s philosophy, Adorno writes, is “the permanent confrontation of the object with its concept [...] the unswerving effort to conjoin reason's critical consciousness of

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<sup>676</sup> *Contra* Jay, who, while acknowledging the importance of Benjamin for Adorno’s negative dialectic, nevertheless claims that Adorno’s relation to Hegel often serves to bring him closer to Lukács than Benjamin. On my reading, developed below, it is precisely through Benjamin’s conception of the messianic that Adorno will appropriate Hegelian dialectic. See Jay, *Marxism & Totality*, 251; 254. On this influence more generally, see Frederic Jameson, *Late Marxism* (London: Verso, 2000), 52; and more comprehensively, Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*.

<sup>677</sup> *ND*, 5.

itself and the critical experience of objects.”<sup>678</sup> Hegel himself, supposedly in a conversation with Goethe, called the dialectic “the organized spirit of contradiction,”<sup>679</sup> and in taking up these contradictions, Hegel’s philosophy attempts to express the non-identical, even if this very attempt identifies it in the process.<sup>680</sup>

But here is where the difference between Hegel’s dialectic and Adorno’s comes to light. Adorno wants to express non-identity in a way that does not suppress it beneath identity, in a way that turns the conceptual toward the non-conceptual without the latter being simply devoured or “crushed” by the former.<sup>681</sup> While the passage of the Hegelian dialectic appears more or less indistinguishable from that of the dialectic championed by Adorno, the former variety “is untrue when measured against its own concept.”<sup>682</sup> Though Hegel’s dialectic opens up the possibility of thinking through the passage between contradictory particulars with neither ground nor origin remaining permanent or fixed,<sup>683</sup> Hegel’s idealism forbids this passage, seeking instead to ground this

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<sup>678</sup> *HTS*, Adorno, 9-10.

<sup>679</sup> *HTS*, 43. Cf. Bernstein, who writes: “Negative dialectics, austere thought, is nothing other than the reflective version of the experience of contradictions.” J.M. Bernstein, “Negative Dialectic as Fate: Adorno and Hegel,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed. Tom Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 37.

<sup>680</sup> *HTS*, 101-102.

<sup>681</sup> Hegel compares thought’s negation of the given to eating, and claims that what “human beings strive for in general is cognition of the world; we strive to appropriate it and to conquer it. To this end the reality of the world must be crushed as it were, i.e., it must be made ideal.” See G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopaedia Logic*, trans. T.F. Geraets, W.A. Suchting, H.S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991), §12; §42, *Addition 1*. Cited as *EL* hereafter.

<sup>682</sup> *HTS*, 17.

<sup>683</sup> *HTS*, 13.

movement in an absolute subject. For Hegel, it is only through the activities of consciousness culminating in an absolute subject that all particulars find unity and so are assigned fixed identities in a totality. The absolute subject, or spirit, is at once found to be the origin of the process, and its goal—the constitutive conception of the subject needed for dialectic noted by Adorno above becomes in Hegel the ultimate guarantor of objects in their particularity, for the subject does not simply project concepts onto objects, but the truth of the objects themselves are for Hegel to be found in these projections, their *ideality*.<sup>684</sup> Thus there is a preponderance of the subject and the concept over the object in Hegel which, like Aristotle's metaphysics, falls back into a static conception of the totality of the world, and the positive identities of the objects therein.<sup>685</sup>

The image of the circle employed so frequently by Hegel underscores the stasis of totality: things are not transformed into new things, but rather preserve an identity with what they become *concretely* (or, in their *actuality*) with what they always already were *abstractly* (or, *potentially*) through the successive stages of the development of consciousness.<sup>686</sup> Though we might say Hegel approaches Benjamin's messianic conception of history with his insistence that the beginning is only found to have been the beginning in the end, and is thus always already mediated by the end in which it will be discovered as the

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<sup>684</sup> Hegel, *EL*, §11-12; §14; Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), §802.

<sup>685</sup> Adorno, *ND*, 7; 27.

<sup>686</sup> *ND*, 156. Cf. Hegel, *EL*, §15.

beginning,<sup>687</sup> this retro-active positing of foundations ensures that the end is likewise mediated by its beginning, and is thus never something alien to it. Insofar as the beginning retro-actively posited by the end is never “an arbitrary or merely provisional assumption,”<sup>688</sup> then recognizing that the development of a thing is at its end depends upon a version of this end being already present in the beginning.<sup>689</sup> The end must grow out of the beginning, even if the beginning can only be fully known in the end, and the necessity of this organic link serves to transform Hegel’s messianic moment into theodicy. Rather than being caught in a messianic light that illuminates their radical otherness from themselves, Hegelian theodicy ensures that things necessarily progress along a given trajectory, developing into the complete form of what they always already were in embryo.<sup>690</sup> Thus Hegel’s idealism serves to arrest the passage of his dialectic in a static system of identity.<sup>691</sup> Adorno’s turn to Benjamin and the messianic is thus an attempt to split the unity of dialectic and idealism found in Hegel, and so open up the possibility of a dialectical experience in Hegel’s “freedom toward the object”<sup>692</sup> irreducible to idealist categories and the circle of their organic

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<sup>687</sup> Hegel, *SL*, 71-72.

<sup>688</sup> Hegel, *SL*, 72.

<sup>689</sup> Hegel, *SL*, 74.

<sup>690</sup> On Hegel’s expanded use of the concept of theodicy and its relation to reconciliation, see Raymond Geuss, “Art and Theodicy,” in *Morality, Culture, and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 83.

<sup>691</sup> Or as Hegel writes concerning the transition from becoming to determinate being, but which can be seen as a summary of the movement of his dialectical idealism generally: “Becoming is an unstable unrest which settles into a stable result.” See *SL*, 106.

<sup>692</sup> Adorno, “Opinion Delusion Society,” in *Critical Models*, trans. Henry W. Pickford (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 110.

development. Indeed, Adorno rests the very possibility of philosophy having any future at all on the possibility of there being dialectical experience “independent of the idealistic machinery” emphasized by Hegel.<sup>693</sup>

Thus, while Adorno’s negative dialectic owes a great deal to Hegel’s dialectical idealism, he is not, as Bernstein claims, simply continuing the Hegelian tradition beyond the point at which Hegel had left it, in the manner available to one attempting to do so “after Marx, after Nietzsche, and above all after two centuries of brutal history in which the moment to realize philosophy [...] was missed.”<sup>694</sup> Though the contradictions found in a world shaped by organized compulsion and domination ensure dialectic remains the shape of thinking, in order to turn toward the non-conceptual and so separate dialectic from idealism Adorno must do violence to Hegel—violence that brings Adorno closer to grave-robber than legal heir.<sup>695</sup> Bernstein fails to grasp this, for he fails to distinguish between Hegelian dialectic and Hegelian idealism: though Adorno’s Hegelianism is *unorthodox*, Bernstein claims that he nevertheless “accepts the rudiments of Hegelian idealism.”<sup>696</sup> While there remains some argumentative flexibility in the term “rudiments,” we have seen above that

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<sup>693</sup> *ND*, 8.

<sup>694</sup> Bernstein, “Negative Dialectic as Fate,” 20. Nor does this make Adorno a kind of Nietzschean, as we shall see below. Cf. Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science* (London: Verso, 2014), 71.

<sup>695</sup> Indeed, for those who see Hegel’s philosophy to be inextricable from his idealism, Adorno’s modification of terms such as contradiction, mediation, reflection, and determinate negation amount to a rejection of the Hegelian project as such. See Michael Rosen, *Hegel’s Dialectic and Its Criticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 161-162; 176-177.

<sup>696</sup> Bernstein, “Negative Dialectic as Fate,” 19.

Adorno's approach to Hegel, while deeply indebted to the Hegelian dialectic, is equally opposed to the idealism in which the Hegelian dialectic is framed. For this reason, Adorno's negative dialectic must be seen less as an organic growth pushing itself up through the fertile soil of Hegelian idealism than as an attempt to think against Hegelian idealism by introducing into it the messianic, as *a foreign body assailing the body of this philosophy*. Rather than perpetuate Hegelian philosophy then, Adorno, through the immanent critique of the dialectic this foreign intrusion precipitates, "explodes Hegelian idealism."<sup>697</sup> Free from idealism, the remnants of the Hegelian dialectic might pursue their passage between contradictory particulars bound by neither origin nor foundation.

### *Constellation of Objects*

Yet what might be the moral and political import, if any, of Adorno's immanent critique of the dialectic, and how might these relate to the concerns of metaphysics? And moreover, how can negative dialectic be an "immanent" critique of Hegel's dialectical idealism, if it employs a concept *foreign* to Hegel? If the messianic comes from outside the body of his philosophy, then how can it at once be "immanent" to it? I will begin here by taking up the latter group of questions, those concerning the immanence to the dialectic of Adorno's critique. Most generally, one might call Adorno's critique of the dialectic "immanent"

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<sup>697</sup> ND, 329.

insofar as he employs the dialectic to engage in critique of the dialectic. However, there is more to this critique than simply the self-application of the dialectic, for Adorno also claims, as noted above, that Hegel's philosophy "is untrue when measured against its own concept."<sup>698</sup> That is, it is not simply a matter of being dialectical where Hegel was not, but rather, it is a matter of being dialectical where Hegel *ought to have been*, had he pushed his own philosophy past the limits that he was willing to set for it. Thus, Adorno's foreign "assault" upon the body of Hegel's philosophy has with it also an element of *recovery*.<sup>699</sup>

For the purposes of this discussion, we can isolate two reasons that allow Adorno to insist that negative dialectic is an "immanent" critique of Hegel's dialectical idealism, despite having to employ a concept foreign to Hegel to accomplish it. The first is that dialectic, as Adorno claims, shows that objects are never subsumed beneath concepts without leaving a remainder.<sup>700</sup> The implication here is that dialectic is always pushing beyond itself, always creating a limit whose recognition already presupposes some notion of what lies beyond the limit. Thus to claim that knowledge has been realized in the totality of a system is, dialectically speaking, to gesture toward what might lie beyond the

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<sup>698</sup> Recall *HTS*, 17.

<sup>699</sup> That Adorno employs Hegel against Hegel has often been remarked upon, though it remains a matter of debate as to whether or not Adorno succumbs to the same problems he would criticize. For some recent treatments of this question, see Charlotte Bauman, "Adorno, Hegel, and the Concrete Universal," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 37.1 (2011): 73-94; Lauren Coyle, "The Spiritless Rose in the Cross of the Present," *Telos* 155 (2011): 39-65; Darrow Schecter, "Unity, Identity, and Difference," *History of Political Thought* XXXIII.2 (2012): 258-279.

<sup>700</sup> Recall *ND*, 5.

limits of that system, what remains un-known, as the remainder produced in the movement that establishes the totality of the system. In this sense, the passage of the dialectic that allows for the building of a system also makes possible that system's destruction, for the creation of stable knowledge through dialectic at once produces an outside to that knowledge which threatens its stability. Thus the movement immanent to the very concept of dialectic already militates against the closure that idealism would impose upon it, pointing instead toward what lies beyond itself. In this sense, that which transcends the dialectic is already immanent to dialectical movement: dialectic, as self-transcendence, has transcendence immanent to its own concept.

This brings us to the second reason as to why Adorno's use of "the messianic" or "redemption" can be considered part of an immanent critique of dialectical idealism. That is, the messianic transcendence of the dialectic cannot be said to be completely outside the dialectic's own movement. As a conceptual "ruse," redemption is without positive existence or identity in the present; however, at the same time it does not forego the possibility of both of these in the future. Whatever content can be assigned to that which lies beyond the passage of the dialectic can only be a projection of the immanent movement of the dialectic, of the conflicts that animate society in the present. Yet at the same time, insisting on a ban of utopian images—of images of the world transformed beyond its constitutive conflicts—is equally a projection of the movement of the

dialectic and the perceived needs of struggle in the present.<sup>701</sup> The very availability of a concept of redemption for Adorno to turn against identity and synthesis, and so allow for a turn in the movement of the dialectic toward non-identity, is itself a product of the dialectic and the social conflicts it articulates. Its positive instantiation, however, would mean the end of the dialectic, for it would mark the end of the split in experience that dialectic expresses.

The object, in its resistance to the suffering it endures through its identity with the concept, seeks its transformation, its freedom to not be measured against the concept. The suffering of the object here refers not simply to the experience of pain, but to experience as such. Insofar as the experience of the object made identical to a concept is mediated by that concept, the object *suffers* this identity and its concept—identity strives to define the limits of experience available to the object.<sup>702</sup> The suffering of this limitation cannot be distilled to a limitation of inherent rational capacities, as Honneth argues, for rational capacities are not inherent for Adorno, but are tied rather to socio-historical possibilities which mediate bodily comportment. When they are taken to be inherent, rational capacities are bound up with the limits identity-thinking would

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<sup>701</sup> On Adorno's use of the *Bilderverbot*, see Webb, "If Adorno Isn't the Devil, It's Because He's a Jew," 523-527.

<sup>702</sup> Though Adorno has been criticized for drawing on an undifferentiated—even "undialectical"—conception of suffering, the multiple uses Adorno makes of suffering in his work implies a more complex conception, which would include the meaning I give it here, even if he often does not draw clear distinctions between different kinds of suffering. See Raymond Geuss, "Suffering and Knowledge in Adorno," in *Outside Ethics*, 128-130. Cf. Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, 144-149.

impose on objects, and thus contribute to this suffering.<sup>703</sup> Thus, insofar as its conceptual identity fails to capture its own lived experience, that is, its own persistence and transformation in time, the object desires to be free of this identity, and these desires take the shape of the messianic or redemption: or rather, redemption/the messianic is the conceptual reflection of the desire for transformed experience—transformed life.<sup>704</sup> Redemption is born in the immanent movement of the dialectic, as the desire that things be otherwise—redemption only appears to come wholly from outside, and so be *foreign* to this movement, insofar as idealism, in its attempt to build a closed and complete system, served to relegate the unstable remainders produced by the movement of the dialectic to the outside of this system. In this sense, while negative dialectic is the dialectic illuminated by the “messianic light” of redemption, it is at the same time the *recovery* of the possibility immanent to the concept of the dialect as a transcendence of itself, a self-transcendence betrayed by Hegelian idealism.<sup>705</sup>

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<sup>703</sup> Axel Honneth, “A Physiognomy of the Capitalist Form of Life,” trans. James Ingram, *Constellations* 12.1 (2005), 60. On some anthropological consequences of these claims, see Chapters 12 and 13 below.

<sup>704</sup> Cf. Robert Hullot-Kentor, “Suggested Reading,” in *Things Beyond Resemblance*, 230.

<sup>705</sup> *Contra* Buchwalter, who claims Adorno practices a “transcendent critique” that remains at the level of abstract negation. Buchwalter claims Adorno dissociates any possible meaning between the realms of life and death, thus precluding the possibility of the determinate negation necessary to change the world as it exists, for this would require finding in this world some kind of truth or meaning. Though Adorno does indeed deny the possibility of there being meaning or truth in the Hegelian sense for what transpired in Auschwitz, what this means for Adorno is that it is no longer possible to be Hegelian, not that the world cannot be changed. Compared to one who would be simply Hegelian after the transformation of the basic conditions of his philosophy, Adorno’s attention to the transformed constitution of the object reflects a *greater* concern with the immanence of critique to socio-historical change and the possibilities available therein, not less. See Andrew Buchwalter, “Hegel, Adorno, and the Concept of Transcendent Critique,” in *Dialectics, Politics, and the Contemporary Value of Hegel’s Practical Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

Nevertheless, in turning back to the former set of questions concerning these philosophical speculations and the practical world, it might be said that just as logic, metaphysics, and politics were deeply conjoined in Hegel,<sup>706</sup> so do they remain in Adorno. Negative dialectic aligns itself with the central concerns Adorno highlighted in Aristotle's metaphysics—namely, the questions of the relation between universal and particular and the conceptualization of change—which for Adorno are at once the central problems of moral philosophy and the most salient problems facing politics. Liberated from idealist origins that would ground its operations and pre-determine its passage, negative dialectic would attempt to think a different relation between universal and particular, one that Adorno calls, against the idealism from which he has attempted to separate this dialectic, *materialist*. As Jarvis notes, this materialism is “not a set of fixed metaphysical or methodological commitments,” nor “a dogmatic ontology stating that only matter is real”<sup>707</sup>; rather, it is an orientation to the world, a manner of re-interpreting it in light of the contamination of thinking by its other, by the trace in thinking of what is not thinking but that makes thinking possible. Following the trace of matter in thinking and insisting on re-interpreting concepts in its sense means to turn against the concept of the constitutive subject necessary for dialectical thinking, and which in Hegel's idealism reigns supreme, toward a preponderance of the object.

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<sup>706</sup> *HTS*, 95.

<sup>707</sup> Simon Jarvis, “Adorno, Marx, Materialism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, 80; 97.

Adorno calls the object “the positive expression of non-identity,” and as such, it is little more than a “terminological mask” for material that can otherwise only be grasped in their particularity.<sup>708</sup> To turn toward the object, to accept its preponderance, is thus to recognize all the particulars in their irreducible variety that form the substance of both thought and the thinking subject, and thus to limit, and so end, the power of the constitutive subject of idealism. We might say that it is this end of the constitutive subject of idealism that is for Adorno the prime moral and political task of philosophical speculation; thus the turn toward the preponderance of the object is at once a philosophical, moral, and political endeavor. While the object can only be conceived by a subject, its otherness to the subject is irreducible: the object is never simply subject, but rather subjectivity remains only a moment of the object. Moreover, what is called subject is itself always also an object—its own objectivity is inescapable. Thus in the subject-object polarity, object preponderates: it is simultaneously subject *and* object.<sup>709</sup> Yet Adorno insists the preponderance of the object does not, or should not, establish a new hierarchy between these terms,<sup>710</sup> one where subjectivity is perpetually *reduced* to objectivity, where the concept is reduced to its material conditions, and so explained away. The objectivity of matter is never simply immediate, for *object* is itself a concept, a “positive expression” of the non-conceptual, and hence presupposes the cognition of a subject. A negative

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<sup>708</sup> *ND*, 192.

<sup>709</sup> *ND*, 183. Cf. “On Subject and Object,” in *Critical Models*, 249-250.

<sup>710</sup> *ND*, 181.

dialectical grasp of subject and object, then, involves seeing in each the manner in which their reciprocal permeation fails to coalesce in a stable identity.<sup>711</sup> Subject and object are together an expression of nonidentity: they are constituted through their non-coincidence with each other, and as such remain “negative throughout.”<sup>712</sup>

The negativity of subject and object in objective preponderance means that the transformation of objects interpolates different subjects through the cognition of these objects. That is, the material designated by the concept of *object* includes both the socio-political factors that shape the activities available to a given body, and the body itself, predisposing this body to a certain range of relations with its world, including a range of objects of cognition. In relating to the world through its activities and its understanding of this world and these activities through their cognition, that is, through thinking, a subject is born. Attempting to think the preponderance of the object is to deny the fixed character of subjectivity as itself constituting the objects of cognition, insisting instead on being open to being subjectively transformed through different relations to the object. Being open to the object, to its primacy, means to rend the veil that subjectivity would weave around the object by seeing in it subjectivity’s own contingency. As the subject “is the agent, not the constituent”<sup>713</sup> of the object, that is, the subject has an objective core, then one must seek after the object not

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<sup>711</sup> *ND*, 139. Cf. “On Subject and Object,” 255.

<sup>712</sup> *ND*, 174.

<sup>713</sup> “On Subject and Object,” 254.

in the absence of the subject, but *through* it.<sup>714</sup> Where the subject is found at its most particular and contingent, there object will be.

Thinking toward the object without reducing it to something constituted subjectively thus requires for Adorno its placement relative to other objects in what he calls, following Benjamin, a “constellation.”<sup>715</sup> Here again, we find Adorno making use of a kind of ruse, or a conceptual trick against concepts themselves, for the placing of objects in constellation is itself a subjective act that works against subjective preponderance. The tension of the objects in constellation illuminate in each other the non-conceptual that each on their own would hide. Torn from their organic context and placed in a foreign set of relations established by the thinking subject, they lose the ability to speak their own names, and so to repeat their ideological function, instead becoming readable together as “a sign of objectivity.”<sup>716</sup> In unlocking the non-conceptual from the conceptual, like “a safe-deposit box,”<sup>717</sup> this constellation of objects, while itself the work of subjective cognition, at once allows for the release of the grip of the cognizing subject. That is, just as the individual objects are transformed in the relation made possible through the constellation, so is the

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<sup>714</sup> “On Subject and Object,” 250.

<sup>715</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (London: Verso, 2009), 34. The affinities between Adorno and Benjamin have led rightly to the claim that on certain themes “it is difficult to specify the precise location of the boundary between them.” See Shierry Weber Nicholsen, *Exact Imagination* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 53. Concerning the boundary between these two thinkers on the question of constellations, see Simon Jarvis, *Adorno* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 175-176.

<sup>716</sup> *ND*, 165.

<sup>717</sup> *ND*, 163. Cf. Adorno, “The Actuality of Philosophy,” 35.

cognizing subject transformed from its relation to this transformed object. The constellation, through its transformation of the objects of cognition, thus evokes a new subject, one that would possibly replace the subject that served to bring the constellation together in the first place.

Thinking in constellations, this kind of neutralization of the violence of thought by turning it against itself, comes closest to the “distanced nearness” of the non-violent contemplation that would be possible in a transformed world.<sup>718</sup> Releasing the subject from its own grip, it allows for an experience of the *weight* of the object, of the suffering that is otherwise hidden,<sup>719</sup> and the possibility of a new subject constituted through this constellation of objects. Yet this power of constellations to transform subjects must itself be seen as being drawn from the “messianic light” projected from the suffering object, rather than the subject through which a constellation is constituted. That is, as the subject is the agent of the object, not its constituent, a constellation must be seen as the subjectively produced response to the resistance of the object to conceptual capture. In placing objects in constellation, the subject hopes to reveal or even generate non-

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<sup>718</sup> *MM*, A54, 89-90. It must be emphasized here that thinking in constellations is not in and of itself non-violent. As noted above, Adorno denies the kind of separation between thinking and acting, or individual and society, that would enable one to simply stop being violent *tout court*, as though through an act of individual will, or as Marder writes, by “*refusing* to reproduce the idealist absorption of the object into the subject” (my emphasis). Insofar as our thinking is social *all the way down*, it is permeated by social violence. Thinking in constellations mimics what would be non-violence in order to point in its direction, but one cannot on one’s own pretend to have so mastered one’s own powers of cognition—most of which are involuntary—to simply accomplish this through an act of individual refusal. A truly non-violent society is a pre-requisite for non-violent cognition. Cf. Michael Marder, “Minima Potentia: Reflections on the Subject of Suffering,” *New German Critique* 97, Vol. 33.1 (2006), 67.

<sup>719</sup> *ND*, 18.

conceptual affinities among them. A non-conceptual affinity is a relation, either a similarity or a difference, which does not operate at the conceptual level—it is a similarity or difference between objects that is not part of their conceptual identity. Constellating different objects such as to express non-conceptual affinities thus reveals non-conceptual dimensions of the constellated objects, which bring the identity established between these concepts and their objects into contradiction. A constellation of objects thus reveals how objects might relate to each other otherwise, and so reveals the tenuous, fragile, and contingent nature of the conceptual order that presents itself as total and complete.

In this way Adorno forges a new conceptual relation between particulars. Rather than the idealist relation in which the universal exists over and above particulars as their origin and ground, thus reducing them to simple moments of the universal's necessary trajectory, Adorno theorizes the universal as emerging only in a particular and subjectively produced constellation of objects. His negative dialectic, which illuminates the reciprocal permeation of subject and object and their instability as tenuous moments in a clash of particulars, serves to think against Hegelian idealism and the absolute subject enshrined therein, theorizing instead the possibility of subjects produced in and through a new constellation of objects, and thus existing against the totality in which the subject is but a relay point in this totality's reproduction. However, while it has been claimed that like in Hegel, dialectical logic, metaphysics, and politics all remain

inextricably intertwined in Adorno, some of the more salient consequences of his re-casting of relation between universal and particular through negative dialectic must be examined. Specifically, it remains to be seen what exactly Adorno's revolution in thinking might mean for the human-animal distinction as we have seen it formulated by Aristotle in relation to art and politics. It is to these questions we presently turn.

## **Chapter Thirteen:**

### **Adorno on Humanism and the Human Being**

As we have seen, Adorno's negative dialectic, the turn toward the primacy of the object, and thinking in constellations, all have in common an attempt to make visible in thought that which evades thought but makes it possible: that which is non-identical to the concept. This turn toward the non-identical is called by Adorno "an axial turn"<sup>720</sup> of the Copernican revolution in philosophy; yet unlike Kant's Copernican turn, which attempted to organize human knowledge into metaphysical categories grounded in a transcendental subject, Adorno's turn toward the object and the non-identical is intended to show the impossibility of such a subject. Insofar as there are concepts, Adorno thinks that some kind of subject must necessarily persist to think them; however, the primacy of the object means that this cognizing subject is always constituted in relation to these objects, and is thus forever being displaced and transformed by the shifting constellation of different objects. The turn toward the object thus reveals the tenuous and fragile nature of the subject: non-identical with itself, the subject becomes incapable of serving as the stable ground upon which objects can be definitively known. Even the generality of the Kantian categories of a priori apperception, space and time, can no longer serve as stable ground, for even

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<sup>720</sup> *ND*, xx.

though space and time can always be found to structure a given subject's cognition of an object, these cannot be abstracted from the subject's particular experience of them in the object so as to form an unchanging substratum of experience. The subject is the *how* of the object,<sup>721</sup> a report on the experience of its ever-changing constellation.<sup>722</sup> As such, space and time are always experienced in the particular array of constellated objects, and are inseparable from them, just as is the given subject of these objects. To isolate from this experience an unchanging substratum, even one so general as to be constituted only by space and time, is to reduce experience to an expression of a priori conditions, and so transform it into a wall standing between subject and object, vivisecting the subject's lived experience of the object.<sup>723</sup>

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<sup>721</sup> "On Subject and Object," 250.

<sup>722</sup> This is not to make the subject-object relation itself a transcendental condition of experience, and Adorno a transcendental philosopher, as does O'Connor. Though the elegant simplicity of O'Connor's argument is seductive, it must be rejected, for Adorno claims the very existence of the subject-object relation is "the result of a coercive historical process" which must not be "transformed into an invariant." Subject and object are themselves concepts, and to make them the condition of experience would be to undermine Adorno's turn toward the object, which is precisely an attempt to displace the primacy of concepts, showing that though they mediate experience, they are not its condition of possibility. See Brian O'Connor, *Adorno's Negative Dialectic* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), 15. Cf. Adorno, "On Subject and Object," 246.

<sup>723</sup> What we might experience as subjective continuity through internal experience such as memory is not, therefore, the product of the machinery of subjectivity, but continuities that persist in the objective constellations of our experience. For instance, insofar as individual subjectivity is bound to a body, the changed constellation of objects that serves to displace and transform our subjectivity still includes our bodies and its changes. The birth of a new subject in a changed constellation of objects is only as different from past subjects as the object is different from past objects. It is worth noting that this conception of the subject bares a striking affinity to certain Buddhist ideas which hold that consciousness of an object should not imply a 'self' insofar as we think of a self as a kind of enduring subject with a separate existence. See Evan Thompson, "Self-No-Self?" in *Self, No Self?* eds. Mark Siderits, Evan Thompson, and Dan Zahavi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 168. For a comparison of Adorno and certain Buddhist ideas, see Asher Horowitz, "Adorno on Emptiness," in *Subversive Itinerary*, eds. Shannon Bell and Peter Kuchyski (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

Yet if Adorno's turn toward the object thus attempts to express the subject's non-identity with itself, what consequences might this turn toward non-identity entail for *political* subjects, specifically, the subject of *humanism*? In the above account of Aristotle's conception of the human being and its relation to other animals, it was possible to isolate different capacities Aristotle considers to be uniquely human, and those shared with other animals. The uniquely human capacities, such as *nous* and the different capacities bound up with *logos* that underscore supposedly human activities such as thinking, speaking, deciding, and recollecting, were found to be unequally distributed among human beings. Though these capacities can be enabled or obstructed through political organization and cultivated or corrupted through the arts, the basic set of capacities available to the human being, and indeed, individual human beings, is fixed and unchanging. In this sense, we can say that Aristotle has a *positive* conception of the human being, in that the plurality of human life can be subsumed beneath a single concept, identical to itself.

To place Adorno in dialogue with Aristotle on this issue, and so to apply Adorno's turn toward the non-identical to this conception of the human being and its difference from other animals, is thus to trouble this conception of the human being. If the subject is without ground, enthralled instead to the continually shifting constellation of different objects, then what continuity can

there be among humans across time and place?<sup>724</sup> What can serve as the transcendental conditions of humanity if transcendental conditions have themselves been called into question? Though Adorno and his colleagues at the Frankfurt School of Social Research have been considered examples of the *Marxist humanism* that emerged philosophically in response to the discovery of Marx's "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts," and politically, against Stalin and the policies of the Soviet Union, Adorno's turn toward non-identity must be seen as a critique of the "species imperialism" of humanism,<sup>725</sup> and a challenge to the Aristotelian conception of human being.

However, the word *human* and its related terms are used by Adorno in several different ways. To get a better grasp of what the human being is, or might be, according to Adorno and his philosophy of non-identity, I will give an account of two of the most prominent conceptions of the human being found in Adorno's work. The first, what we might call the *actuality* of humanity, if it were not for its negative character, concerns the ways in which Adorno thinks humanity exists, fitfully and inconsistently, in a world where life is "wrong." Humanity here is not a positive condition or self-identical subject, but rather exists only in opposition to inhumanity, as the other of the inhumanity perpetuated by the world. The second form of humanity we might call the *potential* of humanity, if not for the fact that again this potential is without any positive existence, nor is it

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<sup>724</sup> See Adorno, "The Problem of a New Type of Human Being," in *Current of Music*, ed. Robert Hullot-Kentor (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), 462.

<sup>725</sup> Martin Jay, "The Frankfurt School's Critique of Marxist Humanism," *Social Research* 39.2 (1972), 296.

unchanging—it might even be said to be *produced* through the resistance to inhumanity that constitutes the first kind of humanity. This second form of humanity is what Adorno calls “reconciled” humanity. Like Adorno’s utopian speculations noted above, reconciled humanity does not actually exist, but rather lives off the promise of a future positivity that may or may not ever be realized. I follow my consideration of this reconciled humanity with an examination of Adorno’s often overlooked conception of progress, which I argue is necessary to connect these two different accounts of humanity.

In this way, I use Adorno to begin to formulate a response to Aristotle’s conception of the human being and the anthropological invariant thought to lie at the root of western thought, shaping our relations to art, politics, and other animals. I argue that, though it would appear that through his condemnation of the inhumanity of the world Adorno gestures toward a humanity *to come*, and thus that the idea of what would be human has remained until now merely a promise of a kind of subject that has not yet been, Adorno’s descriptions both of inhumanity and this reconciled humanity suggest that what would lie on the other side of the struggles of “pre-history” is not human at all, but a different kind of animal. As such, the concept of humanism, and even the word “human,” are deeply misleading and encourage the perpetuation of a cycle of violence, the dialectic of enlightenment, from which Adorno’s utopian speculations on the end of humanity would escape.

### *Humane Humanity*

Adorno's complex relationship to the concept of "humanity" or the "human," and thus the difficulty of referring to him as a humanist,<sup>726</sup> can perhaps be grasped most starkly by opposing two statements made on the subject in lecture courses he delivered in the 1960s. In a lecture given on July 27, 1965, part of a series of lectures Adorno gave on the topic of metaphysics, Adorno refers to "the infinite possibility which is radically contained in every human life," and he even tells his audience: "you may think me an old-fashioned Enlightenment thinker, but I am deeply convinced that there is no human being, not even the most wretched, who has not a potential which, by conventional bourgeois standards, is comparable to genius."<sup>727</sup> It is hard to find a more succinct statement on humanism than this reference to the "infinite possibility" and even "genius" of every individual human being, merely awaiting their realization. From a certain perspective even, we might say that these statements are consistent with contemporary interpretations of Aristotelian humanism, such as those of MacIntyre, Nussbaum, and Salkever.

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<sup>726</sup> By 'humanist' I mean a more expansive idea than the modern tradition arguably beginning with the French Revolution and the 'Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen.' 'Humanist' or 'humanism' in this sense concern not simply the practical promotion of aims considered to be human, or human rights, but the theoretical centrality or necessity of the human being. In this broad sense, the philosophical anthropologies which have underscored much of the political theory of the Western tradition—that is, their ideas of what a human being necessarily is and what they take to be the political consequences of this—are humanist in this broad sense, even if they do not necessarily promote the kind of practical or political humanism we see today. In this regard there is a largely unacknowledged affinity between Adorno and that infamous enemy of 'theoretical humanism,' Louis Althusser. See Althusser, "The Humanist Controversy," in *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings*, ed. François Matheron, trans. G.M. Goshgarian (London: Verso, 2003).

<sup>727</sup> *MCP*, 132-133.

And yet, merely two years earlier, on July 25, 1963, in a lecture given on the problems of moral philosophy, Adorno tells his audience that he “is reluctant to use the term ‘humanity’” in discussing questions of “the good life,” for this term “is one of the expressions that reify and hence falsify crucial issues merely by speaking of them.” Moreover, Adorno recounts a story of declining to join the Humanist Union, telling its members: “I might possibly be willing to join if your club had been called an inhuman union, but I could not join one that calls itself ‘humanist’.”<sup>728</sup> How are we to make sense of the apparent contradiction found between these two statements? Is it possible that by 1965 Adorno’s views on humanity and humanism had changed from what they were only two years earlier, and that Adorno’s later humanistic statements represent an Adorno who had put aside his earlier reservations? I do not think Adorno abandoned his reservations concerning humanism, but an examination of Adorno’s positive uses of the term human and its related concepts is necessary to understand why Adorno expresses more solidarity with the notion of an “inhuman” union than a human one.

Adorno’s statements regarding humanity defy any attempt to see in his thought an initial disillusion with humanity following the Second World War that would eventually give way to a more optimistic view of the possibilities for human life. Rather, Adorno’s comments on humanity reveal a curious relation between a

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<sup>728</sup> *PMP*, 169.

kind of extreme pessimism, and an extreme optimism, which remains fairly consistent throughout his work. For instance, while the alleged pessimism of the major works Adorno completed during his American exile has been much commented upon, Adorno, in conversations recorded with Horkheimer in 1956 in preparation for a political manifesto (which was ultimately abandoned), Adorno insists that he does not “believe that human beings are evil when they come into the world,” and that humans “are not as bad as all that by nature.”<sup>729</sup> Moreover, Adorno claims that “[f]reedom truly consists only in the realization of humanity as such.”<sup>730</sup> While what Adorno might mean by “humanity as such,” that is, a humanity that has been realized, will be examined further below, there are numerous other remarkably sanguine statements regarding humanity in the present scattered throughout Adorno’s work that must first be confronted.

In his role as a public intellectual in post-war West Germany,<sup>731</sup> Adorno will frequently rely on humanist language to outline the political tasks necessary to build the kind of culture that might resist fascism and its tendencies. In radio lectures delivered in 1965 and 1966, Adorno claims the principal task of education is nothing less than the “debarbarization of humanity,”<sup>732</sup> and that this

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<sup>729</sup> Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Towards a New Manifesto*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 2011), 47-48. Cited hereafter as *TNM*.

<sup>730</sup> *TNM*, 50.

<sup>731</sup> Adorno’s reputation in the contemporary Anglo-American world as cultural mandarin often serves to obscure the degree to which he was in fact deeply engaged in public debate. See Tom Huhn, “Introduction: Thoughts beside Themselves,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, ed. Tom Huhn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>732</sup> “Taboos on the Teaching Vocation,” in *Critical Models*, 190.

“debarbarization” has been less successful in the German countryside, where democratic and humanistic values have yet to become firmly entrenched.<sup>733</sup> Against the political imposition of these values, which remain in the Germany of his day “nothing more than [the] formal rules of the game,” Adorno cites the “real humanitarianism” found in the United States, where the “political form of democracy is infinitely closer to the people,” and where everyday life is marked by “an inherent element of peaceableness, good-naturedness, and generosity.”<sup>734</sup> It is this “peaceableness,” or freedom from compulsion, that appears throughout Adorno’s writings as what might be the promise of humanity. Adorno writes that it is the separation between theory and practice, and so the possible disjoining of thinking from the compulsions of practical activity, in which “[h]umaness awakes,”<sup>735</sup> and the ability to rigorously discipline one’s particular actions through the application of universal rules in the Kantian fashion would make one “more of a monster than a human being.”<sup>736</sup> To recognize in one only their membership in a universal category, and so ignore their particularity, is precisely to deny them their humanity,<sup>737</sup> and hence the possibility of non-violent or non-compulsive universality. Indeed, Adorno claims humanity is nothing but the *resistance to force*, the resistance to violence and compulsion.<sup>738</sup>

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<sup>733</sup> “Education after Auschwitz,” in *Critical Models*, 196.

<sup>734</sup> “Scientific Experiences of a European Scholar in America,” in *Critical Models*, 240.

<sup>735</sup> “Marginalia to Theory and Praxis,” in *Critical Models*, 267.

<sup>736</sup> *PMP*, 156.

<sup>737</sup> *MM*, A116, 182.

<sup>738</sup> *ND*, 286.

In this way Adorno appears to advocate a negative or non-identical notion of humanity. Like Adorno's turn toward the preponderance of the object that served to limit the transcendental function of the subject, making it instead the agent of the object rather than its ground, Adorno's non-identical conception of humanity would make humanity not a transcendental subject whose basic potentialities are already given in advance of their actualization, but rather a subject constituted in resistance to the forms of domination that organize the objective world. Humanity, or human subjects, would thus be continually reconstituted around new objective constellations, always pushing against the forces of compulsion found therein. The concept of humanity in this sense would point toward the non-conceptual, the other side of the positive order of domination.

It is perhaps for this reason that Adorno claims that while we cannot know positively what the human or humanity is, we can recognize the *inhuman*, and thus "the concrete denunciation of the inhuman" is a more appropriate expression of moral philosophy than "vague and abstract attempts to situate man in his existence."<sup>739</sup> Positive conceptions of humanity serve the inhuman in two different but related ways. Either positive conceptions present humanity as already reconciled to the existing order, one wherein violence remains among the tools at this order's disposal, and thus rob humanity of its utopian potential by

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<sup>739</sup> *PMP*, 175.

making it the subject of this order and a possible agent of its violence. Or, positive conceptions of humanity serve to establish the human in the place of the transcendental subject, thus making its abstract and eternal qualities the frame of reference through which experience of the object can be reported, dulling the possible experience of this object and rendering humanity deaf to the possible suffering therein. By rejecting these positive conceptions of humanity, Adorno uses the concept of humanity against itself, opposing its promise to its actualization, and thus attempts to compel it beyond itself, in perpetual dissatisfaction with what the constituted order would represent as humane and good.

This opposition between negative and positive conceptions of humanity might thus allow us to explain the apparent contradiction noted above in Adorno's attitude toward humanity. Adorno's affirmation of the "infinite possibility" and even "genius" of individual human beings concerns not some pre-existing set of possibilities available to human beings *qua* human, but rather to possibilities that are themselves historically constituted in relation to that which these possibilities have opposed as inhuman. Likewise, Adorno's refusal to join the Humanist Union reflects his rejection of the positive articulation of human possibilities and their political promotion, which would serve to reify or fix these

possibilities at a given moment in history and so deny the possibility of a different instantiation of humanity—of different human subjects.<sup>740</sup>

And yet, there seems to be something missing from this explanation. That is, if humanity is nothing but the resistance to inhumanity, then humanity is nothing but the perpetual disruption of the borders drawn by the positive order of the world and its claim to be the realization of humanism, or what is *best*, given the possibilities available to human beings. While such a claim would bring Adorno closer to the “agonistic humanism” of Honig and its roots in the work of Arendt and Rancière,<sup>741</sup> what is extinguished in the above presentation of Adorno and his relationship to humanism, were it to be considered complete, is the messianic light that serves to illuminate the possibility of objects and their concepts being other than they are. That is, the dynamism of the relation between negative and positive humanity, or between humanity and inhumanity, serves to reify the place of struggle in the human constitution, thus presupposing the unchanging nature of political conflict, and so reviving a mythical understanding of the world as an eternal return of the same, with *agon* as its ground. If Adorno is to avoid chaining his negative conception of humanity to

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<sup>740</sup> Hence Adorno’s opposition to prominent philosophical anthropologies of his day, such as those of Max Scheler, who espouses a kind of metaphysical possessive individualism through his conception of personality, and Arnold Gehlen, who makes personality into a moment of the state’s institutions. See Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, trans. Manfred S. Frings and Roger L. Funk (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 480; Arnold Gehlen, *Man in the Age of Technology*, trans. Patricia Lipscomb (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 166; Adorno, “Gloss on Personality,” *CM*.

<sup>741</sup> Bonnie Honig, *Antigone Interrupted*, 17-19. Recall also Chapter 1, p.10, note 24, above.

inhumanity, and so limit the possible articulations of humanity to opposing violence and domination, then there must be something lying beyond humanity as the resistance to inhumanity, something toward which this conflict is turned but that remains irreducible to this conflict. This other, we shall see, is Adorno's conception of a *humanity to come*, that is, a "reconciled" humanity.

### *Reconciled Humanity*

Like Adorno's use of Benjamin's concept of the messianic, which serves to transfigure concepts in the present and thus make it possible to imagine them being radically other than they are, so is Adorno's use of the concept of a "reconciled" humanity, a realized or "redeemed" humanity, necessary to separate his negative conception of humanity from its enthrallment to the totality in which the dialectic of enlightenment unfolds. That is, Adorno's conception of humanity needs to relate to something outside of the totality in which it is itself constituted in order to remain non-identical to what it would be in this totality, and so avoid absorption in an identity with that with which it struggles. Also like Adorno's secularized use of the concepts of the messianic and redemption, this "reconciled" humanity is not a positive reality; or rather, the possibility of its ever becoming a positive reality cannot be definitively demonstrated or rejected in the present.

Adorno posits the *telos* of this humanity as the opposition to inhumanity in a reconciled humanity, not as the necessary unfolding of human potentials, but as a conceptual device that allows us to see a gap in the struggle between the terms human and inhuman that makes it possible to imagine a world not constituted by their struggle. Without positive existence, this humanity to come is not a fixed point that will necessarily be realized, nor is it something like a transcendental condition of the negative conception of humanity, the humanity found in opposition to violence. Rather, this “redeemed” humanity arises through the ambiguous promise made by negative humanity to resist the inhuman, but that is at the same time a condition that this negative humanity must presuppose in order to maintain its negativity within the circle of perpetual violence and its resistance, through the possibility of a future positivity that may or may not ever become reality.<sup>742</sup> Thus like the concept of redemption examined above, redeemed or realized humanity is both immanent to the struggle between the human and the inhuman, and transcends this struggle in an image of humanity other than what it is. It is this transcendence, the possibility of humanity becoming something fundamentally other than what it presently is, that differentiates Adorno’s conception of humanity from “agonistic humanism,” or other theories that might seem similar to Adorno in their opposition to the closure of totality, or the permanent and fixed identities such closure is thought

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<sup>742</sup> In this sense, it is possible to say that Adorno’s use of the term *telos* to designate “reconciled” humanity is ironic. Another dimension of this irony, specifically in relation to Hegel’s use of teleology, is noted below.

to entail. A brief consideration of such a theory may thus help shed light on some implications and consequences of Adorno's project and the importance of this reconciled humanity to it.

A groundbreaking work that has proved influential in shifting the theoretical focus from classically conceived revolutionary struggle toward agonism and difference is Laclau and Mouffe's *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (1985).<sup>743</sup> From their perspective, not only would the term *humanity* be a discursive construct, but one without clear and definite content. On this view, humanity would be nothing but a "floating" or "empty" signifier to be filled with whatever content the political partisans who deploy it are able.<sup>744</sup> Of course, Adorno's own deployment of the concept of a reconciled humanity is itself a political gesture, and as such, Laclau and Mouffe might claim that the concept of "reconciled humanity" is simply Adorno's way of giving content to the "empty signifier" that is humanity. However, this response would deny the *negative* character of reconciled humanity in the present. Unlike other attempts to fill this signifier, which are made as positive declarations of what humanity is, and so

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<sup>743</sup> Though works such as William Connolly's *Identity/Difference* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), Bonnie Honig's *Political Theory and the Displacement of Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), and James Tully's *Strange Multiplicity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) have arguably been more influential on this trend in political theory as it exists in North America, none make the explicit break between this approach and classical revolutionary politics as explicit as do Laclau and Mouffe, while insisting on the relation between the recovery of agonism and socialism. If agonism can indeed aid socialist strategy, then agonists can indeed be socialists without being interested in "the purging fire which dominates the revolutionary tradition." See Alex Thomson, "Polemos and Agon," in *Law and Agonistic Politics*, ed. Andrew Schaap (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 105.

<sup>744</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* (London: Verso, 1985), 171. Cf. Ernesto Laclau, "Why do Empty Signifiers Matter to Politics?" in *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 1996), 44.

would legitimate the aims of those making the declaration as the *basis* for these aims, Adorno claims only that humanity might be otherwise than it is as constituted through struggle. Thus reconciled humanity would not serve as the content of an empty signifier, but instead serves as an attack on any attempt to fill this signifier, yet without claiming that the signifier must necessarily remain empty, or even that the structure that produces this signifier will necessarily persist.

Claiming that interaction between speaking beings that would produce meaning at once necessarily produces empty signifiers that are given content through their deployment in various contexts involves making ontological claims about the structure of society that Adorno tends to avoid. For Adorno, a theory so formulated might at best accurately describe the structure of a given society, or even a group of societies that share common characteristics, but it could not tell us what lies beyond these societies were these characteristics to change, and so cannot speak for a conception of society *in itself*. In this aversion to ontological claims about society that might elucidate social features separable from any particular society, Adorno's dialectical critique is radically skeptical of the predictive power of concepts. Dialectic, Adorno writes, "is the ontology of the wrong state of things."<sup>745</sup> As such, it allows for the socially and politically constituted to mobilize this constitution against itself, and so grasp its process of

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<sup>745</sup> ND, 11.

grasping, but it does not allow for the possibility of knowledge that would somehow work above or below this constitution, and so make claims above what it is that could be independent of its historical constitution. Through this refusal, Adorno's negative dialectic leaves open the possibility for radical change in the elements of both society's constitution and individual cognition as basic as the relation between universal and particular.

Laclau and Mouffe, on the other hand, write of "social negativity" as if it were a positive condition, that is, as if society were negative *in its being*, thus making positive identities the precarious attempts to construct a whole around an original lack that can never be completely closed.<sup>746</sup> While society is thus never a closed totality, and social identities are forever subject to slippage or displacement, the most that can be hoped for in this situation is the construction of a hegemonic bloc in which different identities are linked through chains of equivalence that allow for their equal co-existence.<sup>747</sup> While the particulars of social relations might thus change, the fundamental structure of society and social identity, or how universals relate to particulars, remain unchanged, regardless of the type of society under consideration.<sup>748</sup> Moreover, such a theory reduces what Adorno calls "the truth content" of language to the instrumental machinations of what is basically a form of communication, even if Laclau and Mouffe promote the recognition of agonistic differences over the consensus

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<sup>746</sup> Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, 189; 127; 86.

<sup>747</sup> *Ibid.*, 178; 182; 258.

<sup>748</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

building of dialogical unity. In this way, the ontology of agonism promoted by Laclau and Mouffe serves as a wall on the other side of which are placed the kinds of utopian speculations that inform Adorno's thought and the possibility for radical change it holds. Laclau and Mouffe thus can be said to opt instead for a kind of *second sailing* in which the place of conflict as it exists in late-modern capitalist societies becomes the condition for society as such. The possibility toward which Adorno's "reconciled" humanity gestures, on the other hand, lies beyond the present structure of society, and can appear within it only in the negative and the fragmentary.

Thus Adorno claims that "if humanity has any meaning at all, it must consist in the discovery that human beings are *not identical* with their immediate existence as the creatures of nature."<sup>749</sup> That is, humanity is not identical with the struggle against inhumanity. This critical understanding of humanity, made possible through the dialectic of philosophical reflection which places it in relation to a reconciled humanity, thus serves to "smash through human-made constructions," such as the mythic conception that would identify humanity with endless struggle and suffering. The "human measure" to which such constructions "return"<sup>750</sup> is precisely their relation to this future humanity, the "reconciled" or "liberated" humanity that does not yet exist,<sup>751</sup> but whose realization becomes the guiding light of human activity in its resistance to

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<sup>749</sup> *PMP*, 15. Emphasis added.

<sup>750</sup> Adorno, "Why Still Philosophy," *CM*, 10.

<sup>751</sup> *AT* 65; 194; *MM*, A108, 172.

inhumanity. By positing what would be truly human as a state not yet realized, and interpreting instead all positive articulations of humanity as obstacles to its realization—indeed, Adorno even claims that the potential of the individual human self “stands in polemical opposition” to its reality<sup>752</sup>—Adorno can oppose himself to humanism, allying himself instead with the “principle of being human,” which remains “still unrealized.”<sup>753</sup> This rejection of humanism in favor of an as yet unrealized “principle of being human” leads Adorno to return to an Enlightenment concept that is taken as a given among some circles, while blithely maligned in others, yet remains fundamental to understanding his idea of a reconciled humanity: *progress*.

### *The Question of Progress*

The concept of progress expresses optimism concerning the future, and Adorno is not generally known for his optimism. Adorno’s famous statement in *Negative Dialectics* that “[n]o universal history leads from savagery to humanitarianism, but there is one leading from the slingshot to the megaton bomb,”<sup>754</sup> would seem to militate against a concept of progress. Moreover, Lukács’s claim that Adorno occupied a room in the *Hotel Abyss* has proven stubbornly persistent, and for those familiar with Habermas’s critique of the alleged nihilism of Horkheimer

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<sup>752</sup> ND, 278.

<sup>753</sup> ND, 257.

<sup>754</sup> ND, 320.

and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*,<sup>755</sup> the idea that Adorno might cling to a concept of progress may perhaps seem surprising. However, in light of Adorno's relation to the concept of humanity outlined above, we find that a concept of progress seems necessary for this idea of a reconciled humanity, insofar as the possibility of this future humanity would be *better* than that which presently exists. Thus we must turn to Adorno's most concise statement on progress, made in a radio lecture of the same name, if we are to move beyond simple caricatures and grasp instead Adorno's own conception of progress.

Adorno begins his lecture with terms drawn from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* and the dire pronouncements on human history found in *Negative Dialectics*. For Adorno, the question of the possibility of progress must first face what is for humanity at once its most basic and most drastic challenge: the possibility of its own continued survival. With the radical increase in the human capacity for destruction made evident in the Second World War, "the possibility of progress" must be understood in terms of "averting the most extreme, total disaster": the annihilation of the human species, and perhaps even life on the planet as such. Yet here, in the shadow of the possibility of this "total disaster," it may be possible to cite those lines of Hölderlin, in echo of their citation in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: "But where danger threatens/ That which

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<sup>755</sup> For a critique of Habermas' interpretation of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, see Robert Hullot-Kentor, "Back to Adorno," *Telos* 81 (1989), 9-14.

saves from it also grows.”<sup>756</sup> The radical nature of this possible disaster, extending as it does beyond any single group to encompass all of humanity, and perhaps even all life on the planet, thus also opens up both the possibility, and the *necessity*, of resistance to this disaster on a much larger scale than that on which resistance was conceived in the past. Averting this total disaster requires nothing less than what Adorno calls a “global subject.”<sup>757</sup>

However, despite the temptation of directly associating this “global subject” with the rise of new social movements and the possible emergence of a global civil society which have gained prominence in the years since Adorno’s death, Adorno’s hostility to positive articulations of humanism troubles any direct or simple association with such movements. Humanity is not for Adorno the *origin* of resistance to this disaster, but the *goal*, and its concept can only be thought through extreme forms of differentiation and individuation—not as a “comprehensive generic concept.”<sup>758</sup> Thus humanity might be said to be found in the particular activities of various subjects formed in opposition to inhumanity, and perhaps also in the solidarity they express for other subjects formed in opposition to other localizations of inhumanity, but one does *not* find humanity in the sum of these resistances, for as we have seen, only a reconciled humanity would be truly human. Claiming the sum of these resistances is itself an

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<sup>756</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 38. Cited hereafter as *DE*.

<sup>757</sup> Adorno, “Progress,” *Critical Models*, 144.

<sup>758</sup> Adorno, “Progress,” *Critical Models*, 151.

expression of humanity as a whole, that is, a particular instantiation of a universal subject, would be to subordinate their particularity to a universal concept and so erase the contexts in which these acts of humanity were actually found, while at once reconciling the concept of humanity with struggle. But reconciled humanity is not an animal constituted through struggle, nor can it be a universal concept that exists above its particular instantiations. The global subject that might emerge in response to the threat of “total disaster” is not itself reconciled humanity, but a possible *agent* for the ends, which, realized, would enable the emergence of a reconciled humanity.

Progress, it might be said, is thus the process of different particular subjects constituted in resistance to varying local conditions, aligning themselves with other such subjects so as to crystallize into a global subject. In this way, progress is “measured” in relation to the possibility of a reconciled humanity becoming reality, however indirect this possibility may be. It is important to note, however, that insofar as this global subject does not exist above and beyond these particular instantiations of humanity, it cannot be something for which they might sacrifice themselves. This is where Adorno’s Benjaminian mutation of Hegel again becomes evident. The theodicy of Hegelian world spirit is such that particular instantiations of this spirit can be sacrificed for the whole; in fact, particular instantiations of this spirit are really only known insofar as their typically unwitting self-sacrifice serves to further the cause of world spirit. As

such, history is a “slaughter bench”—it is the chronicle of the perpetual self-destruction of particulars whose destruction furthers the cause of the universal.

Regardless of what Hegel may have considered the correct disposition of the individual enlightened by this knowledge to political events as they unfold, transposed into the realm of political struggle, these ideas allow for the most galling violence and barbarity in the name of higher causes, and the submission to the inevitable “march” of history is seen as the realization of progress. We might find in Benjamin’s rejection of “moving with the current”<sup>759</sup> of history, then, resistance to the Hegelian view, which, refracted through Adorno’s conception of the global subject, means a rejection of the theodicy that would allow for the “evil” of the calculated sacrifice of particular struggles for a perceived greater good. If humanity is only found in the particular and differentiated ways in which inhumanity is resisted, then aligning with others in a way that would compel the calculated sacrifice of particular struggles would be a loss of humanity, and hence work against the formation of the kind of global subject Adorno is outlining.

However, the rejection of theodicy alone is not enough to give progress an unambiguous character for Adorno. Insofar as the activities that serve to build a global subject are bound to activities of resistance, and thus to the forces that compel resistance by precipitating the “total disaster” that must be averted,

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<sup>759</sup> Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” XI, 258.

progress finds itself inextricably bound to the development of the forces of compulsion and domination, and the “total disaster” that looms beyond them. Thus, Adorno must claim that “progress occurs where it ends,”<sup>760</sup> for progress would only truly be realized when resistance to inhumanity is no longer necessary. True progress, the progress that might see a qualitatively different form of human life step out of the shadows, and in so doing, show human history to have really been *pre-history*, would itself need to be beyond the progress of this global subject, bound as it is to the forces in resistance to which it is constituted. Yet if human beings must be liberated from the very power that makes possible their liberation, insofar as humans first liberated themselves from inhuman nature through the exercise of their powers of reason, then it is *this* power from which humans must be liberated: the compulsive power of *reason*. As we saw in Aristotle, and as Adorno continues to claim, it is the power of reason that enables humans to separate themselves from the rest of the natural world, and allow for its domination toward human ends. Moreover, for Adorno, it is reason that now propels humans toward the “total disaster” through its instrumental exercise divorced of the realization of reconciled humanity.

Yet this possible liberation from reason does not, for Adorno, amount to its rejection. While the shape reason might take in a reconciled humanity is an open question that must be put aside for the moment, as far as Adorno is

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<sup>760</sup> Adorno, “Progress,” 150.

concerned the question of resistance in the present cannot be divorced from the exercise of reason. Contrary to a view that persists, despite the most explicit evidence, Adorno does not see a way beyond the present order of things that does not involve reason, and even an appropriation of the Enlightenment, for only through these is Adorno's critique even intelligible.<sup>761</sup> However, to critically reflect on reason and its place in domination, not as simply the capacity that enables humans to lift themselves above domination, but a capacity that has at once served to facilitate domination, means to displace the centrality of reason in the constitution of what might be a reconciled humanity. Though Adorno claims there can be no "idea of progress without the idea of humanity,"<sup>762</sup> for, as we have seen, it is only insofar as the cause of a reconciled humanity has been advanced that progress can be said to have taken place, it is worth asking whether this reconciled humanity would be human at all.

If humanity has only ever been the struggle for survival against a hostile natural world which has since been brought to heel, as it were, and transformed into the fodder for human aims, then would not the act of stepping out "of the magic spell" that binds humanity to itself through the domination of nature be to

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<sup>761</sup> Despite Horkheimer and Adorno claiming in the preface to *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that they have no doubt "that freedom in society is inseparable from Enlightenment thinking," the view continues to persist that their work is exemplary of a long line of "bitter rejections of our Enlightenment heritage." See Horkheimer and Adorno, "Preface," in *DE*, xvi; *ND*, 85. Cf. Robert S. Taylor, "Review of Nicholas Tampio, *Kantian Courage*," in *Perspectives on Politics* 11.2 (2013), 631. For an account of Horkheimer and Adorno's relation to the legacy of the Enlightenment and how it serves to differentiate them from other prominent critics of it, see John P. McCormick, "A Critical versus Genealogical 'Questioning' of Technology: Or How *Not* to Read Adorno and Horkheimer," in *Confronting Mass Democracy and Industrial Technology*, ed. John P. McCormick (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

<sup>762</sup> Adorno, "Progress," 145.

step out of the circle that is humanity?<sup>763</sup> That is, if human identity has always been established in distinction from nature through its mastery—both “external” nature and its own “internal” nature<sup>764</sup>—then would not the end of this mastery make human identity impossible? Is this not the real goal of the progress toward which Adorno points, and whose accomplishment would mean the end of progress as necessary resistance to the inhuman?<sup>765</sup> Yet Adorno does not take this step and abandon the concept of humanity, or at least not completely. Adorno refers to a “definition of humanity as that which excludes absolutely nothing,” that is, a human totality that no longer holds within it “any limiting principle,” and is hence free of the coercion that would subject its members to a common standard.<sup>766</sup> Strictly speaking, such a totality would be no totality at all, but simply a collection of different subjects, united only in their difference.<sup>767</sup> Only here, Adorno claims, “would there be humanity and not its deceptive image.”<sup>768</sup>

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<sup>763</sup> Adorno, “Progress,” 150.

<sup>764</sup> Adorno, “Progress,” 148.

<sup>765</sup> Tellingly, the most extreme attempt to make Adorno a philosopher of permanent revolution, and so make historical dynamism permanent, also sees the moving force of this permanent dynamism to be humanity itself—“ [n]ot animals, not God, not nature.” See John Holloway, “Why Adorno?” in *Negativity and Revolution*, eds. Holloway et al (London: Pluto, 2009), 14.

<sup>766</sup> Adorno, “Progress,” 145.

<sup>767</sup> This “Utopia of misfits,” as Jameson imagines it, would not quite be the blossoming of “neurotics, compulsives, obsessives, paranoids, and schizophrenics,” for these conditions would not all exist, at least not in the same manner, in this utopian future. This is not to say that mental illness would not exist, but simply that how its symptoms relate to various socio-political factors would be radically transformed. See Jameson, *Late Marxism*, 102.

<sup>768</sup> Adorno, “Progress,” 146.

But why must this reconciled humanity, this humanity without any exclusion or “limiting principle,” be called humanity at all, if humanity was itself only constituted through exclusion and the establishment and institutionalization of principles of limitation? How might such a humanity even cohere as a concept without some limiting principle? The simplest answer here is that these limits and the exclusion they promote also promise their opposite. In establishing limits, the other side of these limits come into focus, just as acts of exclusion ultimately depend upon those they exclude, and contain within them the possibility of inclusion. As the determinate negation of the exclusion and “limiting principle” that served to constitute humanity, reconciled humanity preserves these within itself. In this sense, reconciled humanity is held together as that which no longer must dominate, that animal whose aggressive impulses have been deprived of the objects through which they were made actual. While these aggressive impulses remain in potential, even such potential can be expected to diminish and fade over time, like the loss of prominent canine teeth. If these impulses would indeed fade over time, then reconciled humanity, as the determinate negation of humanity, might cease to be any kind of humanity at all, for this animal would cease to be constituted through the contradiction in experience expressed by dialectic through negation—the instrumental necessity of opposing oneself to others in order to ensure self-preservation. Insofar as reconciled humanity preserves within it the memory of the limiting principle of

humanity and the impulses that went with it, then it might be said to be constituted through the contradiction existing between its own peaceful state and the struggle from which it was born, but as its aggressive impulses fade, so would this contradiction and thus its status as some kind of human. In this sense, it is perhaps not as some form of humanity at all that reconciled humanity serves as the *telos* of the human struggle against the inhuman, but as some other kind of animal.

Recall that for Aristotle, the potentials thought to be exclusively human served to elevate humans above other animals, but to differing degrees based on the natural distribution of these potentials found in particular human individuals. It was through the institution of certain activities in civic and artistic life that this natural inequality was made to flourish by allowing for lower human types to reach toward higher ones and so be reconciled to them. In this way the capacities humans share with other animals were made subordinate to those considered exclusively human. This way of formulating the human as the suppression of the animal serves to make “the animal” into the *other* of the human—the non-identical remainder produced through the conception of the human and its flourishing. In this sense, the image of “the animal” might be said to haunt human life as the specter of life organized otherwise, of life drawing on different capacities than those which served to compel some to recognize others as their betters. In this sense, Adorno’s conception of a reconciled humanity and

the transformation of human life it entails would appear to proceed through a transformation in our conception of how humans relate to animals.

Thus, it can be said that there is good reason to believe that reconciled humanity cannot be something arising simply out of the struggle between the human and the inhuman, and the progress made through the production of a global subject whose resistance to “total disaster” might propel humanity toward its own reconciliation. Reconciled humanity, if indeed a humanity constituted without a limiting principle and hence without exclusion or coercion, is as much animal as it is human. In this light, the goal of progress is less the production of the conditions in which humanity might be transformed into another kind of *humanity*, i.e. another creature that must resist inhumanity, but rather, to transform the very conditions that compelled humanity to come into existence in the first place, and so to transform humanity into another kind of animal. This relation between the animal and the human, between the human and its own animality, are thus necessary to grasp the animality of this reconciled humanity and hence the moral and political underpinnings of Adorno’s project. To this end, I now turn toward their consideration, specifically through an examination of Adorno’s use of animal imagery, and a defense of my claim that reconciled humanity is an animal other than human.

## Chapter Fourteen:

### Relatively Modest Horrors: Adorno and Animals

In his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel refers to the negative freedom of the abstract will that cancels all particularity as “the freedom of the void.” This abstract freedom “becomes in the realm of both politics and religion the fanaticism of destruction, demolishing the whole existing social order, eliminating all individuals regarded as suspect by a given order, and annihilating any organization which attempts to rise up anew.”<sup>769</sup> According to Hegel, this situation describes the Terror of the French Revolution.<sup>770</sup> The French Revolution, Comay claims, introduced an “untimeliness” into historical experience, a kind of “traumatic dissonance” that has served to make a split in historical experience since: events like the Revolution always happen at once too soon (we are never ready for them) and too late (they are always already long past due). The introduction of this traumatic split and re-orientation in the very structure of experience separates subsequent history from what came before, thus making the French Revolution “the epochal marker of modernity.”<sup>771</sup>

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<sup>769</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, ed. Allen Wood, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), §5.

<sup>770</sup> Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, §5. Addition.

<sup>771</sup> Rebecca Comay, *Mourning Sickness: Hegel and the French Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011), 4-7.

Insofar as Hegel's philosophy can be seen as being constituted around the experience of the French Revolution, and Hegel himself can be called the "most lucid theorist" of this trauma,<sup>772</sup> we might find in the subjective preponderance Adorno opposes in Hegel to be Hegel's attempt to master this trauma. The preponderance of the subject over the object can be seen as an attempt to master the trauma of experience in the modern world, conceptualizing it in such a manner that its shock is deadened and it can be integrated into the order constituted through the subject's own development. Yet it is precisely this deadening and integrating of the shock into a repressive socio-political order that Adorno argues enabled its return even more horribly in the violence of the twentieth century. In *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno refers to "the relatively modest horrors of the French Revolution," from which the philosophers of the age were so quick to distance themselves, lauding instead order and the rule of law.<sup>773</sup> If the repressed trauma of the French Revolution that constitutes the unconscious of modernity was able to erupt in events such as Auschwitz and Hiroshima, how much more terrible will the next eruption be, if the trauma upon which the new order sits has so outstripped these past horrors as to render them nothing more than "modest"? It is here again that we see the specter of "total disaster" that threatens the continued existence of human and other life, and in opposition to which was found Adorno's definitions of humanity and progress.

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<sup>772</sup> Comay, *Mourning Sickness*, 4-5.

<sup>773</sup> *ND*, 251.

Indeed, only in resistance to this “total disaster” might it be possible to psychologically reconstitute the subjects of modernity such that trauma and destruction no longer occupy the central place in this constitution.

Yet if “that which saves” really does grow from “where danger threatens,” we might find, as I have already suggested above, strange allies in this struggle against inhumanity, and in the liberation from this struggle. Adorno, along with the other members and associates of the Frankfurt School, are known to have been animal lovers, and even gave each other animal pet-names: Adorno was hippopotamus, his wife Gretel Adorno was Giraffe-Gazelle, and Horkeimer was Mammoth.<sup>774</sup> A widely published photograph from Adorno’s days in Los Angeles shows him at his desk surrounded by figurines made in the images of his favorite animals, a collection to which Adorno referred as his “household horrors.”<sup>775</sup> Might this curious nickname give a clue to where “that which saves” might actually lie? While Adorno’s thoughts on nature have become the object of scholarly study,<sup>776</sup> little systematic attention has been paid to the role animal imagery serves in Adorno’s work.<sup>777</sup>

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<sup>774</sup> Lorenz Jäger, *Adorno: A Political Biography*, trans. Stewart Spencer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 107. This practice of giving each other animal nick-names appears to be the extension of one already in use in Adorno’s family from his childhood. See Savage, “Adorno’s Family and Other Animals,” 107.

<sup>775</sup> Jäger, *Adorno*, 108.

<sup>776</sup> See for instance Deborah Cook’s *Adorno on Nature* (Durham: Acumen, 2011); Eric S. Nelson, “Revisiting the Dialectic of Environment: Nature as Ideology and Ethics in Adorno and the Frankfurt School,” *Telos* 155 (2011): 105-126, and Steven Vogel, *Against Nature: The Concept of Nature in Critical Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

<sup>777</sup> For exceptions to this rule, see Christina Gerhardt, “The Ethics of Animals in Adorno and Kafka,” *New German Critique* 97.33 (2006): 159-178; Christina Gerhardt, “Thinking With: Animals in Schopenhauer,

In his review of Claussen and Muller-Doohm's biographies of Adorno, Savage argues that these animal-related anecdotes point to the possibility of re-interpreting certain key passages in Adorno's writings that suggest a "structural and functional identity of animality and utopia in Adorno's thought," serving to remind us that "the path to humanity leads *toward* animality, not away from it."<sup>778</sup> However, as I have suggested in my consideration of Adorno's conception of humanity above, we might push these claims even further. The realization of a reconciled humanity not only involves a transformation of the relation between human and animal, but a transformation of what we think of human such that this reconciled humanity is not really human at all, but rather some new kind of animal, one whose destructive tendencies emerging from the trauma involved in the struggle for survival have been pacified. Reconciled humanity, if it is indeed to embody the promise Adorno claims, must be something fundamentally other than the humanity born and perpetuated in the struggle against inhumanity, the struggle for its own survival.

Defending this claim that Adorno's concept of a reconciled humanity is not human but a new kind of animal will involve demonstrating four separate but related points. The first is that what we call human is a radically constructed creature, one whose constitution is entirely dependent upon the socio-political

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Horkheimer, and Adorno," in *Critical Theory and Animal Liberation*, ed. John Sanbonmatsu (Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield, 2011); Eduardo Mendieta, "Animal Is to Kantianism as Jew Is to Fascism: Adorno's Bestiary," in *Critical Theory and Animal Liberation*.

<sup>778</sup> Savage, "Adorno's Family and Other Animals," 109-110.

order in which it lives. Here I examine Adorno's thoughts on "anthropology" and its relation to socio-political forces, arguing, contrary to many of his interpreters, that Adorno does not have an anthropology, and that his thoughts on the subject must be seen as being a polemic against the various philosophical anthropologies deployed within the Western philosophical tradition. Secondly, if reconciled humanity would be a new kind of animal, and that the thinking that might orient oneself to society in such a way that might bring about its creation involves a turn toward the object and the non-identical, then there must be some relation between the concept of the animal and the non-identical. Here I argue that the concept of the animal points to that which is non-identical to the human, and this can be understood through the violence done to animals in constructing and maintaining what we call human. Thirdly, insofar as the animal illuminates the non-conceptual side of the concept of the human, seeing the "rifts and crevices" in this concept, its intransigence and distortion, means to see human activity as animal activity, and historically conditioned social activity as natural activity. In so doing, the centrality of the concept of the human is displaced, and both the possibility and desirability of its mastery over the animal is brought into question. Lastly, I examine the relation between Adorno's use of animal imagery and his conception of utopia, concluding that a truly reconciled humanity can only be something decidedly other than human, a kind of animal whose life is no

longer characterized by the kinds of conflict that served to bring the human into existence.

*Anthropology, Dialectical and Otherwise*

The final section of Horkheimer and Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, "Notes and Sketches," comprises twenty four fragments, most of which relate to what the authors call in the preface of the book, a "dialectical anthropology."<sup>779</sup> No further elaboration of this term is given. However, many of the fragments that make up this section explicitly concern the human being and its constitution, especially in relation to animals and the violence done to them. While the relation established between humans and other animals through violence will be discussed in further detail in the next section, here I want to focus instead on the various references to "anthropology" scattered throughout Adorno's other works, often polemically. This "anthropology" should be understood much more broadly than the academic discipline of the same name.

For Adorno, anthropology concerns the theories and popular representations of human life and its possibilities in a given society, and how these relate to the structure of society and the activities it compels. Insofar as Adorno considers what we call human to be a product of specific socio-political relations, and not a creature naturally possessed of a certain set of potentials,

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<sup>779</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, "preface," *DE*, xix.

these theories and representations make up an important part of what constitutes human life in a given society. As human constitution is bound up with the form of society in which it appears in this manner, positive articulations of what humanity is have the ideological function of supporting the existing order by imposing an understanding of the possibilities available for living in the terms of this order. The role Adorno attributes to anthropology here is one of solidifying a particular constitution of human being, and so giving a natural appearance to the set of historically produced socio-political relations in which this human being appears. Thus, if progressive change is to be realized, that is, if a given form of socio-political relations are to change in a manner that might facilitate the emergence of a reconciled humanity, an important part of the task of theory is to show how what we call human is a function of these relations. In this way, Adorno should not be understood as being engaged in philosophical anthropology as some argue,<sup>780</sup> for he does not attempt to identify what is definitively human or promote the centrality of its concept. Rather, Adorno's work polemically opposes itself to philosophical anthropology, from the Aristotelian variety, to those prominent in his own day, such as in the work of

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<sup>780</sup> See for instance, Stefan Breuer, "Adorno's Anthropology," trans. John Blazek, *Telos* 64 (1985): 15-31; Jameson, *Late Marxism*, 17; 64; 68; 104; 109; or Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, 253. That Breuer's development of Adorno's "dialectical anthropology," focuses primarily on the development of capitalism, rejects any conception of 'first nature,' and ultimately claims to be "an anthropology without anthropos" (31) leaves one to wonder exactly what remains of philosophical anthropology at all, after the passage of the dialectic.

Max Scheler or Arnold Gehlen,<sup>781</sup> both of whom were influenced by Aristotle in important ways.<sup>782</sup>

Perhaps Adorno's most concise statement on the ideological role of anthropology is made in *Negative Dialectics*, in reference to Franz Neumann's book about the National Socialist state, *Behemot*.<sup>783</sup> There Adorno calls anthropology "the chemism of humankind."<sup>784</sup> The extreme concision of this statement requires some unpacking, specifically with reference to Hegel's *Science of Logic*, which Adorno is here appropriating in his characteristically fragmented fashion. On the subjective side of Hegel's logic, objectivity is divided between three moments: mechanism, chemism, and teleology. In order for an object to be known in its objectivity, that is, known by a cognizing subject, yet known free of the imprint of the subject's own knowing, according to Hegel, requires that this objectivity be known free of limitation, opposition, or contingency.<sup>785</sup> For example, if the object in question were a work of art, knowing this work of art in its objectivity, or calling a work of art *objective*, means to know it in its entirety,

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<sup>781</sup> Indeed, Adorno and Gehlen debated one another on West German radio, an account of which can be found in Stefan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno: A Biography*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 378-379; 390-391. Freyenhagen also uses this episode to frame his discussion of Adorno in *Adorno's Practical Philosophy* (2; 242), though Freyenhagen sees philosophical anthropology as a point in common between Adorno and Gehlen, despite their particular differences on what is actually proper to human being, whereas I argue that Adorno is critical of the very possibility of philosophical anthropology.

<sup>782</sup> See Arnold Gehlen, *Man*, trans. Clare McMillan and Karl Pillemer (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 17; 169; 276; 299; 339; 356; 360; 361; 363; Max Scheler, *Formalism in Ethics and Non-Formal Ethics of Values*, 481; Scheler, *Man's Place in Nature*, trans. Hans Meyerhoff (New York: Noonday, 1970), 91.

<sup>783</sup> Franz Neumann, *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933-1944*, trans. Peter Hayes (New York: Octagon, 1963).

<sup>784</sup> *ND*, 346.

<sup>785</sup> Hegel, *SL*, 709.

without remainder; knowing it in its individuality, that is, knowing it on its own terms without necessary reference to some other work; and lastly, to grasp its necessity, that is, to know that it is the result of a necessary unfolding that could not be otherwise. The possibility of actually knowing in this manner and so the coherence of this position will not be considered here; rather, I will restrict myself to explicating this part of Hegel in terms of Adorno's conception of anthropology.

For Hegel, coming to be objective in this manner requires the passage from *mechanism*, wherein the object is seen as an aggregation of parts whose actions on themselves and each other are "extraneous" to themselves<sup>786</sup>—where they are seen to operate without intention, end, or self-direction— to *teleology*, whereby the actions of the parts of the whole are known by an intelligence which directs itself toward given ends in accordance with some purpose.<sup>787</sup> Chemism serves as the mediating point between these two, whereby the various mechanical processes are synthesized as a whole, and known to be the parts of a totality.<sup>788</sup> For Hegel, chemism ultimately remains on the side of mechanism, part of an external way of knowing that for Hegel cannot grasp the self-moving drive toward various ends that is life, and consequently treats objects as *dead things*.<sup>789</sup>

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<sup>786</sup> *SL*, 711.

<sup>787</sup> *SL*, 734.

<sup>788</sup> *SL*, 727.

<sup>789</sup> *SL*, 740; 767.

To call anthropology “the chemism of humankind,” then, is to call anthropology a process of synthesis whereby the various positive instantiations of humanity, the various kinds of human life that appear in different societies, are synthesized into a totality that is, in the Hegelian terminology, a “chemical object” *external* to itself and hence *un-reflective*. Or in other words, the human being, as the object of anthropology, is a general conception that purports to capture what the human being really and necessarily is, based on these positive instantiations of how humans are *compelled* to live—that is, based on how humans live under domination. As a chemical object, humanity does not understand its own processes of construction, that is, how its unity has come to be imposed as a concept through its own practices of knowing, and thus it takes the object that it sees distorted through an existing articulation of the subject to be the object in its totality. However, in order to grasp the objectivity of the object, the subject’s own role in the object’s constitution must be understood. Only in understanding how the subject structures the object can its objectivity be known, and the external unity established through “chemism” can be made internal, and so allow the object to begin to determine its own ends and strive toward them, in the Hegelian sense. Thus, humanity as an object of anthropology is not a living, breathing entity, capable of the agency Hegel ascribes to

teleological subject-object relations, but a *corpse* produced especially for dissection.<sup>790</sup>

An example of one such anthropological process can be found in Adorno's criticism of television. In television dramas, Adorno claims the dramatic changes the characters suffer reveal only what they always already were, their "true nature,"<sup>791</sup> as opposed to the myriad ways in which these sufferings are socially produced. People become only what their nature allows, and so the "hidden message" of the various forms of entertainment that compose the culture industry is contained in the view of humanity they promote.<sup>792</sup> In seeing such views of nature and the boundaries it sets to human life so dramatized, viewers come to adopt similar attitudes, and so understand these same boundaries to be those that mark their own lives and their possibilities. Insofar as these ideas regarding human life come to influence their own daily decisions and practices—insofar as people come to seek opportunities in their own lives to re-enact the narratives they have absorbed through television or elsewhere—these ideas come to have substance in positive instantiations of human life, which in turn serves itself up as the fodder for further dramatic representation. In this way, the television drama, as one instance of the "chemism" of anthropology, serves to

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<sup>790</sup> Hence Adorno's claim that reconciled humanity is the *telos* of the struggle against inhumanity, for inhumanity includes the positive articulations of the limits of human life enshrined through the "chemism" of anthropology. Adorno's use of *telos* and this Hegelian schema is ironic, however, in that Adorno's reconciled humanity would be free of the dynamism that characterizes the subject-object relation found in the *teleological* moment of objectivity.

<sup>791</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Television as Ideology," *CM*, 66.

<sup>792</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

create a view of humanity incapacitated and alienated from other potentials its socio-political constitution has made available, in the *opposite* image of Adorno's global subject, which would be constituted as an expression of solidarity between different instances of human resistance to inhumanity.

If anthropology is to a significant extent involved in the creation of its own object, the human being, then the human being must be, as noted above, constituted through socio-political relations. We might be tempted to see here a likeness to the argument found in Foucault's *The Order of Things* concerning the discursive construction of the human being through a shift in the social sciences, which included anthropology. At the end of that work, Foucault famously claims that a discursive transformation might result in the disappearance of the concept of the human being, "like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea."<sup>793</sup> Such a transformation is welcomed by Foucault, who, in Heideggerian fashion, would see anthropology destroyed in order to make possible a more primordial relation to language, and so rediscover "a purified ontology or a radical thought of being."<sup>794</sup> Though Adorno does not appear to have been familiar with Foucault, he did know this argument as it is found in Heidegger, and of which he expresses deep suspicion. For Adorno, though "[t]he current talk of humanism is awful," he sees in Heidegger's turn toward a being more lofty or more primordial than

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<sup>793</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 387.

<sup>794</sup> Foucault, *The Order of Things*, 342.

human a quietism that would remain unmoved by suffering.<sup>795</sup> Humanity contains both the danger of domination and destruction and the promise of a life free of these, and the task of Adorno's critique of humanity is to resist these dangers in the interest of its promise, even if the promise of humanity will, as I argue, be found not to have been human. To better grasp this difference between Adorno and Heidegger/Foucault's position on anthropology, then, we must ask: to *what extent* must humanity be seen as the product of particular socio-political relations? What, if anything, remains unchanged through the vicissitudes of anthropology?

Put most simply, it is Adorno's turn toward the object that distinguishes him from Foucault and Heidegger. Insofar as anthropological processes concern ways of knowing, they can be considered *subjective*. As we have seen, Adorno argues against the absolutely constitutive powers of subjectivity, in favor of a preponderance of the object. For Adorno, objects are given and pre-exist subjects, even if they cannot be known without subjects. Thus subjective processes such as those of anthropology cannot be said to constitute the human absolutely; rather, there must be some object, some material, that is continually being conceptualized as human, but that remains irreducible to this conceptualization. However, just as the subject is also an object, so is anthropology also objective—its existence cannot simply be separated from the

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<sup>795</sup> ND, 89.

objectivity of society, and so simply removed from it, as a tumor from a body. That is, anthropology must correspond to some need in society, some aspect of its objectivity, as opposed to being a complete and arbitrary construction. To turn toward this need, to the objectivity of society veiled by the subjective processes of anthropology, is thus to search for the object in the subjective constructions of anthropology. Adorno attempts to accomplish this turn by illustrating the ways in which the different aspects of the subjective constitution of the human being correspond to social needs—to the structure of the object. To answer the questions, then, regarding the extent of the anthropological constitution of the human being, and so what remains non-identical to it and perhaps as such even resists it, we must examine the instances where Adorno locates the object through cracks in the subjective wall. I will examine first the various aspects of human constitution that Adorno sees to be the specific articulations of social compulsion, before turning to what might be seen as the condition of this compulsion.

According to Adorno, “man as a *constituens*,” that is, the human subject that not only transforms nature and builds cities, but that grounds the objects of cognition, “is in turn man-made,” a fact that must displace the creative centrality of the human mind.<sup>796</sup> The *self* that is so often taken as the emblem of the individuality particular to humans is “entwined with society,” owing to society its

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<sup>796</sup> Adorno, “On Subject and Object,” *CM*, 251.

very existence, for, as Adorno claims, *all* of the content of the self comes from society, from its relation to the object.<sup>797</sup> Moreover, Adorno claims there is no “substratum” that might lie beneath the social deformations of humanity, no interior upon which social forces exert their pressure from outside;<sup>798</sup> rather, interiority must itself be seen as part and parcel of the particular form of humanity created in the historical transformation of socio-political relations.<sup>799</sup> Thus, Adorno holds that no meaningful distinction can be drawn between who or what people are, as particular instances of humanity, and their social roles, for these roles “extend deep into the characteristics of people themselves, into their undermost composition.”<sup>800</sup>

These claims directly challenge any positive conception of the human being based on a necessary set of a-historical potentials, such as Aristotle’s, which attempts to isolate certain fundamentally human capacities. Indeed, Adorno will claim that the attempt to isolate such capacities is itself the product of the division of labor, and thus mediated through specific socio-political relations.<sup>801</sup> The consequence of such claims is that even capacities that are taken for granted in our society must necessarily be seen as its products. For instance, concepts such as the individual and its freedom, and the competition between individuals, must all be seen as the products of social-historical relations, as are basic features

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<sup>797</sup> *MM*, A99, 154.

<sup>798</sup> *MM*, A147, 229.

<sup>799</sup> *AT*, 116.

<sup>800</sup> Adorno, “Free Time,” *CM*, 167-168.

<sup>801</sup> *MM*, A39, 64.

of the individual, such as the ego, will, reason, and even its bodily reflexes. The competition between formally equal individuals that characterizes bourgeois society and that is thought to be the necessary consequence of certain fundamental human building blocks are thus all found to be themselves produced by the very set of relations they are held to legitimate. If the individual, at least when taken as an “absolute” as opposed to a result, is indeed “a mere reflection of property relations,”<sup>802</sup> then the competition between individuals, “the truly bourgeois principle”<sup>803</sup> that characterizes their relations, is itself a product of the distribution of property. Adorno will even speculate that pre-bourgeois competition, or the antagonism thought to structure human relations at a more fundamental level, is the consequence perhaps not even of the human struggle for survival against a hostile natural world, but of the reification of “archaic arbitrary acts of seizing power.”<sup>804</sup> In this case, the antagonism that exists between people would be the inheritance of acts of violence that were themselves contingent, and unnecessary from the perspective of human development. In both cases, however, this antagonism is itself maintained and reproduced through socio-political relations that might be otherwise, as is the ego, which is part of the architecture of the individual “implanted” by society.<sup>805</sup>

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<sup>802</sup> *MM*, A99, 153.

<sup>803</sup> *MM*, A6, 27.

<sup>804</sup> *ND*, 321.

<sup>805</sup> *ND*, 297.

Even reason itself, the very cornerstone of the difference between human and animal, is for Adorno a social product. Though reason has so frequently been understood as an important, even definitive, capacity in defining human life, here again Adorno sees in reason its *artificiality*, or socially *produced* nature. Reason evolved genetically through the “force of human drives,”<sup>806</sup> in the interest of survival. Insofar as there is no human history that is not at once social history—that is, insofar as humans have been social at least as long as they have been human—then the survival that was facilitated by reason was always already survival in the context of human societies, and so cannot be isolated as a capacity that pre-existed them. As the most “hypostatized” category, reason or *ratio* in bourgeois society becomes the self-preservation of the individual against the whole, and thus serves to perpetuate the antagonism between individuals.<sup>807</sup> The executor of this self-preserving reason is the will. Yet the act of willing involves the capacity to command the body, and in order to marshal the body to its command, the will must treat the body as an object, as its instrument. In so doing the will serves to separate itself and the *ratio* from the body and its impulses, from its reflexes, which are now seen as alien and mechanical, divorced from that which is highest and most definitively human.<sup>808</sup> Divided and alienated from itself in this manner, the model of a hierarchical division of labor, or social domination, becomes the model for the inner architecture of the human

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<sup>806</sup> *ND*, 230.

<sup>807</sup> *ND*, 317-318.

<sup>808</sup> *ND*, 217; *MM*, A147, 231.

being. It is for this reason that Adorno writes that perhaps the freedom of a free society would mean being free from the will,<sup>809</sup> for insofar as the will is a mechanism for inner repression produced by the outward repression that structures society, the disappearance of outward repression would mean the transformation of this human architecture.

In this way, Adorno reveals the socially constructed character of anthropological concepts, and thus the objectivity of the subjective constitution of the human being. This manner of finding objectivity through the subject might even be seen to dialectically mediate the positions of Foucault and Aristotle noted above. Against Foucault, Adorno's turn toward the object serves to open up the discursive constructs of anthropology to their other: the un-intentional reflexes and impulses of the body suffering the activities imposed upon it by social organization, whose experience remains irreducible to the concepts of anthropology. At once, however, and against Aristotle, these bodily reflexes and impulses cannot be isolated from their social expression or their mediation by language in an unchanging set of potentials that might serve to definitively tell us what a human being *is*. As Adorno writes, "We cannot say what man is. Man today is a function, unfree, regressing behind whatever is ascribed to him as invariant [...] He drags along with him as his social heritage the mutilations

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<sup>809</sup> *ND*, 264.

inflicted upon him over thousands of years.”<sup>810</sup> Thus attempts to define the human being serve only to chain human being “to the rock of his past.”<sup>811</sup> That the human being evades definition in this manner does not serve to elevate anthropology; rather, “it vetoes any anthropology.”<sup>812</sup> Anthropology forges the conceptual manacles in which what might have resisted inhumanity is bound.

Thus, even if what we consider human is largely the function of anthropology, there nevertheless remains something non-identical to the conception of human being proffered by anthropology. This “something” is not simply to be found in the discursive slippages produced by an excess of significations, but rather the result of the embodied condition of discourse that both enables and limits discursive constructions. That is, what can be said about human beings and its acceptance as plausible depends on the bodily experience of social subjects—if anthropology had no point of contact with objectivity in this sense, it would be without force or even meaning. This *point of contact*, the most basic meaning-making activity that both serves to enable and limit the reach of anthropology, is what Adorno calls *mimesis*: the “indelible [...] element in all cognition and in all human practice.”<sup>813</sup> Insofar as *mimesis* has traditionally been linked to imitation, Adorno can thus claim that humans are only human insofar as they imitate one another; however, Adorno’s use of the term suggests a much

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<sup>810</sup> ND, 124.

<sup>811</sup> ND, 51.

<sup>812</sup> ND, 124.

<sup>813</sup> ND, 150.

broader meaning, and commentators have often noted the difficulties of pinning this term down.<sup>814</sup>

While Aristotle's conception of *mimesis* was not limited to direct representation or imitation of objects of observation, but instead allowed for their imaginative transformation—utilizing capacities humans share with other animals, we must recall—it nevertheless remained tied to what Aristotle considered the naturally human desire to know. Insofar as knowledge serves a more important role in human life than those of other animals, and insofar as Aristotle sees the human desire for knowledge to reach up toward divine thought, *mimesis* thus shares these associations: just as humans are held to be the most intelligent, so are they held to be the most imitative of all animals.<sup>815</sup> Adorno, however, does not simply adopt the Aristotelian conception of *mimesis*. As Horowitz writes, Adorno's conception of *mimesis*, "primordially," involves "the desire to be what there is contact with before there is a self to make contact." But even this formulation, Horowitz claims, involves too great a separation between subject and object: "'One' is 'the object.' And that is all there is."<sup>816</sup> This conception of *mimesis*, it must be noted, while serving to condition the desire for knowledge and what we call humanity, is reducible to neither.

At its most basic, *mimesis* is a desire for contact, and this desire is not exhausted in the divisions of self and other, or subject and object. For this

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<sup>814</sup> *MM*, 154. Cf. Lisa Yun Lee, *Dialectics of the Body*, 109.

<sup>815</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* 4 1448b5-15.

<sup>816</sup> Asher Horowitz, "Adorno and Emptiness," 272.

reason, *mimesis* can be considered something like the drive that animates the bodily excess of conceptual organization. It makes possible the process of identification, yet no identification can ever fully encompass it, and consequently it lends itself to a continual series of mediations that re-translate it into new conceptual schemas, of which anthropology is but a set. Thus we might say the dynamism that characterizes human development, the constant transformation of humanity through its own self-organized processes of compulsion, depends on *mimesis*, as would the transformation of this compulsion, and the humanity constituted thereby. However, a full account of *mimesis* will have to wait for Chapter 14 below, and my discussion of the relation of Adorno's conceptions of art, morality and politics. At present it is sufficient to note that what we call human is the product of socio-political relations operating on both subjective and objective levels, and the condition of this humanity and its vicissitudes depends on a bodily desire not reducible to the human. It remains to elucidate now, what relation this construction of the human might have to other animals. How has the human managed to differentiate itself from other animals, and maintain its privileged status? To this question, I presently turn.

### *Animal Violence in Human Constitution*

Having demonstrated the degree to which the human being is produced through socio-political relations, and having highlighted the bodily impulse whose

continual mediation informs these relations and the vicissitudes of anthropology, we might now return to the “dialectical anthropology” of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Like Schoenberg or Beethoven’s “failed” compositions that through their failure bring to light the status of the object more truthfully than a successful composition might have, Horkheimer and Adorno’s failed attempt to write an anthropology—even a “dialectical” one—illustrates the impossibility of the task, and thus the status of its object, the human being.<sup>817</sup> Adorno has described *Dialectic of Enlightenment* as an attempt to write “a primeval history of the subject,”<sup>818</sup> and it is perhaps for this reason that *DE* might be considered their bleakest work: the authors here attempt to draw the outline of the shadow in which they sit, while historical events serve to burn this shadow into the ground. In this light, the human being is that moment in the history of the subject where the destructive and violent impulses that allowed for its clear distinction from its object through the latter’s domination are given their most complete articulation: in the possibility of the total destruction of the natural world.

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<sup>817</sup> Notes made by Adorno around the same time (1941) on the possibility of a new anthropology suffered the same fate: they fail to stand on their own as an independent whole, and are instead ultimately divided and cannibalized by other works, such as *Minima Moralia*. See Müller-Doohm, 274; 389. On success in failure, see Adorno, “Alienated Masterpiece” in *The Adorno Reader*, ed. Brian O’Cormnor (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 317; *Philosophy of Modern Music*, trans. Anne G. Mitchell and Wesley V. Blomster (New York: Continuum, 1985), 69; 71; 119. Cited hereafter as *PMM*. On the direct influence of Schoenberg’s techniques for Adorno’s philosophy, see Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*, 15; 44-45; 188-189.

<sup>818</sup> *ND*, 185.

In *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Horkheimer and Adorno display the other side of the struggle against inhumanity that constitutes the human being: inhumanity is not only a kind of brutality perpetuated by humans against each other, but it must also be seen as that which is simply not human, such as the natural world and the other animals that populate it. In turning toward the primeval history of the subject, Horkheimer and Adorno find that the human is only a moment of the subject which has been constituted through the violent suppression of nature, and most notably, the violent suppression of animals. If the subject is to emerge as something distinct from its object, and so ultimately take up the banner of *human being*, a creature distinct from nature and from other animals, it must master and suppress its own objectivity, its own history and condition of possibility—its *animal* body. As I will attempt to show, it is in part for this reason that Adorno's idea of a reconciled humanity cannot be human, for the turn toward the preponderance of the object and the non-identical is, in the case of humanity, a turn toward animality, to the suppressed animal impulses that inform all human activity but must continually be suppressed, transformed, and disciplined by the repression of a society organized around the exigencies of domination for the human to be produced. The object for which the anthropological subject is but an agent is an animal, and it is only in recognizing this that the repressive social relations necessary for the

reproduction of human life might be relaxed, and human life might dissolve into a different kind of animal life, free of this repression.

As commentators have noted, sometimes pejoratively, this aspect of *Dialectic of Enlightenment* bears a close affinity to Nietzsche,<sup>819</sup> especially the Nietzsche to be found in the second essay of his *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Here Nietzsche also provides something very much like a “primeval history of the subject,” wherein human social features and institutions are treated as part of the biological evolution of the species. For Nietzsche humans came to reason, and with it the mastery of their emotions and drives, through memory, which had to first forge a connection between past, present, and future such as to enable remembering individuals to identify themselves in their past and so make calculated projections for their future. In order for the future to look enough like the present and past to render calculations concerning it useful, human activities had to first be made regular and reliable. Such reliability was produced through a transformation of this “necessarily forgetful animal,” for which forgetfulness had been a strength that enabled daring, by means of the pain inflicted through “the most horrifying sacrifices and forfeits [...] the most disgusting mutilations [...] the cruelest rituals.”<sup>820</sup> Religious and socio-political institutions were the mnemonic devices employed to “breed” this animal capable of making a *promise*, an animal

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<sup>819</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, “The Entwinement of Myth and Enlightenment,” in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995), 106; 110; 120-2; 127. Cf. Gillian Rose, *The Melancholy Science*, 71.

<sup>820</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, ed. Carol Diethe, trans. Keith Ansell-Pearson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Essay II, §3, 38. *GM* hereafter.

possessed of an inner life to serve as the Archimedean point for the vicissitudes of its experience—a *subject*. First among these institutions was the institution of debt, and so the debtor-creditor relation, which established in the human animal the concept of *equivalence*. Insofar as widely disparate things might be made equivalent under certain conditions, the expansion of these conditions involves an increasing number of things coming under the law of equivalence, including these promise-keeping animals, whose equivalence between each other and their values allows for the emergence of their *common humanity*. Thus for Nietzsche humanity is not something that exists by nature possessed of certain distinctive capacities, but is rather the subject of repression as it has been socially organized through history.

Much of Nietzsche's genealogy is consistent with what Horkheimer and Adorno have to say in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*: the idea that the things commonly considered to be naturally human are the product of millennia of social repression, and that this repression might be discernible through a "biological" standpoint—or a "natural-historical" standpoint, for Horkheimer and Adorno—allow for a certain degree of harmony between their respective positions. Yet despite Nietzsche's clear influence,<sup>821</sup> the latter might be said to differ from Nietzsche on three related points that ultimately put their projects in discord: the place of power in the natural world (1), the role of reason and its

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<sup>821</sup> Indeed, Adorno even claims that "of all the so-called great philosophers I owe him [Nietzsche] by far the greatest debt—more even than to Hegel." See *PMP*, 172.

historical possibilities (2), and consequently, the possibilities available for politics and the relations it establishes between animals (3). Concerning the first of these points, Nietzsche claims that “anything in existence” has come to be the way it is, and continues to be transformed, according to the purpose imposed upon it “by a power superior to it.” This continual process of transformation in which old meanings and purposes are “obscured or completely obliterated” is a result of the “overpowering and dominating” forces of which “everything in the organic world” consists.<sup>822</sup>

While terms such as “anything in existence,” or everything in the “organic world” suggest that Nietzsche is making ontological claims that would hold for any society at any point in history, for Horkheimer and Adorno, as is consistent with Adorno’s later philosophy, such ontology could only ever be that of the “wrong state of things.”<sup>823</sup> That is, while Nietzsche’s “biological” standpoint shows that any power is itself historically constituted, the *relation between* historically constituted powers based on domination and submission that characterizes the “organic world” is held to be unchanging. Yet for Horkheimer and Adorno, not only is the power that overpowers another always an historically constituted power, but so must the relation between these powers that compels one to dominate another be seen as historically constituted. The organic world is thus not an unchanging substratum upon which human society sits, nor an

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<sup>822</sup> Nietzsche, *GM*, EII, §12, 51.

<sup>823</sup> Recall *ND*, 11.

unchanging drive that animates continually changing historical entities; rather, nature and natural drives are themselves internally mediated by history through emerging forms of socio-political organization. While the idea that meanings and purposes are continually being displaced and re-interpreted informs Adorno's approach to concepts in his turn toward the non-conceptual, as we have seen, this turn is illuminated by a "messianic light" that shows these things might be other than they are, not simply in the sense that what appears to be a natural power is in fact historically constituted, but that the structure of domination in which power is exercised might be radically transformed. While Nietzsche himself comes close to something like a messianic *impulse* with the notion that his "man of the future" will "redeem" what came before, ultimately the redemption to be found in forgiving debts and renouncing the law of equivalence is for Nietzsche a new display of power, and with it, a new imposition of values.<sup>824</sup> That the strong will and must triumph, even in redemption, is for Adorno a projection of socio-political domination—it does not tell us what might lie beyond a society organized around such domination.

We might consider the first consequence of this differing approach to the place of power in the natural world to be a different relation between Nietzsche and Horkheimer and Adorno to reason, and so to the legacy of the Enlightenment. Nietzsche's biological or "genealogical" standpoint undermines

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<sup>824</sup> Nietzsche, *GM*, EII, §24, 66. Cf. §10, 48.

the notion of reason as a godlike capacity that distinguishes humans from other animals, showing reason instead to have evolved as another instance of the biological drive for dominance, and as such, the means by which a certain historically constituted animal learned to exercise its power and so dominate others through the imposition of its own standards. While Horkheimer and Adorno agree with this exposition of reason to the extent that its nature must also be seen as internally mediated by history, they hold that reason as an expression of domination has at the same time made intelligible its opposite, the possibility of freedom, and with it the possibility of a different articulation of reason. To reach this different articulation of reason and the freedom it may enable requires that reason recognize its own complicity in domination, and so its own relation to nature. Insofar as domination is perpetuated by reason unaware of this complicity, becoming aware of complicity would be to deprive domination of one of its tools, thus compelling it to perpetuate itself by different means. Through this transformation of social domination, reason would itself be transformed, for, like nature, it is continually subject to the internal mediation of history and the forms of socio-political organization that emerge therein. In this way, Horkheimer and Adorno cling to the idea of the transformative capacity of reason, and thus can write that “freedom in society is inseparable from enlightenment thinking.”<sup>825</sup>

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<sup>825</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, *DE*, xvi.

Concerning the prospects of reason in the service of future life, Nietzsche's genealogical standpoint is not so sanguine. Reason, calculation, and memory have for Nietzsche served to give the human animal greater depth, perfecting repression in such a way as to create the possibility of a new kind of animal that might be to the human as the human takes itself to be toward other animals. However, reason, calculation, and memory are embedded in a system of equivalences that has grown so broad as to have become an impediment to the realization of this possibility. For a new, higher kind of animal to emerge that might rule over humanity, what is needed is the ability to posit values, meanings, and purposes that are exclusive—values that not all will be capable of holding. The positing of such values presupposes the power to affirm both one's particularity and one's superiority over and above the rest of humanity as a *singular* individual, a power that has been eroded by the system of equivalences in which reason, calculation, and memory have emerged. If values can be made equivalent, then none can rule, and so the very principle of life—the drive to overpower and to dominate—is undermined. If life is to triumph against “the great nausea, the will to nothingness,” and “nihilism,”<sup>826</sup> then potential rulers must be seduced into exercising their power and distinguishing themselves as singular individuals. Insofar as reason is tied to a system of equivalences,

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<sup>826</sup> Nietzsche, *GM*, EII, §24, 66.

distinguishing oneself as singular will involve the emphasis of something other than one's capacity for reason.

The political consequences of these two points mark the decisive split between Horkheimer and Adorno with Nietzsche. For Nietzsche one must be seduced into affirming one's singularity against all equivalences, thus making oneself capable of affirming one's life not only in the triumphs but also in the defeats and suffering, such that one might say, "I wanted it thus!"<sup>827</sup> In making one's own life in its singularity the content of the will, and so living as if one had given oneself one's own life, one separates oneself from the humanity that exists only in the equivalences established between particular triumphs and defeats, particular sufferings, and subject to external authority. The capacity to withstand being the sole author of one's life becomes the new capacity that elevates one above others, and makes the singular individual capable of this performance superior to them. Insofar as the affirmation of the singularity of one's life is at once a response to seduction, to being seduced by its potential beauty, then Nietzsche can be seen to re-establish the aristocratic rule of the beautiful, the nobility of those who would rule others like cattle by virtue of the strength of their mythic superiority.

Horkheimer and Adorno, of course, reject this as the perpetuation of domination, even class rule. For them, Nietzsche's "man of the future" is *all too*

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<sup>827</sup> Nietzsche, "On Redemption," in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale (New York: Penguin, 2003), 161.

*human* in that the order he represents is precisely the same kind of socio-political domination that has characterized virtually all human development—that is, one where humans separate themselves from other animals and rule over them as their superiors. For Adorno, rather, the political problem posed by humanity is the possibility of a world free of domination, and so one where the aggressive instincts that have informed such human development have been pacified. To understand how this pacification relates to other animals, and thus how Nietzsche’s own solution is a perpetuation of the order of domination in which humanity emerged and whose continued existence it maintains, we must look to the constitution of the human in relation to the animal, and how “the animal” can be considered non-identical to the concept of humanity.

Recall that what Adorno calls identity is a correspondence between an object and its concept. To think is to identify, to establish a correspondence between a concept and an object given in the material world. Establishing such correspondences is the means that the animal that became human evolved for self-preservation; thus Adorno refuses to separate thinking and life activity into independent spheres, for thinking evolved as a response to life activity, and is itself an activity meant to preserve life. Identity must therefore be seen as a response to the threat nature posed to early or even pre-humans, and the concept, the “idea-tool” allowing for the seizure and control of the objects of the

natural world.<sup>828</sup> From this evolutionary standpoint, the non-identical has the appearance of a threat to human survival, and for this reason must continually be seized by concepts and identified. Identification must therefore be seen as a compulsive activity born in terror, whose continuation represents both the perpetuation of the human attempt to dominate “the nightmare of nature,” and the “dizzying horror of the organic”<sup>829</sup> that spawned this compulsion.<sup>830</sup> Yet just as the physical seizure, control, and manipulation of the natural world is always evading human efforts in myriad ways, so does the object always exceed the concept, and undermine its subjectively established identity. Adorno’s turn toward the non-identical, then, is a turn toward that which is continually suppressed by the concept in the terror-stricken human compulsion to dominate, in the hope that this terror might be exorcised.

Perhaps nowhere is the violence of this suppression, and so the terror that accompanies it, more evident than in the concept of the human being. With Horkheimer, Adorno writes: “Throughout European history the idea of the human being has been expressed in contradistinction to the animal. The latter’s lack of reason is the proof of human dignity.”<sup>831</sup> If the concept of the *human* is a way of establishing an identity between the material entity, or body, in the array of a certain set of relationships and activities it engages, then the non-identical

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<sup>828</sup> *DE*, 31; *ND*, 11.

<sup>829</sup> As Jameson puts it. See *Late Marxism*, 96; 218.

<sup>830</sup> *ND*, 172.

<sup>831</sup> *DE*, 203.

would be that which falls outside of the concept—all the practices, relationships, and physical features that fall outside this ideal. Insofar as the concept of the human is “expressed in contradistinction to the animal,” and “few other ideas are so fundamental to Western anthropology,”<sup>832</sup> then the concept of the *animal* points to the practices, relationships, and physical features that are non-identical to the concept of the human. The animal, then, appears as a symbol for the rejected possibilities of the life that calls itself human—that which is subject to the ban erected by the concept of the human. It is for this reason, Adorno claims, that identifying certain visible groups of human beings with animals “is the key to the pogrom.”<sup>833</sup> In identifying certain humans as animals, their destruction becomes the preservation of the relationships, practices, and features that can be identified beneath a given conception of human, and so the maintenance of the ban this concept imposes on other forms of life.

Insofar as it is specifically reason or intellectual capacities that are found to be the marks that distinguish between human and animal, then insofar as reason is not seen as a function of the body, the body becomes a liminal space between the human and the animal. While the body is the necessary site of all human endeavors, it is only as commanded by reason that it performs in ways that fall beneath the concept of human—in its involuntary functions, such as the rudiments of perception and the experience of pleasure and pain, the body is

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<sup>832</sup> *DE*, 204.

<sup>833</sup> *MM*, A68, 105.

animal. Without reason, the world of the body, like that of the animal, is one without concepts, caught in a flux of drives that conform only to vital patterns, deprived of volition, meaning, and purpose, and produced as such through what might be seen as the other side of the anthropological processes that serve to constitute the human: the treatment of other animals. It is in “the twitching movements of the bound victims” that the human body is found to be “mechanical, blind, automatic,” in the same sense as an animal, yet it is precisely this involuntariness of the body that resists identity with the concept of the human. The concept of the animal, in pointing toward what is non-identical in the concept of the human, that which resists life organized under the concept of humanity, bears witness to the possibility of a humanity transformed.

The problem of human constitution in relation to “the animal” and the ethical implications thereof have been taken up by recent philosophers, perhaps most notably Jacques Derrida. Derrida notes that the concept of “the animal” is itself a *bêtise* that reduces the “heterogeneous multiplicity of the living” to a singular concept in order to facilitate the identification of the human. Yet insofar as this *bêtise* also facilitates *resistance* to the human, we should be cautioned against its simple rejection. Derrida’s claim that the very act of reducing the multiplicity of animal life to “the animal” in the singular reveals the *animality* of the human, both in terms of its latent aggression and cognitive limits, is consistent with Horkheimer and Adorno’s attempt to expose the non-identical in

the concept of the human.<sup>834</sup> However, rather than conclude that this moment of human animality gestures toward the possible transformation of the human, as do Horkheimer and Adorno, and perhaps even the transience of the concept of the human as such, Derrida suggests instead that the dissolution of this concept of “the animal” in the singular into a concept of *animals* in the plural—the “heterogeneous multiplicity of the living”—might inhibit the violence perpetuated through these concepts.<sup>835</sup> However, my discussion of Aristotle and the world of poetic myth above suggests serious problems with Derrida’s conclusion.

Aristotle shows little interest in the concept of “the animal” in the singular—for him the study of animals and their contrast to human beings is always a matter of grasping animal life in its heterogeneity and multiplicity, and these do not prevent their conceptual capture and hierarchical organization. Moreover, the relation between humans and animals in the world of poetic myth allowed for different kinds of human-animal alliances, yet these were established in order to identify oneself as a master over certain other animals, and with them, other human beings. Derrida’s turn to heterogeneity and multiplicity seems to assume that the plural and singular, or *the many* and *the one*, are liberating or repressive in and of themselves, rather than attending to the particular instantiations of the singular and the plural at the socio-political level, as these

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<sup>834</sup> Derrida, *The Animal that therefore I Am*, 31; 41. Indeed, Derrida even acknowledges Adorno as an inspiration for these ideas. See Derrida, “Fichus,” in *Paper Machine*, trans. Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 180.

<sup>835</sup> Derrida, *The Animal that therefore I Am*, 47-48.

change historically.<sup>836</sup> Though his apparent intent is laudable, Derrida's attempt to extend "the similar, the fellow, to all forms of life, to all species" and so claim that "[a]ll animals qua living beings are my fellows,"<sup>837</sup> serves to advance the empire of the same, whose subject is positive humanity, the humanity constituted and maintained through violence. Like attempts to extend human rights to certain kinds of non-human animals without a concomitant transformation of the human subject, their inclusion in the world of humans ignores the degradation of humanity and the intraspecies violence by which society is maintained.<sup>838</sup> Thus the task is not simply to expand the domain of the human, and so make animals into human subjects, but to liberate the human from itself, and its own need to dominate others.

As my examination of Nietzsche has attempted to show, however, this recovery of animality, of thinking of humans and their particular capacities genealogically, as one would other biological organisms, is on its own not enough to transform the relation between these animals wherein some must overpower and dominate others. In Hegelian terms, Nietzsche's overcoming of the human amounts to its *abstract negation*: it fails to take the actual structure in which the

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<sup>836</sup> Cook reads Adorno in this same vein, claiming: "Adorno aims to foster reconciliation by overcoming the tyranny of the One to reveal the astounding profusion of the Many." Adorno himself avoids these ontological terms, hearing in them the reverberation of myth: "The illusion of taking direct hold of the Many would be a mimetic regression, as much a recoil into mythology, into the horror of the diffuse, as the thinking of the One" (*ND*, 158). Cf. Cook, *Adorno on Nature*, 162.

<sup>837</sup> Derrida, *The Beast and the Sovereign* Vol.1, 109.

<sup>838</sup> See for instance Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation* (New York: Random House, 1990); Paola Cavalieri and Peter Singer, "A Declaration on Great Apes," in *The Great Apes Project* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993); Martha C. Nussbaum, "Beyond 'Compassion for Humanity'" ; Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka, *Zoopolis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

human emerged as its object, and so fails to transform the conditions of possibility upon which the human depends. Instead we require, again in Hegelian terms, the *determinate negation* of reason and humanity put forward by Horkheimer and Adorno, wherein reason is not lost but rather displaced and transformed in its mediation by its other, the animality of the body and its involuntary impulses. Only mediated by its own repressed animality might the strictures that give rise to the human be relaxed, and the human might finally be reconciled to its own animality, and thus to other animals. Theorizing this possibility, and thus the turn to the non-identical of humanity found in the animal, thus involves not seeing the humanity of animals, but the animality of human constitution. It is thus Adorno's account of the animality of human particularity toward which I presently turn.

### *Non-identity as Human Animality*

In the interest of showing that the reconciled humanity toward which Adorno gestures is an animal other than human, I have argued that the mimetic impulses that underlay all forms of human life have been produced as human through what Adorno calls "anthropology," and that the various practices and capacities designated as "animal" should be considered non-identical to the anthropologically produced conception of the human. Adorno's attempt to reveal that which is non-identical to the concept within the conceptual framework of

thinking, in this context, thus involves revealing the animal within what we consider human, or showing those aspects of the human we take to be most definitively human to in fact be animal—the task I take for this section.

The rudiments of this task can be found as early as “The Idea of Natural-History” (1932), wherein Adorno attempts to comprehend what is most historical as being natural, and what is most natural as being historical.<sup>839</sup> This attempt to grasp the entwinement of history and nature will find a new articulation in the entwinement of myth and enlightenment in his collaboration with Horkheimer, and also inform his later work, perhaps most notably in his readings of Hegel and Marx.<sup>840</sup> And yet, following this trend in Adorno’s thinking and attempting to see in the human its repressed animality brings my interpretation of Adorno into conflict with what is arguably the most prominent interpretation of Adorno’s ethical thought, what has been called Adorno’s “ethical modernism.”

The chief proponent of this view, J.M. Bernstein, expounds what he calls Adorno’s “ethical modernism” in a rich and complex interpretation of Adorno’s texts, a full account of which cannot be pursued here. Broadly put, however, it might be said that for Bernstein Adorno’s “ethical modernism” is an attempt to reconstruct the ethical meaning lost to the ravages of enlightenment, which has served to disenchant the world and so undermine the traditional objects of ethical

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<sup>839</sup> *INH*, 117. Cf. Mendieta, “Animal Is to Kantianism as Jew Is to Fascism,” 151; though for Mendieta, this project involves refounding metaphysics and anthropology, in the vein of Bernstein discussed below.

<sup>840</sup> Asher Horowitz, *Ethics at a Standstill* (Pittsburgh: Dusquesne University Press, 2008), 81; Bob Hullot-Kentor, “Introduction to the ‘The Idea of Natural-History,’” *Telos* (1984), 102-103.

life. For Bernstein, this makes Adorno something of a romantic Weberian: Adorno sees the disenchanted or secular world of modernity to be without a “rationally compelling” or “intrinsically motivating” normative account, and takes providing such an account to be the aim of his philosophy.<sup>841</sup> In order to accomplish this aim, Adorno sets to reformulating how we think about concepts and their relation to objects, such that our concepts might once again correspond to those objects that make up the “fundamental structures of ethical reasoning and moral insight”: that is, authority, knowledge, and experience, all of which have been set adrift by the corrosive powers of enlightenment reason.<sup>842</sup>

With respect to nature, this project orients itself against the enlightenment view that served to disenchant the natural world by seeing all anthropomorphism as myth, and so, in the interest of purging myth, drove a wedge between the human and natural worlds, transforming the objects of the natural world into mere fodder for human aims, and so robbing them of the capacity to make ethical claims upon humans. Insofar as human nature is itself part of nature, however, this hard distinction is irrational, and requires re-conceptualization. To this end, Bernstein sees Adorno as reviving an idea of anthropomorphic nature, albeit a secular one, wherein the objects of the natural world have been *re-enchanted*. That is, the objects of the natural world are understood as being entwined with the human world such that what might be called human is impossible without

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<sup>841</sup> Bernstein, *Adorno*, 18.

<sup>842</sup> *Ibid.*, 32-34.

them, and insofar as human relations need necessarily encompass natural objects, natural objects would form part of human ethical life and so require some degree of ethical consideration.<sup>843</sup> In this way, Bernstein writes, “Adorno pursues romantic ends [...] through hyper-cognitive means.”<sup>844</sup>

Bernstein’s interpretation is attractive for a number of reasons: Adorno is found to provide an answer to important ethical problems raised by modernity, and offers a theory concerning the possibility of a more peaceable relation between humans and the natural world, thus making Bernstein’s Adorno the (perhaps not-so-reluctant) colleague of Aristotelians such as MacIntyre, Nussbaum, and Salkever. And yet, as I shall argue, Bernstein’s view fails to capture what I understand to be crucial in re-thinking the human-animal relation and its relation to politics and art. Bernstein downplays the transformative aspect of Adorno’s thought, both politically and what we might call *mimetically*, by reifying the place of the human and so attempting to stamp the whole of the natural world with a human imprint in order for it to have ethical weight. Moreover, this view demands of the individual the kind of human activity which is itself linked to its own domination, for it bases the possibilities available to ethical life on an idealized notion of the human subject, one for whom the exercise of its basic capacities are precisely what sustain the order to which it is enthralled. On my reading, Adorno is not trying to find new foundations for the

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<sup>843</sup> Ibid., 191; 197.

<sup>844</sup> Ibid., 4.

ethical life modernity has displaced and so reconstruct its meaning, but rather trying to theorize how one might live a life denied of such meaning.<sup>845</sup> To better grasp this life and its relation to animality, it is worth examining a critique leveled at Adorno and his work on enlightenment with Horkheimer that actually serves to capture this aspect of Adorno's thought better than does Bernstein.

In *Nihil Unbound*, Brassier seeks to advance the enlightenment project, arguing that the disenchantment of the world is not a debilitating calamity to be mourned, but rather an “invigorating vector of intellectual discovery” that ought to be celebrated, and taken to its radical fulfillment. The philosophical fulfillment of the enlightenment project, Brassier argues, involves affirming precisely the corrosive potential of reason that has disenchanted the world, and the nihilism that is its consequence, by “kicking away” the “pseudo-transcendental props” that persist in supporting the image of the world as possessing inherent meaning and value. With this comes the recognition of the mind-independence of the world and its utter indifference to human aims, which Brassier claims has been the triumph of modern scientific discovery.<sup>846</sup> From this perspective, human beings are less the source of enlightenment rationality than they are its temporary bearers, a transitory point in a narrative wherein an inhuman intelligence has awoken, and is “in the process of sloughing off its

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<sup>845</sup> Cf. Adorno, “The Actuality of Philosophy,” 32.

<sup>846</sup> Brassier, *Nihil Unbound*, xi; 26.

human mask.”<sup>847</sup> Reading Adorno (and Horkheimer) along the lines traced by Bernstein, their thought, as the rehabilitation of anthropomorphic nature and the “resurrection of Aristotelianism,”<sup>848</sup> is an anachronistic and romantic attachment to the human being and its pinning after a lost nature. For Brassier, following the inhuman trajectory of the enlightenment means to see the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* not in the terms of Homer’s *Odyssey*, that is, not as humanity’s homecoming in anthropomorphic nature, but rather in the terms of Cronenberg’s *The Fly*: “human reason is revealed to have been an insect’s waking dream.”<sup>849</sup>

To read Adorno *against* Bernstein, as attempting to think the animality of humans and how to live after the loss of meaning, *instead* of the resurrection of meaning through anthropomorphic nature, is to find, perhaps startlingly, Adorno and Brassier aligned on certain important points. Adorno is not, as Brassier would have it, simply on the side of those who would mourn the disenchantment of the world. Though Adorno can be said to mourn its disenchantment in that he sees the liquidation of features of the past that served to resist domination, such as individuality, as unhappy developments, and Adorno remains far less sanguine concerning the progressive possibilities of recent developments than Brassier, he nevertheless rejects the idea of returning to some pre-given structure of ethical life seen as *fundamental* in the way Bernstein would have it. Instead, Adorno aims to exploit the possibilities history has made available to thinking in the hope

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<sup>847</sup> Ibid., 48. A similar argument is made by Lyotard. See Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, 8-23.

<sup>848</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>849</sup> Ibid., 48; Cf. p. 244n13.

of seeing new life dawn. Of nihilism and its relation to this hope, Adorno writes: “A thinking man’s true answer to the question whether he is a nihilist would probably be ‘Not enough’—out of callousness, perhaps, because of insufficient sympathy with anything that suffers. Nothingness is the acme of abstraction, and the abstract is the abominable.”<sup>850</sup>

To begin unwinding the ideas bound in this quotation, we might note that while Adorno thinks the abstractions of thinking involve anesthetizing oneself to suffering in ways that can allow for one to continue going about one’s affairs despite one’s own suffering and the suffering of others, a *lack* of abstraction can also serve to trap one within one’s own particularities, and so fail to critically grasp the anaesthetizing role played by abstraction. In this sense abstraction is the only means of curing abstraction, for it is only through critical thinking—that corrosive element of reason—that the conceptual screen that would shield us from the world becomes visible. To maintain a critical disposition to the world and so continue to press against one’s own conceptual capture is, in a sense, to adopt a nihilist posture to the world, one which refuses satisfaction with any positive content: “Thought,” Adorno writes, “honors itself by defending what is damned as nihilism.” To this end, Adorno claims that “true nihilists” are those who would oppose this nihilism—that is, the nihilism that sees the emptiness of all conceptual structures that has accompanied modernity—with the meanings

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<sup>850</sup> *ND*, 380.

and values of the past. Against such attempts, Adorno insists on persisting in the critical negativity of thought that would reject these “faded positivities,”<sup>851</sup> striving instead toward its own fulfillment.

Adorno’s thoughts on nihilism gesture toward his critique of anthropology and the concept of humanity produced therein, and serve to align his attempt to see the animality of the human through what we see to be most human with Brassier’s comment on human reason being the dream of an insect. Though Adorno will occasionally employ conventional rhetorical tropes that make pejorative reference to human characteristics as being “brute” or animalistic in some sense,<sup>852</sup> there is an important tendency in Adorno’s thought that interprets those capacities that are traditionally held to be most human as in fact animal, thus undermining anthropocentric accounts of the world. For instance, while Adorno and Horkheimer claim that the “hypertrophy of the cerebral organ” in human beings is well-established enough to be considered more than “a freak event in natural history,” they nevertheless insist on thinking of human beings as kinds of animals whose technological prowess must be understood as an extension of the aggressive drives mobilized to self-preservation, just as is found in other animals.<sup>853</sup> Likewise, Adorno reads the history of the transformations of economic forms described by Marx as analogous to the rise and fall of different

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<sup>851</sup> *ND*, 381.

<sup>852</sup> Tellingly, these references occur more frequently in his lectures than his published writings. See for example *PMP* 132, 162, 174; *MCP*, 77; *ND*, 36.

<sup>853</sup> *DE*, 184.

animal species over millions of years.<sup>854</sup> Perhaps most important for this view, however, is Adorno's insistence on describing the mental life of human beings, that which is traditionally considered to be most definitive of humankind and so thought to separate humans from other animals, in terms of animal life.

For Adorno, not only can ideology be likened to the rage a lion must have for the antelope it attacks,<sup>855</sup> and psychological pathologies can be likened to the mutations suffered by dinosaurs prior to their extinction,<sup>856</sup> but the "sovereign mind" and its subjectivity must be seen to be entirely embedded in "the animal life of the species."<sup>857</sup> As noted above, Adorno thinks thinking must be understood as the particular way humans evolved in their struggle for self-preservation: establishing correspondences between concepts and objects allowed for humans to identify objective continuities in their worlds that signaled possible threats and aids to self-preservation. Yet with this capacity has come a kind of mental captivity, one that deadens our experience of particularity, which is to say, one that deadens us to suffering. Recall that to suffer is not simply to experience pain, but to experience as such—to *undergo*: it is at once to persist in time and to be changed by it, in the particular manner that one does as a living creature. In this sense suffering involves an indelibly passive element, for even where we are active, to experience our own activity as self-changing we must be

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<sup>854</sup> *ND*, 356.

<sup>855</sup> *ND*, 349; Cf. *ND*, 22.

<sup>856</sup> Adorno, "Opinion Delusion Society," *CM*, 111.

<sup>857</sup> *ND*, 22.

worked upon by this activity—we must *suffer* it, and our selves, as the complexes we contribute to creating both in resistance to and adoption of the identities foisted upon us by our societies. Insofar as we tend to experience objects through concepts, the particularity of the suffering we witness is continually mediated and categorized within the forms of thought we have inherited through our cultures and languages, which in turn shape and are shaped by the vicissitudes of our societies.

In this sense, Adorno writes, our “mental captivity is exceedingly real.”<sup>858</sup> The structure of individual consciousness and the limits it imposes on experience repeats the social captivity of the individual, whose very notion of the individual freedom being trampled by society is itself a projection born of these social relations. Adorno thus likens this mental captivity to armored animals, such as the triceratops and the rhinoceros, which seem trapped beneath the weight of their weapons forged in the struggle for self-preservation, and which they are compelled to drag around, as a kind of “ingrown prison which they seem—anthropomorphically, at least—to be trying vainly to shed.”<sup>859</sup> Adorno even suggests that this “imprisonment in their survival mechanism” might explain the

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<sup>858</sup> “On Subject and Object,” *CM*, 252.

<sup>859</sup> *ND*, 180; “On Subject and Object,” *CM*, 252. Adorno’s use of the image of the rhinoceros here may be the influence of Eugène Ionesco’s *Rhinocéros*, to which he makes reference at *AT*, 347. Though Ionesco’s play appears to cling to some sort of humanism by giving lines ridiculing humanism to those characters who transform into animals, only Berenger, the character most poorly adjusted to the demands of being human and who claims to lack “will-power [*volonté*],” manages to resist transforming into a rhinoceros. Those who triumph the will and reason are the first to succumb. See Eugène Ionesco, “Rhinoceros,” in *Plays: Volume IV*, trans. Derek Prouse (London: John Calder, 1964).

animal's ferocity—both for the rhinoceros, and for the human being. Like the armor of the rhinoceros, humans have inherited their conceptual imprisonment as both a defense mechanism and a weapon, and insofar as they are so equipped to defend and to attack, it is really no surprise that they produce societies that require one do both in order to survive. However, in seeing the animality of this condition, that “the human being is a result, not an *eidōs*,”<sup>860</sup> a response to certain historical pressures which are, conceivably, subject to change, then we might envision the evolution of an animal other than the one we are, one other than the animal constituted in resistance to the threats of starvation, exposure, and violence.

Insofar as the animal can be seen as the non-identical of the human, attempting to reveal in the identical concept of the human what is non-identical to it is to see human activity as being animal activity. Put differently: Adorno uses animal objectivity to limit the pretension to absoluteness of human subjectivity. This turning of the human toward the animal has three important socio-political consequences. Firstly, in seeing human activity as animal activity, human pretensions to sovereignty and autonomy are revealed to be contingent, fragile and transient. That is, what is understood to be most fundamentally and irreducibly human has come to be the way it is and remains as such only as a response to certain conditions that could be otherwise. Secondly, and following

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<sup>860</sup> “On Subject and Object,” *CM*, 258.

from this first consequence, the human is found to be most animal precisely where it had thought to make its break from animality, thus revealing a continuity between human reason and animal aggression: that is, we are most *inhuman* precisely where we see ourselves to be most human. Thus understanding ourselves to be uniquely human and so uniquely possessing reason, faith, or even historical dynamism is to lock ourselves in a particular form of life no less free from compulsion than “the industriousness of ants and bees, or the grotesque struggles of the beetle as it carries a blade of grass.”<sup>861</sup>

Lastly, if we are to resist the inhumanity of humanity that serves to trap humans as humans, the inhumanity that would reconcile us to societies wherein we are compelled to struggle for our survival, we must then draw upon those capacities seen as *merely* animal—those that would be excluded from the heights of what is considered most definitively human. Drawing on animal capacities in this way is what it means to live in a world where humanity is inhumane, where historical events have served to rupture the correspondence between ethical meaning and the daily activities one must suffer to live. It is for this reason that Adorno writes that against the “caricature of freedom” offered by personality, what is left to morality today is “to try to live so that one may believe himself to have been a good animal.”<sup>862</sup> Our own animality is the necessary starting point for the resistance against inhumanity, for it at once allows us to acknowledge our

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<sup>861</sup> Adorno, “Marginalia to Theory and Praxis,” *CM*, 262; Cf. *ND*, 369.

<sup>862</sup> *ND*, 299. Cf. Adorno, “The Problem of a New Type of Human Being,” 465-467.

own inhumanity and complicity with its order, while drawing upon that which shrinks from the grammar of that order—that which resists what is seen to be definitively human.<sup>863</sup>

For Adorno, we are all *Gregor Samsa*—Gregor's triumph is to have realized his own animality, to have come directly into contact with the fact of human reason as the waking dream of an insect. Where Gregor fails is that he refuses to pursue the challenge his animality presents to human compulsion, attempting instead to live his human life as before. The impossibility of living as an insect in a human world, of circulating between the points of what would be human meaning but which can no longer apply, is one for which Gregor pays with his life. Brassier's critique of Adorno actually serves to follow this particular vector of his thought more closely than Bernstein. There can be no new correspondence between ethical meaning and the daily activities we pursue for self-preservation without the concomitant transformation of society, and with it, all that is considered human.

### *The Utopian Animal*

I have argued that for Adorno those activities considered to be most definitively human are the spellbound attempts to repress animality, and are thus continuous with the compulsion traditionally thought to animate animal life. This insight

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<sup>863</sup> *MCP*, 136.

serves to underscore the inhumanity of the human, the reason for Adorno's rejection of humanism as the promotion of certain fundamentally human capacities. However, revealing the animality within humanity is not simply to discard humanity because of its animality, as if humanity were simply a lie, nor is it to reveal the necessity of overcoming this animal condition in a *truly human* one, for as we have seen, insofar as the promise of humanity is a humanity without boundaries or limitations, it is not humanity at all.

To better understand this point we might again make reference to Hegel and Adorno's critique of him. As we have seen, Adorno criticizes the elements of theodicy and teleology in Hegelian philosophy, arguing that these limit Hegelian dialectic to the positive unfolding of that which is originally given. While this unfolding may pass *through* the negative, it must necessarily conclude with the positive reconciliation of this negativity to a whole that was already contained in its origin as embryo. Through his utopian or messianic displacement of the origin and with it the possibilities available to thinking, Adorno claims that his negative dialectic avoids the false reconciliation of the Hegelian variety: a negation of a negation does not result in a positive, Adorno claims, but rather serves to transform the whole in which negative and positive were opposed.<sup>864</sup>

To think that the negation of inhumanity results in humanity is to follow the logic that Adorno rejects—this idea that the negation of a negation results in a

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<sup>864</sup> ND, 159-161.

positive—by seeing the imperfect or negative humanity that needs the passage of history to become what it positively is. However, Adorno thinks what can legitimately be called human, those acts of resistance that gesture toward the arrest of violence and compulsion that I called *negative humanity* above, always already were the negation of the inhuman. A second negation, the negation of this negation, is thus not to choose humanity over inhumanity, but to negate the very structure in which each are constituted in opposition to each other. The persistence of negativity here, Adorno’s “nihilist” posture, is thus an attempt to transform the very constellation of possibilities in which the human has come to be, and so gesture toward a new form of life. As Adorno requires the third term of *reconciled humanity* to obstruct the reconciliation of negative humanity with inhumanity in a positive order constituted through their permanent struggle, we get intimations of what reconciled humanity might look like through its refractions in instances of resistance, and as I shall argue in the next chapter, in the experience of works of art. As I shall argue in this section, however, the link between Adorno’s utopianism and animality, seen in these flashes of animality, confirm that reconciled humanity would be an animal other than human, and that the socio-political transformation required to end compulsion would free humanity of its own constitutive fetters.

In understanding Adorno’s reconciled humanity to be a kind of animal, it is important to realize that this animality is not a return to some pre-human,

animal past. With Horkheimer, Adorno writes that animals are without concepts, and as such trapped in a perpetual present that, uninterrupted by thought, is “dreary and depressive.”<sup>865</sup> Though we have seen that human reason must itself be seen as an animal drive, we have also seen that to see the human as an *eidos* possessed of certain fundamental capacities is to trap what we call human in a state much like this perpetual present. It is reflection that might serve to interrupt this cycle and so propel humans toward their transformation,<sup>866</sup> and for this reflection concepts are necessary. However, in order for this reflection to displace rather than reinforce the conceptual capture of human identity, it needs to stem from an experience of the non-identity of the human, which was found to be the animal, or animality. It is for this reason that Adorno, in conversation with Horkheimer, will claim that although our “animal phase” can no longer be retrieved, animals might nevertheless “teach us what happiness is.” To this, Horkheimer responds that freedom is to “achieve the condition of an animal at the level of reflection,” which he links to the possibility of no longer having to work.<sup>867</sup> Adorno further refines this point in a later conversation, stating: “Philosophy exists in order to redeem what you see in the look of an animal,” which he links to the negation of the interests of self-preservation.<sup>868</sup>

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<sup>865</sup> *DE*, 205.

<sup>866</sup> *ND*, 345.

<sup>867</sup> *TNM*, 16.

<sup>868</sup> *TNM*, 71.

In these passages, we see the animal as a symbol of what is blocked by the concept of humanity, but its redemption requires both conceptual thinking, and the transformation of society. Specifically, this transformation would be one to end the struggle for self-preservation in which the human was constituted, and that formed the ground on which our interests have been discernible and the organization of our lives through labor has depended. The animal in this sense, what is seen in its gaze, is the possibility of living a life unsubordinated to instrumental interests. It is for this reason that “Utopia goes disguised in the creatures,”<sup>869</sup> in animal life, for the lives of animals are without human purpose, and so not directed toward necessary ends organized beneath the banner of exchange. In this sense, what the animal reveals is the possibility of *individuality*, that hallmark of the most definitively human, whose gross parody is thought to be for whom modern Western societies are organized.<sup>870</sup>

The possibility of this individuality and its denial are visible in the tiger “endlessly pacing back and forth in his cage,”<sup>871</sup> and its promise can be found in zoological gardens, which Adorno claims are like the bourgeois equivalent of Noah’s Ark, preparing for the flood that the bourgeoisie itself precipitates. The zoological garden, and the imagination it stirs, exhibits the hope that animals might survive “the wrong” done to them by humans, and so “give rise to a better

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<sup>869</sup> *MM*, A146, 228.

<sup>870</sup> *ND*, 343.

<sup>871</sup> *MM*, A74, 116.

species, one that finally makes a success of life”<sup>872</sup>—a hope that likewise reflects the human desire for the end of its capture. It is in fact this *human* capture to which Adorno alludes when he writes that the eyes of apes “seem objectively to mourn that they are not human,”<sup>873</sup> for insofar as humans are no less trapped in a form of life they take to be the measure of good, they might only recognize their own capture through the capture of other animals.

In this way, we might liken humanity to the stupidity [*Dummheit*] of which Adorno and Horkheimer write in the concluding fragment of *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. “Stupidity is a scar,” that “marks a spot where the awakening play of muscles has been inhibited instead of fostered”: it marks “the points where hope has come to a halt.”<sup>874</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer take the feeler of the snail, vulnerably stretching out into the world in curiosity, as their “emblem of intelligence,” for it is only in seeking out new directions in this manner that the animals that exist came to be as they are, and it is only insofar as extending further into this beyond is repulsed that they must remain as they are, continuing along the same beaten paths. Self-same humanity might in this way be seen as the emblem of stupidity, the ossification of intelligence that would turn away from the possibility of a new form of life dawning, a form which, through the “feeler” of intelligence, of reflection, “might emerge from the clearly formed

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<sup>872</sup> *MM*, A74, 115.

<sup>873</sup> *AT*, 113.

<sup>874</sup> *DE*, 214.

species to which the individual creature belongs.”<sup>875</sup> Reconciled humanity, then, represents a state wherein humanity has laid down its humanity, where the particular traits thought to be definitively human and those considered to be common with other animals have been drawn upon such as to bring about a new form of life. Though the coring of human meaning by enlightened modernity has reduced the “divine parody” of humanity to its animality, it is here in our animality that hope persists, for only in “the feeble tail-wagging of a dog” might “the ideal of nothingness evaporate.”<sup>876</sup> That is, only our animality can cure the nihilism that has reduced humans to animality, and only as some new kind of animal might reconciled humanity become a positive reality, and so leave the dynamism of struggle behind.

Perhaps the most concise statement of this utopian shedding of human dynamism is to be found in the aphorism entitled *Sur l'eau* in *Minima Moralia*. There Adorno speculates upon the possible ends of a utopian “true society,” claiming that the insistence on the positing of ends and the bustling mobilization to meet them is a reflection of bourgeois values and the concept of nature these presuppose: dynamism is itself an “anthropological reflex of the laws of production.”<sup>877</sup> Against the natural persistence of dynamism, Adorno imagines a world were humans are without want, and whose own enjoyment is thus transformed beyond its present manner of organization and maximization.

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<sup>875</sup> *DE*, 213.

<sup>876</sup> *ND*, 380.

<sup>877</sup> *MM*, A100, 156.

Rather than throwing themselves into “the conquest of strange stars,” such a humanity might be content in an animal existence, “lying on the water and looking peacefully at the sky.”<sup>878</sup> This, Adorno suggests, would be true peace, the “eternal peace” of a “fulfilled utopia”—one that is free not only of socio-political domination, but one free even of the compulsion that inheres in what we consider the natural psychological structure of humanity.<sup>879</sup> In order to grasp the two layers of the transformation involved in such a utopia, of society and of the individual, Adorno pairs two wildly different texts: Maupassant’s account of sailing between St. Tropez and Monte Carlo, *Sur l’eau*, from which the aphorism takes its name, and Kant’s philosophical sketch, “Perpetual Peace,” referenced by Adorno toward the end of the same aphorism. Together these texts form a constellation whose particular combination of terms, like the lock of Adorno’s safe-deposit box, serves to fly open to the possibility that would otherwise remain hidden.<sup>880</sup> These texts, and the relation between them Adorno constructs, are worth examining in greater detail.<sup>881</sup>

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<sup>878</sup> *MM*, A100, 156-157.

<sup>879</sup> Though Chrostowska claims the relation here between utopia and animality cannot be taken literally, it might be asked here exactly what “literally” would mean in this context. Though Adorno does indeed rely on simile to illustrate that life in his utopia would be experienced *like* animals experience it, even a humanity transformed to some other kind of animal would still be a particular kind of animal undoubtedly different from other animals as apes, dogs, and porpoises are different from one another. Why this would mean that the subject of Adorno’s utopia would not *literally* be some kind of animal is unclear. See S.D. Chrostowska, “Thought Woken by Memory,” *New German Critique* 118 Vol.40.1 (2013), 110n61.

<sup>880</sup> Recall *ND*, 163; “The Actuality of Philosophy,” 35.

<sup>881</sup> Schweppenhäuser also remarks on Adorno’s use of Maupassant and Kant in this aphorism; however, he does not develop how each relate to the other (such that their meaning is found in this relation) in the way I attempt here. Moreover, his interpretation of the reference to Maupassant depends on an episode in the 1876 version of the story, rather than the story Maupassant published under the same title in 1888. In the

As its title indicates, Kant's essay "Perpetual Peace" is a kind of theoretical plan for securing lasting peace, here understood principally as that between states. To briefly summarize the most important points of this essay to my present discussion, Kant claims that war is a result of the lawless condition in which states and their interests exist in opposition to each other, and that this condition would be ended with the establishment of a world republic wherein each state, like an individual in the state of nature, would renounce the lawlessness of their pure freedom and so bring themselves beneath the yoke of public coercion, or international law. However, Kant claims that this solution is unlikely because it runs contrary to the "will of the nations" and their own understanding of their particular rights—that is, their commitment to the sovereignty of their own state and its particular laws.<sup>882</sup> Consequently, Kant advances a kind of second-best solution, one that might *take men as they are, and laws as they might be*.

Kant's second-best solution is to establish a federation for the promotion of peace that would aim to end all war by securing the sovereign rights of individual states, though without binding them to the coercive power of a higher

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1876 version, the peaceful experience of being on the water suddenly turns to terror as the sailor finds his boat caught on something below the surface and rendered unmovable. He regains his composure after his boat is dislodged only to discover later that it had been the corpse of an old woman with a stone tied around her neck that had weighed down his anchor. For his part, Adorno makes no attempt to clarify which version of *Sur l'eau* his own appropriation refers. I base my reading below on the 1888 version and the account of animality therein, though the experience of peace as dependent or bound up with the suffering of others persists in both versions, thus requiring the mediation of Kant, I argue. See Schweppenhäuser, *Theodor W. Adorno*, 87-89.

<sup>882</sup> Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace," in *Political Writings*, ed. H.S. Reiss, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 104-105.

law, as would a world republic. Kant envisions this pacific federation as balancing the power-seeking and self-serving inclinations of states against one another: each would be held to recognize the sovereign rights of other states and so abstain from waging war upon them, for fear of losing recognition of its own sovereign rights, and so being attacked in turn. In this way, “peace is created and guaranteed by an equilibrium of forces and a most vigorous rivalry.”<sup>883</sup> No longer dependent on moral improvement, but relying instead on the power of nature and the inclinations Kant thinks it has given human beings, such an arrangement would accommodate even “a nation of devils,” so long as these devils were sufficiently rational to understand how this arrangement promoted their own particular interests.<sup>884</sup>

While the reading of Adorno I have pursued above places him in agreement with Kant that “perpetual peace” must be the goal toward which humanity strives, and that this peace must inevitably be rooted in something like natural inclinations and require the transformation of political institutions, Adorno’s turn toward the animality of humanity keeps him from a full endorsement of Kant’s position. Kant’s theorization of the possibility of perpetual peace depends on an understanding of the human being as a creature divided between its free will and the capacity for reason, on the one hand, and the mechanism of its nature on the other. Consequently, while the world republic

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<sup>883</sup> Kant, “Perpetual Peace,” 114.

<sup>884</sup> Kant, “Perpetual Peace,” 112.

requires that humans cultivate morality by aligning their particular wills with the universal exigencies of reason and adapting themselves to law, the pacific federation organizes human life such that nothing more is required of human beings than that the mechanism of their nature pursue the course it is bound to pursue. However, for Adorno this arrangement means Kant has bought peace at the price of freedom, for he makes human nature the basis of his political recommendations, rather than seeing it to be part of the mechanisms of coercion.

Insofar as Adorno sees what we consider natural to be historically produced, to follow the blindly mechanical workings of one's nature is to acquiesce to the compulsions that animate one's society at a particular point in history, and which are required for the perpetuation of socio-political domination. We might say there is peace in Kant's pacific federation, perhaps, but it is the peace of the vanquished and unfree. Kant's world republic fares little better: here freedom is found only insofar as one is capable of subordinating one's natural inclinations to those of the whole. Elsewhere Kant candidly puts this process of adapting one's particularity to the necessary universality in terms of the human being requiring "a master to break his self-will and force him to obey a universally valid will under which everyone can be free." Or more bluntly: "man is *an animal who needs a master*."<sup>885</sup> As we have seen, Adorno considers such statements to be the anthropological reflexes of social domination, and for

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<sup>885</sup> Immanuel Kant, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose," in *Political Writings*, ed. H.S. Reiss, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 46.

this reason speculates that a free humanity will be free even of the will.<sup>886</sup> In this light, Adorno's turn toward the non-identical of the human, the animal, can be seen as an attempt to draw upon Kant's insights regarding the possibility of a perpetual peace without having to sacrifice freedom. To this end, he requires an experience of freedom that is animal in the sense of being unsubordinated to the exigencies of the will, and yet something other than the compulsive activity of natural mechanism. Adorno finds such an experience in Maupassant's *Sur l'eau*.

In the 1888 version of *Sur l'eau*, Maupassant recalls a leisurely voyage by sail between St. Tropez and Monte-Carlo, reflecting on everything from the wind, war, and human nature and society, all of which he prefaces with the disclaimer that his trip provided him with the opportunity to see nothing more than "water, sun, cloud, and rocks," which gave him no more than the simple thoughts one has, borne "drowsily along on the cradle of the waves."<sup>887</sup> Not only does this preface recall Adorno's utopian image of an animal "lying on the water, and looking peacefully at the sky," but Maupassant's critical view of humanity and his celebration of animal solidarity resonate deeply with Adorno's turn to animality. In characteristic hyperbole, Maupassant claims one would need to be "blind and besotted by stupidity and vanity" to think that one is "anything more than an animal." We human beings are, for Maupassant, "shut-up, imprisoned inside ourselves" and our vain sense of superiority: in reality, the human being is but "a

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<sup>886</sup> ND, 264. This point can also be read as a polemic against Gehlen's anthropology, which depends on a radically un-Kantian conception of the will to define humanity. See Gehlen, *Man*, 358; 360.

<sup>887</sup> Guy de Maupassant, *Afloat*, trans. Douglass Parmée (New York: New York Review Books, 2008), 2.

two-legged insect.”<sup>888</sup> It is this vanity that blinds us to our own barbarity, most clearly visible in the efforts humans exert waging war. For these efforts, Maupassant writes that “[a]mong all the species, the human race is the most frightful [*affreuse*] of all,”<sup>889</sup> thus performing an inversion of Sophocles’ choral ode to the *deinos* of *anthropos* in *Antigone*: through this *affreuse*, lacking as it is the double meaning of both fear *and* wonder found in *deinos*, Maupassant refuses to celebrate human power, finding in it instead only cause for contempt.

In rejecting humanity in this way, Maupassant can only feel himself to have escaped the dreariness of existence by hurling his body “like an animal” into the pleasures of life, loving the sky, forests, rocky crags, tall grass, and clear water like a bird, a wolf, a chamois, a horse, and a fish without being *uplifted*—that is, without finding in them his humanity, but rather loving these only as a “brute beast.”<sup>890</sup> It is this love that Maupassant feels for these aspects of the world that bring him a feeling of peace and solidarity for other animals, and this love grows from his own experience of himself as an animal non-identical to his humanity. It is this animal experience of peace as solidarity that is missing from Kant’s perpetual peace and its rational cessation of hostilities. Yet this is not to make Maupassant into a simple critic of Kant, for in placing *Sur l’eau* in constellation with “Perpetual Peace,” Adorno also delivers Maupassant the animal to be broken by Kant the master. Though Maupassant spurns the aristocratic love of battle,

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<sup>888</sup> Maupassant, *Afloat*, 22; 25-26.

<sup>889</sup> *Ibid.*, 60. Cf. Guy de Maupassant, *Sur l’eau* (Paris: Encre, 1979), 100.

<sup>890</sup> Maupassant, *Afloat*, 37.

there remain three elements of his misanthropy and celebration of animality that echo the aristocratic alliance with animals found in the world of poetic myth that Adorno uses Kant to disarm: a disinterest in questions of equality; a belief in the unchanging nature of human animality and progress; and a sense of the hopelessness of politics.

With respect to equality, Maupassant's aristocratic sensibilities allow him to praise the life of solitude despite the company of two sailors who obey his orders, fantasize about a luxurious life including the ownership of slaves and a harem, and complain about the ugliness of peasants.<sup>891</sup> Insofar as Kant insists that the possibility of perpetual peace is tied to Republican government and the equality made possible therein,<sup>892</sup> the importance Kant places on establishing political institutions provides a critique of the experience of animality that would fail to translate itself into a politics. With respect to politics and the question of progress, Maupassant claims that "man never changes," and for this reason despite the evils of war and the monstrosities perpetuated by governments of all stripes he readily acknowledges, Maupassant can only imagine that humans will continue to bear the burden of these "hateful customs" and "criminal prejudices."<sup>893</sup> Like in the *Sur l'eau* of 1876, Maupassant finds the experience of freedom toward the object, of peace with nature, inseparably linked to human misery.

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<sup>891</sup> Ibid., 9; 53-54; 61.

<sup>892</sup> Kant, "Perpetual Peace," 99.

<sup>893</sup> Maupassant, *Afloat*, 25; 31.

In opposition to the endless turning of the mythic wheel of peace and violence, Kant links the compulsion of mechanistic nature with progress, arguing that the conflicts brought about through the natural inclinations of human beings can be turned toward human progress and the possibility of a perpetual peace, even if Adorno rejects certain details of this conception.<sup>894</sup> Moreover, for Kant, this progress necessarily involves a kind of political solution to the evils of war in a way that Maupassant cannot grasp. In this way, Kant serves to ‘break’ Maupassant’s animality, less in the sense of domestication than in the sense of showing it to be radically incomplete without political direction that would make the experience of this animality more than one only available to some at the expense of others. For his part, Maupassant’s animality shows Kant’s conception of peace to lack the experience that would make his perpetual peace something other than empty form, and allow for a freedom Kant’s peace would not permit—a freedom without coercion.

In this sense, the lock is sprung, and the utopian content revealed: we are returned to a concept of a *political animal*, though this animal can only be the product of political struggle which ceases to be struggle, the utopian possibility that guides and might emerge from political struggle but lies beyond it, not the basic set of capacities that serve unchanging to condition this struggle. In placing Kant and Maupassant in constellation, Adorno works against the tendency that

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<sup>894</sup> Kant, “Perpetual Peace,” 113; “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose,” 50.

sees politics as a necessarily human affair, as it is in Kant, or that sees animality as a kind of escape from politics, as it is in Maupassant. Both sides of this tendency, it might be said, depend on the flattened understanding of Aristotle that sees the human being as a political animal, to the exclusion of other animals. In bringing Kant and Maupassant together, Adorno returns to the question of the political animal posed by Aristotle, but now transformed: the problem is no longer how to establish the political supremacy of what is best in humanity, but of rescuing animality from its clutches, a rescue that would entail a radical transformation of humanity. Through Adorno's conception of reconciled humanity we see that a political animal is what we might become, not what we always already were. If Homer's *Odyssey* chronicles the primeval history of the subject in its return into its most fully developed form, humanity, then Maupassant's voyage, read in relation to Kant's "Perpetual Peace," allows us to glimpse a voyage that does not return to its source, but arrives rather at a foreign destination.

If reconciled humanity was itself the concept whose negativity served to preserve the negativity of negative humanity, and glimpses of which were revealed in the resistance to force, then even the resistance of negative humanity, in its striving towards reconciled humanity, was already the animal non-identity of inhuman personality. In this way, the realization of reconciled humanity, the creation of an animal heretofore unseen, must require the cultivation of animality

toward its necessary political direction. For the utopian animal that is reconciled humanity to become a positive reality, we must therefore indeed learn to live as good animals—we need a practice of animality directed toward the possibility of future transformation. The relation of this moral vocation to politics, and the place of art in this relation, will be the subject of the next chapter.

## Chapter Fifteen: The Politics of an Aesthetic Animal

In a now infamous note to his lectures on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Alexandre Kojève claims that with the realization of the struggles that animate history, the human as *Action*, that is, the dynamic negating of the given, would become superfluous. This cessation of Action would mean the end of revolutions, wars, and even philosophy: the human being would survive itself, in a sense, remaining alive as an animal now in harmony with nature, no longer a Subject opposed to an Object. Of the lives of these post-historical animals, Kojève writes provocatively:

If Man becomes an animal again, his arts, his loves, and his play must also become purely 'natural' again. Hence it would have to be admitted that after the end of History, men would construct their edifices and works of art as birds build their nests and spiders spin their webs, would perform musical concerts after the fashion of frogs and cicadas, would play like young animals, and would indulge in love like adult beasts.<sup>895</sup>

The image painted here shares an affinity with the animal aspect of Adorno's speculations upon utopia; however, Kojève goes on to revise this position in two important ways. Rather than seeing this state of post-historical animality as one lying in a communist future, as he claims to have thought in 1946, Kojève would come to believe that history had in fact already ended with "Robespierre-Napoleon," and that the subsequent world wars, revolutions, and anti-colonial

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<sup>895</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. Allan Bloom, trans. James H. Nichols, Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 158-159n6.

struggles for independence served simply to align the rest of the world with the basic system of recognition attained by its vanguard in Revolutionary France.

However, this revision does not signal Kojève's dismissal of his claim regarding the return to animality. Rather, Kojève claims this return to animality is already an accomplished fact, for life is no longer organized around the existential crisis of recognition that defined humanity, but rather has become focused instead upon raising living standards, the acquisition of consumer goods, and the general satisfaction of "animal" needs seen in both the United States and the post-war communist bloc. For Kojève, "the Russians and the Chinese are only Americans who are still poor but are rapidly proceeding to get richer."<sup>896</sup> Insofar as American capitalism is thought to be more capable of providing these creature comforts, the American way of life is the life most suited to the post-historical period—that is, it is the most suited to an *animal* way of life, devoid of metaphysical concerns.

The second revision Kojève made after a visit to Japan in 1959. Claiming that Japan had already experienced three centuries of post-historical existence, rather than returning to the kind of animality found in American gratification, the Japanese had adopted instead a kind of aesthetic "*Snobbery*."<sup>897</sup> That is, the Japanese had adopted formalized values rooted in aesthetic tastes rather than the simple pursuit of animal satisfaction, thus making them human insofar as the

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<sup>896</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 161n6.

<sup>897</sup> Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, 161-162n6

separation between form and content maintains the subject-object distinction, yet empty of the historical content that characterized human struggle in the West. Rather than returning to animality, then, in Japan the human persists—but as a *style*, rather than a substance.

While it may be tempting here to simply dismiss, as most do, Kojève's brand of *high-altitude* history, a perspective from which the complex political entanglements represented in the innovations and failures of Robespierre and Napoleon appear as a single event separated only by a hyphen, or that sees the tumult and horror of the twentieth century to be no more than the worrying of details whose essential realization proceeded them by a century. Moreover, such grand brush strokes may appear to be out of line in a discussion of Adorno, turned as he was to contact with objects in all their micrological detail. However, Kojève's speculations on the end of history, its relation to animality, and the revisions of his position, all present important insights for my discussion of Adorno and the animality of reconciled humanity.

Kojève's speculations not only posit a utopia lying at the end of the history of struggle wherein the human has become a different kind of animal than what it always had been, but he then complicates this utopia by claiming it to already exist, to "force" this reconciliation, as it were. But Kojève accomplishes this forced reconciliation only at the price of producing an excessive remainder, the Japanese example, thus making his post-historical animal utopia only one among

at least two alternatives. Thus it appears that for Kojève one might choose to be an animal by adopting ways of life congruent with the satisfaction of animal needs, such as that supposedly found in the United States (or Russia/China!) or one might choose to be human, by insisting on living a life mediated by certain formal aesthetic strictures.

By *choosing*, here, I must be clear: Kojève is not suggesting that one might directly choose between human and animal at an individual level, as if these were simply lifestyles that might coexist within the same society; rather, the choice here is a political one, concerning the structure of society and the form of life it makes possible. The distinction between human and animal is here a question of how one would live, not simply in terms of the moral decisions that inform one's daily activities, but in the political organization that enables these decisions and makes possible different modes of life. In this way, we find Kojève's speculations on animality to also point toward the Aristotelian problematic and the particular way it relates ethics and politics: that is, the question of aligning the best life and the political organization that might sustain it. Though these conclusions, in bringing us back to Aristotle, would appear to raise serious problems for Kojève's claim that history and philosophy have come to an end,<sup>898</sup> for Adorno we might

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<sup>898</sup> For does not deciding between an animal and a human life in these senses imply the question that animates the very roots of philosophy, that is, *how ought I to live?*—and further, do not American animals and Japanese humans, if they are indeed two different kinds of being and so other to each other, need to *recognize* one another? That is, if America and Japan do indeed represent two different actualizations of post-historical being, then their otherness to each other demands recognition by this other, and so the continuation of history.

see this return as a challenge to the idea that reconciled humanity would be an animal other than human, and how this animal of the future might be linked to our animality in the present.

In taking our animality as the starting point of the political possibilities available today, and asking how one might live such as to say one had been a good animal, Adorno is suggesting the kind of moral cultivation that produces individuals both alike and unlike the manner advocated by Aristotle. Rather than cultivating those potentials thought to be most definitively human according to their natural distribution, Adorno, in recognizing that this nature is itself the socio-political result of the vicissitudes of history, shows that to cultivate one's humanity in this way is to reconcile oneself to society as it exists and the domination it perpetuates. Consequently, if one is to oppose this order, and strive instead to resist its inhumanity and so work to bring about the global subject that might transform society such that reconciled humanity—a new animal—might come into being, one must cultivate one's animality. Cultivating animality for Adorno is not simply about the satisfaction of animal needs in the sense given these by Kojève,<sup>899</sup> but rather concerns how we might orient thinking and acting in ways that oppose those enthralled to positive humanity, to the

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<sup>899</sup> Indeed, Hullot-Kentor claims that Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory* is a book "written in utter opposition to what we [Americans] are." That this book tends to be either polemically rejected or "rehabilitated" in various ways, typically rendering it less austere and more friendly to pop-culture and the culinary appropriation of art, speaks of the allergy of American "animality" to the kind of animality Adorno would cultivate. See Robert Hullot-Kentor, "Right Listening and a New Type of Human Being," in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, 195.

humanity that thinks itself already to have arrived. Elucidating this process of cultivation, as a kind of moral resistance linked to politics through art, is the task of this chapter.

Adorno, I argue, *like Aristotle*, sees the possible actualizations of one's animality to be linked to the mimetic comportment facilitated by the arts. However, for Adorno it is through the arts that the moral *resistance to humanity* is made possible, and it is through the arts that this moral resistance might become political in the sense of *precipitating change*—goals, which, as we have seen, were not Aristotle's. However, *mimesis* alone is not enough, for while the persistence of the mimetic impulse ensures that humans might become animals other than the ones they are, *mimesis* also serves an important role in making humans human in the first place, and continues in this role in reproducing the human as it is. Consequently, the mimetic impulse needs to be disrupted and set upon a different course: it needs to enter into a new relation with reason if it is to produce the human as some other animal.

The moral experience of this disruption, the moral impulse to something other than humanity, is what Adorno calls the *addendum (Hinzutretende)*, the corporal side of the will that relates reflex and activity. The addendum, as a kind of liminal space between the will and reflex, volition and reaction, is a kind of animal impulse entwined with the body, as the resistance of animality to the imposition of human aims upon the body. In this way, the addendum both

makes possible and undermines human thought and activity. Orienting thought and action around the addendum is to attempt to transform humanity through its animality, to orient the identity-producing activity of *mimesis* around the rupture of the non-identical in human constitution.

There are two sides to cultivating animality through the addendum, and both of which require for Adorno the intervention of the arts. The first side is what I call the *receptive* experience of artworks, which involves relating the passive moment of the “shudder,” the aesthetic analogue of the addendum, to the active moment of reflection in such a way as to resist the re-constitution of the human subject, and so to persist in one’s animality. This receptive experience, insofar as it involves the critical resistance to the violence and domination upon which the empirical world is built, I call moral. The second side is what I call the *productive* experience of artworks, which involves building on this reflection through practical activity. Here reason is deployed through technical procedures in order to invent new ways of expressing animal experience. Productively experiencing artworks thus involves their creation in accordance with moral experience, and where these artworks serve to contribute to the creation of a subject who might threaten the established order of the community, this experience can be called political. Together the receptive and productive experience of artworks serve to realign the relation between *mimesis* and reason

in what Adorno calls “aesthetic comportment,” the subject of which, seen in this light, cannot be considered human, but rather a new kind of animal.

Adorno’s attention to the experience fostered by artworks through both their reception and production is thus not only closely bound up with the releasing of animality from its human confines, but with elucidating the specific moral and political dimensions of this project. It is specifically the latter, the productive-political dimension of artistic experience, that has been overlooked in studies of Adorno’s aesthetics.<sup>900</sup> Adorno’s account of the receptive experience of artworks reverses the Aristotelian attempt to use the practice of *theoria* to reconcile animal to human by creating instead a *dissonance* from which the animal might resist the human. However, Adorno requires a productive-political dimension in order to break from Aristotle’s focus on the effects of art, and hence the division between those who embody the (human) ideal, and those who can only recognize this ideal. In theorizing a productive-political experience of artworks, Adorno abolishes the inequality produced and reconciled in Aristotle’s poetics, between the division of labor between artist and critic, and with it the possibility of drawing an analogy between the artistic avant-garde and a political vanguard. The importance of avant-garde art, or as I call it here, simply *new* art, remains, but it is the prerogative of all to experience it both receptively and

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<sup>900</sup> For example, Zuidervaart’s classic study overlooks this dimension when he argues that Adorno conceives of *praxis* in *Aesthetic Theory* primarily in terms of contemplation, and thus more or less equivalent to Aristotle’s *theoria*. On my reading, this basic affinity holds for the receptive experience of artworks, wherein Adorno reverses Aristotle, but with productive experience Aristotle is transcended. See Lambert Zuidervaart, *Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), 148-149.

productively. Though Adorno himself does not explicitly advocate that all become artists, his aesthetic theory removes the obstacles that ensure the division of labor that produces artists and critics as systematically distinct subjects. His aesthetic theory thus points in this direction, even if it does not announce it with a megaphone.

In this way, Adorno's taking up of the Aristotelian problematic concerning the relation between humans and animals, on the one hand, and art and politics, on the other, is not a return to or even a perpetuation of Aristotle. It is not, as Brassier would have it, a regressive slip into the mythic aspects of Aristotelianism that the enlightenment and modern scientific discovery have long outflanked. Rather, it is the utopian recovery of the fragments of Aristotelianism that would allow for him to speak to us from a future wherein the political animal has become *an aesthetic animal*—an animal no longer human. In this sense, Adorno provides the determinate negation of Aristotle, such that the promise made in Aristotle's philosophical enterprise is preserved in a transformed constellation of possibilities, unlike the abstract negation attempted by Nietzsche and Heidegger, who would have done with Aristotle and his problematic through their reversal. I will begin by examining Adorno's thoughts on *mimesis*, morality and politics, and their relation to the addendum before turning to the receptive and productive experiences of artwork that make up aesthetic comportment.

## *Mimesis*

*Mimesis*, of course, comes to us from the Ancient Greek. It is thus a foreign word, and all the more so for being part of a dead language—that is, there is no one living for whom *mimesis* is not foreign. Treating *mimesis* as a foreign word according to what Adorno has to say about the role of foreign words in language means that we should see Adorno’s use of *mimesis* to be an assault on the pretense of language to organic unity: when Adorno writes ‘*mimesis*,’ he is not simply referencing a tradition of aesthetic thought connected, in some way, to Aristotle and the Greeks, but he is at once haunting his own text with the destruction of that world—with the fall of democratic Athens and its absorption by the Hellenic empire, and the unfulfilled promises these might represent.<sup>901</sup> For Adorno, Aristotle’s is an aesthetics of effect, in collusion with the quietist tendencies toward privatization in Hellenism and the idea that art must serve as a kind of “surrogate satisfaction,” but at the same time it preserves a conception of individuality that might be turned against these.<sup>902</sup> Insofar as *mimesis* is a central concept to Aristotle’s aesthetics, it might be said to display this same duality: *mimesis* is both culpable in the production of the world as it is, yet retains something irreducible to the world as it is, and which might be solicited to transform the world as it is.

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<sup>901</sup> Cf. Edith Hall, “Is there a *Polis* in Aristotle’s *Poetics*?” 304-305.

<sup>902</sup> *AT*, 202; 238; “Marginalia to Theory and Praxis,” *CM*, 267.

In the presentation of Aristotle's conception of *mimesis* above, I argued that although Aristotle appears to suggest that *mimesis* is a fundamental human capacity, one of those most definitive in distinguishing humans from other animals, its humanity, or its entwinement with other human capacities, can only be recognized through that which *mimesis* has itself produced, such that these other human capacities cannot be known, and so cannot be said to exist, prior to mimetic production. In this way, it was argued that *mimesis* serves to crystallize the various capacities that come to be taken as the human ideal and measure of what is definitively human. Insofar as capacities similar but non-identical to the human ideal are frequently called animal, it is really a set of certain animal capacities that become human through *mimesis*, thus making *mimesis* a transformative process, not simply one wherein pre-existent potentials become actual. Though Adorno does not devote any specific text to the examination of Aristotle's conception of *mimesis*, his objections to other elements of Aristotle's aesthetics, and indeed, his insistence on its double character, can be understood as the result of Adorno turning a historicized conception of *mimesis* against Aristotle and the tradition strung together by those who would be his descendents. This appropriation of Aristotle comes to Adorno not simply through the channels established through the tradition of philosophical aesthetics, but also through somewhat more occult sources: those of Walter Benjamin.

In Benjamin's fragment "On the Mimetic Faculty," Aristotle is both present and absent, channeled as if through telepathy or séance, such that what speaks through Benjamin's text bears a resemblance to Aristotle, but is not identical to him.<sup>903</sup> Most explicitly, the title of Benjamin's piece invokes Aristotle by calling *mimesis* a faculty (*Vermögen*): like the English *faculty*, the German *Vermögen* refers to potency, potential, capacity, ability, and power, all of which capture something of Aristotle's *dunamis*, and likewise has been used to translate it.<sup>904</sup> In so linking *mimesis* to the psychological structure of human being, Aristotle's shadow falls over Benjamin's fragment. Moreover, Aristotle's voice reverberates in Benjamin's claim that "[n]ature creates similarities" through mimicry, and that it is the human being that possesses the "highest capacity for producing similarities." The human being is endowed by nature to produce "similarities," to mimic the world around and so "become and behave like something else," and is most natural in doing so.<sup>905</sup> In this way Benjamin takes as his starting point the rudiments of Aristotelian *mimesis*, along with the relation it would establish between nature, art, and human beings: humans are endowed by nature with certain potentials or *faculties*, which, as we have seen, require artifice in order to become actual and so display that which is naturally

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<sup>903</sup> Interestingly, in a letter to Gretel Adorno, Benjamin drew a connection between this fragment and an essay of Freud's on telepathy. See Michael Rosen, *On Voluntary Servitude* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 238.

<sup>904</sup> See for instance *Nikomachische Ethik*, trans. Eugen Rolfes (Leipzig: Meiner, 1911).

<sup>905</sup> Walter Benjamin, "On the Mimetic Faculty," in *Reflections*, ed. Peter Demetz, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Schocken, 1978), 333.

human. The goal of artifice is thus the actualization of nature, and so art must aim to mimic nature. However, as we have seen, what Aristotle calls nature is already historically produced, already mediated by artifice, though he is without the conceptual tools to express this. It is here where Benjamin's modifications of Aristotle begin.

Benjamin writes that the mimetic faculty, though natural, has a history, claiming that "neither mimetic powers nor mimetic objects remain the same in the course of thousands of years."<sup>906</sup> Both natural and historical, *mimesis* is here divided between the explicitly natural component, the "mimetic powers" thought to inhere in human beings, and the explicitly historical component, "mimetic objects," which might be considered both those things that one might mimic, and the formal rules or general shape taken by the exercise of the mimetic faculty in mimicking these things. As children humans learn to exercise their natural powers of *mimesis* through play, but this play is historically mediated both through the kinds of games—the sorts of play—in which children engage, and the particular things they would mimic: the shopkeeper, the teacher, the windmill, the train. As children grow they are assimilated to society mimetically, by reproducing its objects in their own activity, and in so doing society is both reproduced and transformed. As society changes, new mimetic objects are produced that set the boundaries that organize the exercise of the mimetic

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<sup>906</sup> Ibid.

faculty. The nature of the mimetic faculty thus exists only in its actualization in history, in mimetic objects, whose transformation precipitates transformation in the nature of the mimetic faculty.

For Benjamin, however, mimetic objects are not all alike in relation to the mimetic faculty: some objects demand more of it, encouraging the faculty to develop more broadly, to increase its power, while others demand less, and the mimetic current reduces to a trickle. A powerful mimetic faculty is one capable of forging creative connections between widely disparate objects or phenomena, which Benjamin calls “nonsensuous” similarities.<sup>907</sup> Such similarities persisted in past societies in the form of magical correspondences and occult practices, but the demands of the understanding of clarity, precision, and causality imposed by Enlightenment rationality have served to radically alter the ability to establish nonsensuous similarities. For Benjamin, the question thus becomes: are the changes wrought by the Enlightenment and modernity bringing about the decay of the mimetic faculty, or its transformation? Benjamin spends the rest of this short fragment trying to locate evidence that might indicate the latter, alighting on the relation the mimetic faculty has long established with language, even claiming that language is “the highest level of mimetic behavior and the most complete archive of nonsensuous similarity,”<sup>908</sup> and suggesting that it is through

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<sup>907</sup> Ibid., 334.

<sup>908</sup> Ibid., 336.

its “admittance” and expression in language that mimetic production managed to rid itself of its ties to magic.

This last claim is the most significant: if *mimesis* not only lives on in language but it is through its particular relation to language that magic was “liquidated,” then magic and the occult on one hand, and Enlightenment and modernity, on the other, might all be distilled as different combinations of particular linguistic conventions and innovations. This insight does not suggest that the difference between magical correspondences and Enlightenment rationality is simply their respective ways of using language, however, for both attempt to read their own “script” in objective phenomena, thus making them both ways of establishing nonsensuous similarities: or in other words, thus making them both forms of *mimesis*. In this way, Benjamin’s fragment appears to curl back upon itself, like a snake biting its own tail—the very search for the possibility of a future life for *mimesis* through the vicissitudes of society arrives at the conclusion that *mimesis* is itself the very possibility of its own vicissitudes. The mimetic faculty is revealed to occupy a kind of foundational status in the language, thought, and the reproduction of society, such as to be considered, though Benjamin himself does not explicitly push this far, a transcendental condition of their possibility. Benjamin’s attempt to historicize Aristotelian *mimesis* has thus accomplished this aim only at the price of making *mimesis* a permanent, if perpetually changing, feature of history.

Though Adorno will not *simply* adopt Benjamin's account of *mimesis*, and thus not *quite* follow Benjamin in his peculiar brand of "Marxist-Kantianism,"<sup>909</sup> this fragment will prove immensely important for Adorno. Apart from building on the natural-historical perspective Adorno outlined in "The Idea of Natural-History" a year earlier—in part already a response to other of Benjamin's writings—Adorno will inherit three specific points from Benjamin's discussion of *mimesis* that will inform his own. 1) *Mimesis* has contributed at a fundamental and largely unconscious level to making society what it is; 2) *mimesis* is internally mediated through its historical forms, thus it has been and still might be otherwise; and 3) the possibilities for mimetic transformation today exist within language, both in the sense of interpreting it such as to forge new correspondences between phenomena, and in the sense of finding new forms for expressing these correspondences. It is especially in this last point that we find the beginnings of the theoretical importance of art for Adorno, for art makes possible a range of non-conceptual affinities, and is in certain ways much like a language.<sup>910</sup>

With respect to where Adorno's account of *mimesis* differs from Benjamin's concerns the status of the subject-object distinction. For Adorno, the permanence of transcendental conditions, even historically mediated transcendental conditions, have something of the mythological about them, of

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<sup>909</sup> Rosen, *On Voluntary Servitude*, 238.

<sup>910</sup> *AT*, 54; *ND*, 18; Cf. Adorno, "Music and Language," in *Quasi una Fantasia*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso, 1998).

which he is deeply suspicious. Benjamin's account of *mimesis* as the dynamic interaction between a natural mimetic faculty (a mimetic subject) and historical mimetic objects theorizes *mimesis* in terms of the subject-object relation, and insofar as it treats this form of *mimesis* as a transcendental condition of language, thought, and history, makes this relation permanent. As we have seen, Adorno's turn toward the primacy of the object means acknowledging that the subject is also object; hence, the natural aspect of the mimetic faculty must be found to itself be an historical product.

If the mimetic faculty is produced historically, then it is either the product of some other, pre-mimetic drive, or *mimesis* is not originally a faculty, but something else which only becomes describable in terms of inherent faculties insofar as it becomes captured in the subject-object relation. Though these two possibilities are not necessarily mutually exclusive, Adorno adopts the latter strategy, and attempts to show *mimesis* to be a form of bodily comportment—an impulse [*Impuls*] rather than a faculty [*Vermögen*]<sup>911</sup>—that becomes tied up with concepts and identity-thinking as *imitation* [*Nachahmung*], through changes in what will become the human constitution. In this way *mimesis* is non-identical to the conceptual order of identity, and as such Adorno would turn toward it, attempting to 'make contact' with the mimetic element of non-identity, as he does

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<sup>911</sup> It is also notable that Adorno again highlights the mediated—and hence non-foundational or originary—character of this impulse in choosing the word *Impuls*, with its Latin root, rather than something “more German,” such as *Drang*, or *Trieb*, with its Freudian connotations, or even Gehlen's *Antrieb*, which his translators also render as “impulse.” See Gehlen, *Man*, 339.

animality. However, Adorno sees two distinct possibilities leading from such contact: a regressive possibility, one where conceptual thought is shunned in favor of mimetic myth-making, and a progressive one, one that would serve to displace and re-formulate the conceptual order based on mimetic experience. Adorno's commitment to some version of Enlightenment thinking leads him to attempt to theorize the possibility of the latter.

Though Adorno claims that there is an "indelible mimetic element in all cognition and all human practice,"<sup>912</sup> as noted in Chapter 13, *mimesis* is for Adorno the desire to make contact with the object prior to there being a clear distinction between the object to be contacted and the subject making contact; as such, the mimetic impulse is irreducible to the subject-object distinction, or its particular instantiation in the human subject.<sup>913</sup> That is, while a mimetic impulse might be discernible in "all human practice," this claim should not be seen to indicate that it is specifically or definitively human: *mimesis* is part of the other side of the conceptual order in which the human comes to be. It is, in this sense, animal. Yet it is the mimetic desire for contact that facilitates the grasping that is the violence of the conceptual order, and in which the human will emerge. The desire for contact may propel one toward the object before there is a *one* to be propelled, but the *one*, the subject, is formed in this propulsion and contact, such as to become conscious through contact with the otherness of the object. Where

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<sup>912</sup> *ND*, 150.

<sup>913</sup> Recall Horowitz, "Adorno and Emptiness," 272. Cf. *AT*, 110; 329.

consciousness experiences the otherness of the object as a threat, as the human does the animal, there subject and object relate to each other antagonistically. The subject's attempt to reduce the perceived threat posed by the object to the subject is accomplished through the identification of the object with a concept, thus giving concepts the instrumental function associated with the preservation of the subject.

However, this displacement of *mimesis* by the conceptual order does not serve to eradicate *mimesis*. Like Benjamin, Adorno holds that something of *mimesis* survives in the conceptual order,<sup>914</sup> though his account of how it comes to inform that order differs based on the pre-subjective status of *mimesis*. With Benjamin, we saw that it is through mimetic comportment that subjects become attached to the objects of their world: *mimesis* is what holds subjects and objects in thrall. For Adorno, however, the mimetic pull serves to constellate objects in such a way as to make possible the subject that is—the subject is thus posterior to the constellation of mimetic objects. Adorno will thus occasionally refer to the shape *mimesis* takes within the context of the subject-object relation in its reproduction of socio-political domination as *imitation*, rather than *mimesis* as such.<sup>915</sup> The subjective release of objects, and so the possibility of their re-constellation such as to produce a new kind of subject, must therefore involve

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<sup>914</sup> *ND*, 14; *AT*, 96.

<sup>915</sup> Thus Adorno will claim that “mimesis was displaced by objectifying imitation [*Nachahmung*],” (*AT*, 162; *GSB7*, 243), that “mimetic comportment does not imitate something but rather makes itself like itself” (*AT*, 111); and that the “doctrine of imitation [*Nachahmungslehre*]” might be reversed (*AT*, 132; *GSB7*, 199-200).

some kind of recovery of *mimesis*, of contact with the animality of the mimetic impulse against the reproduction of oneself as a human subject through the *imitation* of the objects given to imitate by one's society.

Yet, as noted above, Adorno is not trying to exchange the world of concepts for some primordial idea of *mimesis*, some pre-subjective relation to the world—his turn to animality is not reducible to a kind of nostalgia for the ape, or a celebration of the 'primitive.' There is no pre-subjective world, pristine and conceptless, to which return is possible, and attempts to animate such an idea can only result in gross parodies of un-reflexive nature, and a return to mythological thinking. It is for this reason that Adorno will also on occasion employ *mimesis* pejoratively, referring to the "mimetic regression" involved in attempting to think the "Many" without subjective mediation, or the "cave of a long-past mimesis" into which thinkers like Heidegger would "crawl."<sup>916</sup> For Adorno, recovery of *mimesis* is not an attempt to invoke a past prior to the transcendental subject of humanity, but rather an attempt to invoke a future that lies past such a subject, one constituted through a new relation to our animality. Yet how might one intervene on the pull exuded by *mimesis* between subject and object, such as to break the spell that holds them in thrall? What words might be spoken, or what experience might there be, which could possibly allow for the release of the social objects to which a given subject is mimetically attached? And

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<sup>916</sup> *ND*, 158; 131.

perhaps most importantly: how might such a mimetic transformation of the subject be accomplished in the progressive manner Adorno envisions, one that would represent a sublation of the transcendental subject, as opposed to its repressive desublimation?<sup>917</sup>

The beginning of an answer might be found in Adorno's ideas on art and aesthetics. Adorno claims not only that art is "a refuge for mimetic comportment," but that art makes possible a semblance of the reconciliation of reason and *mimesis*.<sup>918</sup> That is, artworks require both rational and mimetic comportment in their production, and demand mimetic and rational reception, both as what Benjamin called "mimetic objects," and through their interpretation. In constellating *ratio* and *mimesis* in this way, art demands that reason be reconciled to animal impulses, rather than their simple repression, while at once demanding that *mimesis* be directed toward rational ends, that is, the construction of a better world. The artwork, through its adherence to its own formal principles distilled through a kind of antagonistic dialogue with its own history and the techniques upon which it draws, serves to put itself at a distance from the objects that make up its socio-political context—its *material*—and in winning this degree of autonomy, comes to *resemble itself*, rather than them.<sup>919</sup> In this way the artwork presents itself as an example of mimetic activity alienated

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<sup>917</sup> To borrow a term from Marcuse. See Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon, 1991), Ch.3.

<sup>918</sup> *AT*, 20; 54.

<sup>919</sup> *AT*, 104.

from the instrumental functions of imitation that serve to reproduce society as it is, a *mimesis* seeking contact with the nature that “does not yet in any way exist,” its “nonexistent” truth.<sup>920</sup> Artworks might thus make possible a liberation of the mimetic impulse that would reverse the conceptual capture of imitation, compelling reality to imitate art, and making possible “the happiness of producing the world once over.”<sup>921</sup>

In theorizing *mimesis* as central both to the production and reception of art, and to the reproduction of society and the possibility of its transformation, Adorno thus invests the very autonomy of art—that is, its fundamental *distance* from morality and politics—with moral and political weight. Through its relation to *mimesis*, art has potentially radical and far reaching moral and political consequences, and these are in turn entwined with humanity and its future, along with the possibility of living in the present as if one were a good animal. I turn now to these threads and their unwinding.

### *Morality and Politics*

In taking animality as the starting point for the possibility of socio-political transformation and asking, with Adorno, how might one live such as to have been a good animal, it has been established that such a life, along with the desired socio-political transformation, are integrally connected to *mimesis*. Adorno

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<sup>920</sup> *AT*, 132.

<sup>921</sup> *AT*, 339; *GSB7*, 503.

theorizes *mimesis* as the comportment that serves to establish and reproduce the connection between social objects that makes a subject possible. However, insofar as *mimesis* has been displaced or colonized by *ratio*, the subject produced through *mimesis* has been transformed into a transcendental human subject, one seen as the source of the web of social objects through which it is constituted, rather than their product. Recovery of the animality of *mimesis* is therefore necessary to undermine the power of this subject, and the antagonism to others it requires to sustain itself. Such a recovery, and the possibility of a reconciliation with reason rather than its rejection, are made possible through art, whose autonomy has for Adorno both important moral and political consequences. It remains to elucidate what these consequences might be, and to this end, we must examine Adorno's thoughts on morality and its relation to politics.

Though the growing literature on Adorno's "ethics" has helped establish small niches for his work in a variety of disciplines, Adorno remains relatively neglected as a political thinker. Part of the reason for this relative neglect might be that Adorno devotes little direct attention to the study of politics, even though it is difficult to find a work of his that is not touched by politics in some sense: indeed, Adorno claims that "politics is not a self-enclosed, isolated sphere," but must be understood to be connected to all manner of social forces and their contest.<sup>922</sup> However, and perhaps more controversially, we might suggest that it

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<sup>922</sup> Adorno, "Critique," *CM*, 281.

is precisely this emphasis on Adorno's "ethics" that has served to obscure the political dimension of his insights, insofar as these would examine his ethics independent of political consequence.<sup>923</sup> Adorno himself is skeptical of "ethics," preferring instead the term "morality," precisely for its perceived relation to politics.

In his lectures on moral philosophy, Adorno draws a distinction between morality and ethics through an appeal to their respective etymologies. Morality, from the Latin *mores*, concerns the customs of a community, both the explicit and implicit rules that govern the common relations between people.<sup>924</sup> Ethics, on the other hand, comes from the Greek *ethos*, which Adorno considers to be something more or less equivalent to nature, referring "to the way you are, the way you are made," though for the Greeks this also concerned one's fate and one's relation to the gods.<sup>925</sup> To live ethically then, is to live according to one's nature, according to one's fate, and so to live according to the laws of nature or the gods,

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<sup>923</sup> *Contra* Schweppenhäuser, who acknowledges Adorno's preference for the term morality, yet nevertheless reduces this and moral philosophy to "ethics." See Gerhard Schweppenhäuser, "Adorno's Negative Moral Philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion to Adorno*, 331-332.

<sup>924</sup> These *mores* can be found both in the word *Moral* (or *Moralität/Moralismus*), and in the *Sitte* or 'custom' of *Sittlichkeit* (*PM*, 9). That Adorno places *Moral* and *Sittlichkeit* together in opposition to ethics (*Ethik*), might perhaps indicate a further break with Hegel, for in his *Philosophy of Right*, *Moralität* and *Sittlichkeit* constitute separate spheres wherein the former is sublated by the latter. If *Moral* and *Sittlichkeit* can be conflated in the manner Adorno suggests, then the politics to which they point is something lying beyond the institutions of the state, which for Hegel constitute the realm of *Sittlichkeit*. Adorno's opposition to Hegel here is noted by Zuidervaart, though he misses Adorno's conflation of *Moral* and *Sittlichkeit*, thus taking Adorno to oppose *Moral* to *Sittlichkeit*, and so reject Hegelian *Sittlichkeit* in favor of Kantian *Moral*. But Adorno is not trying to return to Kant; rather, he is attempting to move beyond both Kant and Hegel—hence the opposition of *Moral* and *Sittlichkeit* to *Ethik*.. See Zuidervaart, *Social Philosophy after Adorno*, 176. Cf. Adorno, *Nachgelassene Schriften: Abteilung IV: Vorlesungen Band 10: Probleme der Moralphilosophie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 21-23.

<sup>925</sup> *PM*, 10.

while to live morally involves navigating the changeable rules of the community. Though one might object to Adorno's interpretation of the antiquarian roots of morality and ethics, the point here is to note that *Adorno's use* of the term morality is for him linked to the changeable structure of society in a way ethics is not, and so expresses a different set of possibilities in relating the individual to the general. In this way, Adorno sees morality as being linked to reflection and the possibility of radical change, whereas ethics is bound up with the world of myth and the eternal return of the same. Morality and the reflections upon it gathered in moral philosophy thus have "a necessary connection with practical action," and the "crucial question of moral philosophy" is: "What shall we do?"<sup>926</sup>

Though Adorno does not acknowledge it explicitly here, the historical resonance of this question hits a decidedly political note, recalling Lenin's famous: "What Is to Be Done?" Despite Adorno's longstanding opposition to the Soviet Union and the Eastern Bloc, along with his criticism of Brecht's "vulgar Marxism," one might find in writings unpublished in Adorno's lifetime surprisingly sanguine remarks on Lenin as late as 1956. In conversation with Horkheimer, Adorno claims that against the "reified" thinking of Soviet bureaucrats, he has always wanted to "develop a theory that remains faithful to Marx, Engels and Lenin, while keeping up with culture at its most advanced," and that the manifesto he and Horkheimer were then attempting to write must be

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<sup>926</sup> *PM*, 2-3.

“strictly Leninist.”<sup>927</sup> Moreover, Adorno attributes to Lenin the idea “that people are products of society down to the innermost fibre of their being,” an idea that has informed much of the preceding discussion of Adorno’s understanding of humanity and its relation to animality.<sup>928</sup> Nevertheless, these comments are not enough to make Adorno a Leninist, at least not in any straightforward sense. Not only does the fact that the writing of this manifesto was ultimately abandoned undermine Adorno’s apparent Leninist ardor, but the series of conversations in which Horkheimer and Adorno recorded their ideas for this manifesto contain numerous contradictions, suggesting these comments represent *possible* avenues for their thought, rather than definitive statements of it. In this sense, Adorno’s statements on Lenin here ought to be qualified by his other writings, which serve to paint a rather different picture of the possibility of politics and its relation to morality.

As I have attempted to show in my discussion of Adorno’s conceptions of progress and the global subject in Chapter 12, Adorno is against advancing a universal conception of the good that requires the sacrifice of particular struggles, theorizing instead a collective subject that exists only in the solidarity established at the level of particulars.<sup>929</sup> These conceptions are at odds with the direction taken by Lenin and Leninist parties, and appear to offer a different way of

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<sup>927</sup> *TNM*, 103; 94.

<sup>928</sup> *TNM*, 112.

<sup>929</sup> *Contra* Espen Hammer, *Adorno and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2005), 178-180; and Lambert Zuidervaart, *Social Philosophy after Adorno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 161; 177.

conceiving the organization of progressive political struggle to the top-down model of a revolutionary vanguard, organized beneath the aegis of a political party, leading the working class to victory. Moreover, Adorno's persistent rejection of the unity of theory and praxis, which in denying the way in which theory is already a kind of praxis serves only to bury the objective possibilities of theory beneath the pre-given subject of praxis, opposed what Adorno saw as an anachronistic strain of Leninism existing within the student movement.<sup>930</sup> For Adorno, it is no longer possible in the administered society of the West to rely on past modes of organization to guide political struggle, as if the possibilities available to political action had not changed with the defeat of the Spartacists. In this way, whatever might be left of Lenin must necessarily address a radically transformed terrain of political possibility, and it is for this reason that Adorno makes something very much like Lenin's famous slogan "the crucial question of moral philosophy," for herein morality and philosophy are not only pulled toward politics, but politics is turned toward philosophy and morality.

In this way Adorno can be seen to subject Lenin to his own moral and philosophical roots: the question '*what is to be done?*' is '*how ought I to live?*' in a political crisis, where philosophy cannot afford to be an activity of the leisured, but rather seeks desperately to clarify the nature of the socio-political problems such that "total disaster" might not be simply deferred, but averted through the

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<sup>930</sup> "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis," *CM*, 265; *PM*, 4.

transformation of the structure that precipitates its possibility. Adorno's emphasis on the *moral* nature of this question ties it to questions of individual actions and how one relates to others in a way that would obstruct the kind of political theodicy that sees violence as the evil necessary for salvation. By making Lenin's question a moral one, the overarching structure of the party whose interests must be placed ahead of the individual are dissolved into moral demands on the individual who can no longer use the party as a screen with which to obscure these demands or a vehicle to secure one's release from them.

Thus, while Geuss thinks it possible "to retain much of Adorno's analysis within a (revised) Leninist framework,"<sup>931</sup> without considerable elaboration of exactly what of Adorno might remain, and what revisions to Lenin might be necessary, it is difficult to see how exactly one could call Adorno's politics Leninist. Likewise, the moral dimension of Adorno's politics and its relation to knowledge seem to be lost on the vanguardist view that sees Adorno as endorsing the political authority of philosophers. Freyenhagen claims that Adorno thinks that, insofar as only "a few critical individuals" might have access to "genuine and unrestricted experience" in the world as it is, others must defer to and take direction from their authority as "the most progressive minds."<sup>932</sup> Though Adorno does indeed speak of "the most progressive minds [*fortgeschrittensten*

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<sup>931</sup> Raymond Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 107n49.

<sup>932</sup> Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, 248-249. Cf. Zuidervaart, *Social Philosophy after Adorno*, 165.

*Bewußtsein*]"<sup>933</sup> and think that insofar as most people live without engaging in critical reflection they fail to see the veil that has been drawn over their eyes, philosophical reflection can only ever be a partial solution, for, as Adorno claims, "[i]f there really is no correct life in the false life, then actually there can be no correct consciousness in it either."<sup>934</sup>

If there is no correct consciousness, then there can be no definitive authority assigned to the philosopher concerning political matters, only a general demand that all engage in critical reflection. Adorno's insistence on this moral dimension to Lenin's question thus *impedes* the political authority of philosophers rather than advocates it. Not only does Adorno explicitly link critique with the possibility of democracy,<sup>935</sup> but even if only a few of the "most progressive minds" were to make this practice their own, *at best* what such individuals might offer through their attempts to clarify the socio-political problems that present themselves is *theoretical* leadership. That is, while philosophers may provide *theoretical* leadership through the clarification of problems and the provision of conceptual tools that might be of use in political struggle, it is up to the participants in these struggles to reflect on them and do

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<sup>933</sup> *PMP*, 168; Adorno, *Probleme der Moralphilosophie*, 249.

<sup>934</sup> "Opinion Delusion Society," *CM*, 120.

<sup>935</sup> "Critique," *CM*, 281-282. Though Adorno does not elaborate a theory of democracy, his insistence on the necessity of theory and the rejection of its synthesis with praxis suggests a more open-ended and ongoing project of critical reflection than that typically thought possible within the framework of democratic centralism. For an attempt to formulate such a democratic theory, see Andrew J. Douglas, "Democratic Darkness and Adorno's Redemptive Criticism," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 36.7 (2010): 819-836.

with them what they will. I see little evidence to suggest that Adorno thinks this *theoretical* leadership should translate itself into *practical* leadership, that is, that political practice could be based exclusively on a pre-existent theory that would thus endow the theorist or his or her adherents with the authority to tell others what to do. While the theorist or the philosopher might engage in political activity through theorizing, and perhaps even aid different political struggles in doing so, nothing in this relationship would secure a position of privilege for the philosopher within political struggle.

However, in highlighting the moral dimension of Adorno's politics, I do not intend to suggest that Adorno reduces politics to morality, for in bringing politics into contact with morality, Adorno is also trying to push morality toward politics. In fact, as we have seen in Adorno's opposition of morality to ethics, it is precisely its political potential that makes Adorno see morality as the more promising of the two concepts. The dissolution of the Leninist party as a kind of transcendental subject must likewise spell the dissolution of the hard distinction between the demands of revolutionary politics and morality. That moral decisions are a-political, or even anti-political, is an illusion that must be rejected, for morality, as the practical interpretation and navigation of social rules, already implies a politics. That is, morality already implies a position with respect to the creation or transformation of the over-arching framework in which moral rules have force. Adorno confirms the political dimension of his own turn

to morality in the conclusion of these lectures, where he claims: “In short, anything that we can call morality today merges into the question of the organization of the world. We might even say that the quest for the good life is the quest for the right form of politics, if indeed such a right form of politics lay within the realm of what can be achieved today.”<sup>936</sup>

We must now ask: how does the proximity of morality and politics theorized by Adorno relate to art and his theory of *mimesis*? If morality concerns, as Adorno holds, the relation between the individual and the general that we find in interpreting and navigating the rules of the community, then it would appear that there are two rather different kinds of moral activity. Firstly, we can be said to act morally when we follow the rules of our community as we understand them, more or less un-reflexively; and secondly, we act morally when we reflect on the rules of our community and try to give reasons that justify why one action is a more appropriate interpretation of a rule than another, or even when certain rules need not be followed. If, then, politics concerns “the organization of the world,” that is, the order in which the rules of the community have force, and thus one’s moral disposition contains a political position, then these two moral dispositions result in a number of possible political positions. Either one upholds the political order as it is through following the rules of the community, either un-reflexively or for one’s own reasons, or one contributes to

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<sup>936</sup> *PM*, 176.

changes in this order through practical adaption of the rules to personal circumstances, or one opposes this political order by failing to comply with the rules it attempts to guarantee, either un-reflexively or for one's own reasons.

Despite the possibility of considerable differences here between positions, especially with respect to activity that is 'un-reflexive' compared with activity that bases itself on explicit reasons, what both of these moral dispositions and the political positions they entail have in common is that they all proceed from a subject. That is, their respective 'starting positions,' or the place from which moral activity or a political position is experienced, has already come to be as the product of a particular constellation of social objects. Even if we grant that the production of this subject is ongoing, that moral decisions or political consequences can serve to alter the social objects from which our subjectivity springs such as to make it possible to consciously change who we are, these decisions are always limited by the subjectivity from which they initially spring. We may be capable of consciously changing ourselves, but only according to the limits imposed on consciousness that is our subjectivity, i.e. as the subject that we are through a particular constellation of social objects. Or put differently: We interpret the rules of our community and so act accordingly always already in terms of the subject that we are through the particular constellation of social objects available to us in that community. In this sense, we tend to uphold the political order through our moral activity, even where we would oppose ourselves

to parts of it through our interpretations of the rules, as we interpret and act in terms of the subjective possibilities already given by this order through the particular array of objects disposable to us.

Adorno's theory of *mimesis* is relevant here in that it concerns how we produce the relation between these social objects through our own thoughts and actions without direct intention. By attempting to address moral and political activity at the level of *mimesis*, one directs one's attention to the constitution of the moral and political subject that is irreducible to the conceptual order of reason, the rules of the community, or the political order in which their force is guaranteed. This approach can be seen as *radical* in two senses: in attempting to alter the *root* of moral activity and its related political positions, and in the sense that the alteration of the relation between subject and social objects would create different ways of interpreting the rules of the community. Insofar as such dispositions would depend on a subject other than that produced through the simple reproduction of society, this moral activity would be more likely to be antagonistic to the political order. That is, through the mimetic transformation of the subject, moral activity is rendered politically radical.

Yet, how, we might ask, is this kind of deliberate mimetic transformation possible, if *mimesis* is itself irreducible to reason, morality, or politics, though included in all? Through what register must such an intervention take place? As we have seen above in my brief outline of the relation between art and *mimesis*, it

is through art that mimetic transformation might be possible, for Adorno holds art to be something of a reservoir for the mimetic impulse, and insofar as it might disrupt the subjective coordinates upon which morality and politics are based, art can thus be said to harbor inherently radical political potential. It is precisely for reason of this radical political potential that Adorno thinks that art that directly and explicitly aims to make itself political actually serves to limit its radical political potential, for in adapting itself to the exigencies of struggle in the present it serves to reify these exigencies and the subject from which they emanate, rather than disrupt them with the possibility of their own otherness—of a world organized otherwise, along with a different kind of subject. Conversely then, it is precisely the art that aims at its own autonomy, at its fundamental *distance* from morality and politics, that most threatens to disrupt the subjective coordinates upon which morality and politics depend, and thus possesses the most radical moral and political potential.<sup>937</sup> Thus Adorno writes that “politics has migrated into autonomous art” and claims that “an emphasis on autonomous works is itself sociopolitical in nature.”<sup>938</sup>

In terms of the question of humanity, of the positive conception of humanity which serves as the central subject whose coordinates dictate what is morally and politically acceptable, disruption of these coordinates requires art

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<sup>937</sup> *AT*, 228; 242; 255. Cf. Adorno, “Reconciliation under Duress,” in *Aesthetics and Politics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London: Verso.), 160.

<sup>938</sup> Adorno, “Commitment,” in *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*, eds. Andrew Arato and Eike Gebhardt, trans. Francis McDonagh (New York: Continuum, 2005), 318.

that is most distant and strange to humanity—art that is *inhuman*. It is this inhuman art that Adorno sees as most threatening to the subjective coordinates entwined with the world as it is, and it is to the conditions and experience of this inhumanity, of this *animality*, that we presently turn.

### *The Inhuman Addendum*

Let us summarize the key elements of the argument of this chapter to this point: Mimetic comportment serves to constellate the social objects through which a subject is produced, a subject who then serves to maintain through moral and political activity a world in which a given set of social objects are available for mimetic comportment to constellate. In this way, the world as it exists reproduces itself through the activity of subjects; or for Adorno: domination is reproduced precisely by means of the activity of the dominated, as their *expression*. The consequence of this view is that just being as one is, living according to one's desires more or less in accord with one's society, 'expressing' oneself through one's choices and life activity, is to reproduce the power structures of one's society, for what one is, one's personality and humanity, are functions of this society, not externally existing things upon which society is imposed.

Adorno theorizes the possibility of breaking out of this cycle, and thus transforming this subject and this world, through an appeal to the mimetic

comportment that serves to constellate the objects from which their subjectivity is produced. Insofar as artworks serve to congeal mimetic activity, art appears to hold a position of privilege in this project—or at least artworks that serve to disrupt the subjective coordinates that bind moral and political activity in the world as it exists, that is, the world to which the human subject is reconciled. But here we must ask: what kind of experience might serve to disrupt the subjective coordinates that fix us as human? How might the mimetic impulse be diverted from its role in imitation, and so turned against constellating the social objects of the world from which a human subject will be reproduced in order to reproduce a human world, that is, one reconciled to violence and domination? And what kind of art might make such experience possible?

For now I will bracket the question of what kind of art might produce this kind of subjectively disruptive experience in order to focus on the experience itself. Insofar as the mimetic impulse is an *impulse*, that is, a kind of corporal disposition to objects, a way of relating to them through bodily comportment that is both less than conceptual and less than voluntary, the human subject is in part constituted through an attempt to master this impulse in the figure of the body. The body is for the human subject the unruly matter that must be tamed and formed through the conceptual designs of the intellect, or at least through habits informed in some way by intellect—the body is the animal other lurking within

human subjectivity that continually threatens these designs.<sup>939</sup> Commanding the mimetic impulse in this way is not impossible, but such commands are never wholly successful, and the involuntary aspects of our bodily comportment frequently repel such commands. An experience that might disrupt the subjective coordinates of the human and so allow one to attempt to live as a good animal would thus appear to involve an experience of the involuntary and corporal aspect of our human subjectivity. In this way, an object might be introduced into mimetic comportment that resists the particular constellation of objects that make up the human such as to enable its mimicry to produce something inhuman—a subject constituted through the experience of objects that resists being constituted as human. We might find such an experience in what Adorno calls “the addendum.”

In *Negative Dialectics* Adorno provocatively claims that “[a] new categorical imperative has been imposed by Hitler upon unfree mankind: to arrange thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself, so that nothing similar will happen.”<sup>940</sup> He further claims that this imperative cannot be dealt with discursively, but rather “gives us a bodily sensation of the moral addendum”: it is only in the revulsion we feel when confronted with images or knowledge of Auschwitz that “morality survives,” only in this involuntary reaction

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<sup>939</sup> *DE*, 192-193. It is also, as we shall see, the other in me who is in the right—the other to whom solidarity is due. See Alexander Garcia Duttman, “Adorno’s Rabbits; Or, Against Being in the Right,” trans. James Philips, *New German Critique* 97, Vol.33.1 (2006), 186. Cf. *PMP*, 169-170.

<sup>940</sup> *ND*, 365.

rather than any possible reason we could give for calling what transpired in Auschwitz wrong that a new subject might be constellated. Insofar as Auschwitz must be seen as a uniquely human creation, one that drew upon what have traditionally been conceived as uniquely human intellectual capacities and perpetuated according to uniquely human conceptual distinctions that served to divide different varieties of the human animal, arranging our “thoughts and actions so that Auschwitz will not repeat itself” demands the subjective re-constitution of the human being—it demands that we become an animal other than the human animal for whom Auschwitz was a possibility. To this end I must show that the addendum is both an experience of animality, and that cultivating this experience and so producing the kind of animal for whom Auschwitz would be an impossibility requires a certain kind of aesthetic education. In this way, Adorno revives classical notions of aesthetic education dating back to Plato and Aristotle, but ironically, in that the subject he would produce is an animal opposed to the human, rather than the exemplar of what is most divine in the human.<sup>941</sup>

Adorno uses the concept of “the addendum” (*das Hinzutretende*) to undermine the purity of the intellect as it is found in both Cartesian mind-body dualism, and the Kantian will, by claiming a kind of ‘addition’ or supplement would be needed to make sense of each, an addition whose existence would

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<sup>941</sup> Likewise, Adorno’s insights here would radically historicize the contexts in which a given activity might be conceived as virtuous, or a given disposition, good. See Rahel Jaeggi, “‘No Individual Can Resist,’” trans. James Ingram, *Constellations* 12.1 (2005), 71.

undermine or contaminate the very purity upon which these conceptual distinctions depend.<sup>942</sup> For Adorno there is no mind that is not an embodied mind, no will that is not an embodied will, for both mind and will are the historically mediated products of specific transformations in our bodily comportment. According to Adorno's natural-historical view, both mind and will must be seen as natural insofar as they are history-moving entities: both mind and will must contain within themselves a natural element, something that is not completely mastered or self-produced; however, as historical, they must also be seen as the products of particular historical developments.

The addendum is likewise both natural and historical. It is natural in that it is a bodily impulse, a somatic tic that the intellect cannot wholly escape or master, and so the intellect brands it as irrational in order to consolidate its mastery of the body.<sup>943</sup> Yet were the intellect to ever fully succeed in this mastery, it would be its death, for it is only through the body that the intellect came to be, and only its persistence, through the addendum—through the traces of the bodily impulses within the intellect—that it might continue to confront its other and so be a recognizably different entity. Only entwined with the body does reason have life and some access to the world. Thus the concept of the will, of a

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<sup>942</sup> The addendum can also be seen as a polemical response to philosophical anthropologies that would theorize the sovereignty of human being, such as Scheler's conception of personality as the immediate "*domination over the lived body*," or Gehlen's conception of the "hiatus" that distances human actions from bodily impulses, allowing for the voluntary nature of the former, and so the mastery of the human being as a self-creating and responsible entity. See Scheler, *Formalism...*, 480; Gehlen, *Man*, 329-330.

<sup>943</sup> *ND*, 228-229.

particular faculty of the intellect that enables reason or consciousness to act upon the objects of the world and so change what exists, is for Adorno thoroughly dependent upon the involuntary bodily impulses of the addendum: as Adorno writes, “if the hand no longer twitched, there would be no will.”<sup>944</sup>

Yet the historical dimension of the addendum must also be insisted upon, against a simple and reified conception of it as a set of natural impulses. Drawing on Adorno’s claim that a sense or even the *idea* of freedom depends upon the memory of an “archaic impulse” that precedes the ego, an impulse “not yet steered by any solid I” and so “later banished to the zone of unfree bondage to nature,”<sup>945</sup> commentators have often described the addendum in a manner that suggests it is a neglected but basically unchanging and so perpetually available part of human experience. In understanding the addendum in this manner, it becomes a kind of natural human potential that Adorno is trying to actualize, obscured only by particular historical circumstance. Accounts of the addendum as a potential thus take on a purely ontogenetic character, making it the recollection of a natural part of any human individual’s development, or a phylogenetic character, as the recollection of a state in which humans actually lived at some point in the past.

Cook takes the latter approach, writing that the addendum “points back to an earlier stage of history in which human behaviour was largely reactive and

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<sup>944</sup> *ND*, 230; Cf. *ND*, 241.

<sup>945</sup> *ND*, 221-222.

reflexive, but also points forwards to a stage where nature and mind may finally be reconciled.”<sup>946</sup> Freyenhagen also emphasizes this phylogenetic side of the addendum, claiming that the memory of the “archaic impulse” serves to remind us of a spontaneous relation between consciousness and body which might be re-established through a social transformation whose material conditions have been brought to fruition by capitalism.<sup>947</sup> For their part, Habermas and Bernstein interpret Adorno ontogenetically: Habermas construes the lived bodily experience Adorno would incorporate into the idea of a free act to be the expression of the character which develops naturally out of an individual’s lived history.<sup>948</sup> Bernstein takes a slightly different tack, dismissing the phylogenetic reading as “bad speculative anthropology,”<sup>949</sup> and insisting instead that the addendum’s function is one of immanent critique. However, in claiming it to be a piece of “anthropomorphic nature,”<sup>950</sup> he appears to leave the possibility open to an ontogenetic reading that would see the addendum as pointing back to a phase of individual development prior to a rigid distinction between mind and body.

The problem with these interpretations is that they treat the natural dimension of the addendum as a potential that pre-exists its particular historical instantiation and that persists as a possibility that might be recovered more or

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<sup>946</sup> Cook, *Adorno on Nature*, 54.

<sup>947</sup> Freyenhagen, *Adorno’s Practical Philosophy*, 263.

<sup>948</sup> Jürgen Habermas, “‘I Myself Am Part of Nature’—Adorno on the Intrication of Reason and Nature,” in *Between Naturalism and Religion*, trans. Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity, 2008), 189.

<sup>949</sup> Bernstein, *Adorno*, 258.

<sup>950</sup> Bernstein, *Adorno*, 254-256.

less unchanged through the socio-political changes wrought by history. In this way, they bring Adorno closer to Aristotelian humanism and its anthropology than his philosophy actually sanctions.<sup>951</sup> However, if we are to follow Adorno's conception of natural-history here, we must see the nature for which the addendum stands as being historically produced, an idea to which Bernstein comes closest when he refers to the addendum as an "excess of the pure will."<sup>952</sup> The addendum, or *Hinzutretende*, is precisely that: an *addition (Hinzu)*, something *added on* to the will through the act of willing. The addendum is not an unchanging capacity, for it does not pre-exist the will; rather, it is *produced by the will* as that which is non-identical to the will, that which the will cannot master and so rejects as mere "unfree" nature, against which the will's own freedom is defined. What is prior to the will, the mimetic impulse, is fractured by the will and transformed, its remnants gaining shape in opposition to the will— *this* is the addendum. The addendum must thus be understood as the remnants of the mimetic impulse displaced and internally mediated by the socio-political transformations that served to shape the human animal into one for whom actions depend upon a will.<sup>953</sup>

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<sup>951</sup> See especially Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy*, 262; Ch.9.

<sup>952</sup> Bernstein, *Adorno*, 256.

<sup>953</sup> The addendum thus does not refer to "unmediated physical impulses," though it does, as we shall see, allow for a "deep concern with animal suffering." See Mathijs Peters, "The Zone of the Carcass and the Knacker?—On Adorno's Concern with the Suffering Body," *European Journal of Philosophy* (August 2013), 17.

The “memory” of “archaic impulses” that survives in the addendum thus does not point to a past that necessarily existed either as a moment in socio-political history or even an individual’s history, but rather to what is non-identical in the will as it exists, as a kind of mimetic resistance to its permanence. Retrieving these “archaic impulses” through an experience of the addendum is thus not to recover the kernel of a lost humanity, and from which a new humanity might be born, but to seize upon the non-identical excrescence produced by humanity so as to oppose its subjective coordinates. The addendum marks the spot where the architecture of the human is most fragile, where the otherness it suppresses is closest to the surface: it is here where contact might be made with the remnants of the mimetic impulse that serve to constellate the social objects that produce the human subject. As I have attempted to show above, what is non-identical to the concept of the human, that which evades the violent dominance of the human and its particular capacities, is the animal. The addendum is thus a kind of animal wriggling through human concepts, itself produced as the excrescence of these concepts. To attempt to build a new subject around this experience, as Adorno’s new categorical imperative demands, is to attempt to build an inhuman subject—a new kind of animal out of the suppressed and discarded impulses.

Living such as to be capable of saying one is a good animal thus involves learning to allow one’s willed actions to receive direction from the addendum, by

these involuntary bodily responses to others and the situations in which we find ourselves in contact with them. It is not, however, simply to forsake reason and reflection in favor of what are popularly known as ‘gut instincts’—to do simply what *feels right* to us, for these involuntary bodily responses are deeply ambiguous: they include both impulses toward affection and solidarity, and toward aggression and dominance. It is for this reason that Adorno sees the role of reflection as being absolutely vital here, for we must continually interrogate our bodily responses, and see how they relate to others, especially insofar as they might cause them pain, if the circuits of domination are indeed to be resisted and one is to live as a good animal. Yet Adorno’s turn to animality would also obstruct the capacity to ignore these impulses, for insofar as they are the repressed nature constructed by our society, they not only tell us about the structure of our society, about how it is reproduced and the possibilities for change therein, but they bring us into a visceral contact with others in a way the bureaucratic machinery of modern society is able to obscure.

Imagine, for example, that you are witnessing a man being apprehended on the street by the police. After being tackled hard to the ground he is now lying on his belly, hands above his head, legs splayed. The officer is crouched over top of him, his right hand weighing heavily on the man’s head, pressing the side of his face into the pavement. With his left hand, the officer reaches for one of the man’s outstretched hands while his knee digs into the small of the man’s back,

pinning him in place. The man thrashes a little, emitting pained and angered shouts as best he can with his face pressed against the road. There may be relatively good reasons for this treatment: perhaps the man had murdered a child on a school playground, and had then killed the first police officer that had attempted to apprehend him. But you do not know this. The impulse to give reasons for this treatment, to identify with the authority of the police officer and construct a narrative in which this treatment is acceptable *without knowing why* is what being directed by the addendum would oppose.

Through their conceptual capture, the impulses both to participate in this violence and to shrink from it become separated from suffering in a way that contributes to a certain subject maintained through this separation. In identifying with the police officer as a figure of authority, this violent activity becomes a kind of surrogate for your own aggressive impulses. In standing-in for your desire to participate, the space opened up between you and the violent activity by the police officer as the authorized agent of violence serves to deaden the visceral connection between yourself and the suffering and establishes a stable order wherein your aggressive impulses can be expressed by proxy, and so treated as if they were not your own. Insofar as the violent activity of the police officer is required to maintain your own distance from the suffering and thus maintain the particular form of subjectivity you are embodying, the impulse to shrink from this violence becomes attended by reasons for why you should not

involve yourself, for why what you are witnessing is somehow acceptable, and in this way impulses toward solidarity are conjured away. Being directed by the addendum, on the other hand, is to deny the authority of these reasons, and the separation they would establish between you and suffering. To persist in the crisis of one's visceral connection to suffering is to be directed by the addendum, a persistence with which comes the demand for an interrogation of this crisis.

Interrogated in this way, the feelings of revulsion and the impulse toward solidarity one experiences when confronted with such violence might be mobilized so as to intervene against it. However, this kind of mobilization would not necessarily mean that there would be no forces of coercion, no police, or even that the man in our example would be released. These are political questions that demand critical scrutiny, reflection, and debate, and these would not be erased by opening ourselves up to the addendum, for the addendum prescribes no positive institutional arrangement. However, what we can say is that a society wherein our reason was directed by the addendum to end violence when confronted with it, rather than to secure one's own safety, even in situations such as our example above, could not operate as ours does—it would simply not be possible to accept police direction to 'move along,' and so ignore the man pinned to the pavement. Power in such a society would not have free hands, for its authority would be under perpetual scrutiny, and any coercion it would exercise would be continually subject to intervention.

In this way, we see that what Adorno is trying to get at through the concept of the addendum is the disposition of the human subject toward suffering and power, and to attempt to tip the scales toward solidarity with suffering, as opposed to power. As I have argued above, insofar as reason and the use of concepts evolved according to the exigencies of self-preservation such as to eventually come to dominate nature, reason has evolved entwined with power, and the human being is the product of this evolution. To attempt to live a life of activity directed by the addendum is to attempt to disentangle reason from power, to make decisions where reason is not directed toward maximizing benefits to the individual and so securing its survival or prestige, and thus to direct reason toward a different evolutionary path.

Reason would thus no longer hold the majority of seats in the parliament of the subject, but instead occupy a minority position: its role would become one of critically scrutinizing impulses, not directing them, and so would enter into a relation with animality that does not involve its mastery or suppression. To transform the role of reason in this manner is to alter the subjective coordinates of the human being. To privilege the addendum is to direct the mimetic impulse toward objects it would not be directed toward if guided by instrumental reason, and so bring about a shift in the constellation of social objects from which subjects spring. The reason employed by a transformed subject is one that would perceive its interests differently than the instrumental reason that animates

human survival, and so transform the manner in which this subject conceives of its relations to others, and so its moral activity, along with the overarching structures that enable this activity—its politics. Only through this manner of subjective transformation that brings about a change in moral and political activity might one be able to say that one had been a good animal.

However, if the addendum concerns the bodily comportment involved in willing, in making decisions, we must now ask: how is it that we come to feel the way we do, when we do? What if we do not feel the revulsion we are supposed to feel, say, at images or knowledge of Auschwitz? If the involuntary reactions or impulses that make up the addendum stand for the repressed nature our society has produced, how might we ensure that this nature is produced such as to promote solidarity with suffering, rather than identification with power? To gain a better idea of how this mimetic displacement of the subjective coordinates of the human might proceed, we must turn to Adorno's ideas on that reservoir of the mimetic impulse, art.

### *Inhuman Art*

As argued in Chapter 13, Adorno's concept of a 'reconciled humanity' refers to what would be a different kind of animal than what the human being is and always has been—an animal constituted in struggle for whom the capacities that enabled its self-preservation are aligned with socio-political domination.

Furthermore, it has been argued that the passage toward this political transformation through which this new animal might emerge leads through the moral practice of attempting to live as if one were a good animal: that is, attempting to accommodate ‘animal impulses’ in one’s decisions and actions such as to displace reason from its role in simple self-preservation—which is to say, in maximizing individual benefits—in favor of fostering solidarity with others. The specific animal impulses that would be fostered here are what Adorno calls ‘the addendum,’ the bodily comportment or affects entwined with willing. In this way, allowing oneself to be guided by the addendum is to allow for a different mimetic connection to the social objects of which one is subjectively constituted, and so to attempt one’s own subjective re-constitution: indeed to live as if one were a good *animal*, as opposed to a person.

However, while Adorno claims in *Negative Dialectics* that the addendum has become part of the human constitution in response to the horrors of Auschwitz,<sup>954</sup> we must ask: how might the experience of the addendum contribute to solidarity, as opposed to something else—say, a corporal feeling of individual or collective power, such as that promoted by Nietzsche? How can Adorno ensure that untying “the historically tied knot”<sup>955</sup> of the person through

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<sup>954</sup> Moreover, Adorno sees the basic substance of modern industrial capitalist society to be continuous with Auschwitz. See for example, *TNM*, 13. Or as Geulen writes, 1945 “marks the end and the break that changed everything, precisely because not enough changed [...] the truly disruptive effect of this break consists in the ensuing continuity.” See Eva Geulen, “Theodor Adorno on Tradition,” in *The Actuality of Adorno*, ed. Max Pensky (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 186.

<sup>955</sup> *ND*, 277.

the cultivation of the addendum will not result in a form of subjectivity and society much worse than the present? The short answer to these questions is simply: he cannot, for there is no such guarantee.

Adorno readily acknowledges that the removal of the conception of the person makes its “residue” easier to dominate<sup>956</sup>—the moral status of the person, demanding as it does some kind of individual responsibility imposed upon impulses, not only serves to obstruct the emergence of what Adorno considers a better organization of society, but potentially worse ones as well, as fascism makes only too plain. Consequently, Adorno needs some conception of pedagogy that would serve to educate, not the will, but its non-identical impulses, such that these impulses would recoil from violence. Insofar as Adorno theorizes art as a kind of reservoir for the mimetic impulse, art could prove to be an important means for this education. However, apart from a few radio lectures Adorno delivered in the 1960s concerning education, he makes no sustained attempt to develop such a theory, or explore the educational possibilities of art.<sup>957</sup> This is likely due in part to Adorno’s insistence upon the autonomy of art; however, as I will attempt to show, a politically progressive aesthetic education need not be at odds with artistic autonomy, for the attempt to establish art’s autonomy in the manner Adorno theorizes is already politically progressive in a broad sense, as already noted above.

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<sup>956</sup> *MM*, A39, 64.

<sup>957</sup> He did, however, outline a research plan for such a study, though it was never completed. See Adorno, “The Problem of a New Type of Human Being,” 468.

Though the relation between Adorno's aesthetics and Hegel is often noted,<sup>958</sup> others see also the influence Schiller's concept of aesthetic education.<sup>959</sup> Though the question of the truth content of artworks appropriated from Hegel remains important to my discussion, I want here to expand this association with aesthetic education in order to see Adorno attuned to the problematic first set out by Plato and Aristotle examined above. Thus certain of Adorno's ideas on art might be used to re-animate the classical idea of the aesthetic education of the impulses. However, this re-animation does not come without an ironic twist, for this education would not attempt to cultivate the animal such as to make it human, which amounts to drawing a division between reason and impulse, and teaching reason to command and impulse to obey, but rather to cultivate animal impulses such as to enable them to resist human capture, and so to facilitate the kind of displacement of the subjective coordinates that constitute the human in the manner already indicated through the addendum and the turn toward non-identity. In this way, Adorno's aesthetics can be seen to address the question of producing an *aesthetic* animal, not simply in the sense of an animal being constituted through the senses, through its bodily comportment toward objects, but through the arts.

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<sup>958</sup> See for example, Raymond Geuss, "Adorno and Berg," in *Morality, Culture, and History*, 118; Max Paddison, *Adorno, Modernism, and Mass Culture* (London: Kahn & Averill, 1997), 64. For more nuanced accounts of Hegel's role, at least in *AT*, see Weber Nicholse, *Exact Imagination*, 130-133; and Zuidervaat, *Adorno's Aesthetic Theory*, 115.

<sup>959</sup> Robert Hullot-Kentor, "Back to Adorno," 17; Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 8; 102.

For Adorno, an aesthetic animal would be the subject found in aesthetic comportment, which is in turn produced through the tutelage of two different kinds of aesthetic experience: a passive or *receptive* experience of artworks, in which one's subjective coordinates are displaced by the shock one receives through its sheer alien character; and an active or *productive* experience of artworks, wherein one must navigate the various technical problems foisted upon one by history in order to produce a work of art. It is through the conjunction of these two kinds of experience that one might re-align *mimesis* and reason, and so recover from the illness that is the human. These are the kinds of experience necessary to learn to live as a good animal, one whose morality would push against the order of domination and so bring about its transformation, and so make the emergence of a qualitatively new kind of animal a possibility.

In this subsection I will elaborate on what I have called the receptive experience of the artwork. Specifically, I seek to show that a receptive experience of artwork can disrupt the subjective coordinates of the human in a manner analogous to the addendum, and that certain kinds of artworks are more likely to disrupt in this way. Consequently, exposure to such artworks gives one both a bodily experience of one's fragility and finitude—one's animality—combined with an impulse to reflect on this animality and its relation to others. Ongoing receptive experience of artworks might therefore serve to foster the kind of disposition which I have called animal: that is, a disposition to solidarity rather

than individual benefit-maximizing, and with it an aversion to violence. It is not pretended, however, that such experience alone is enough to radically transform human subjectivity. In order for Adorno's idea of aesthetic comportment to push beyond the Aristotelian notion of aesthetic education, aesthetic comportment must consist not only in its receptive dimension, but a productive one as well, and this will be examined in the following subsection.

Concerning this receptive experience of the artwork, we find an experience of the less than voluntary, less than conceptual, bodily reaction to artworks. This experience is closely related to the addendum; however, the addendum, we must recall, is the mimetic impulse internally mediated through the moral will, produced through the moral will as its *excrescence*, its non-identical other. Though the receptive experience of artworks is likewise tuned to the mimetic impulse, this impulse will be mediated differently through artworks than through the moral will, and is thus articulated somewhat differently, and will thus require a different name. The most common terms Adorno employs in describing the mediation of the mimetic impulse through artworks is the shudder (*der Schauder*), or shaking (*Erschütterung*), both of which evoke non-voluntary, non-conceptual aspects of a bodily reaction to artworks akin with the reaction of the body to the moral decisions and actions with which it is confronted in the addendum. These terms are, once again, heavily dependent upon Benjamin and his influence.

In his essay “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” Benjamin examines modernity according to its lived experience, according to what the modern age *feels like*, as new social objects are introduced into the mimetic comportment of the subject that serve to alter its corporal disposition. Specifically, Benjamin focuses on the experience of being jostled in a crowd on the street, and the experience of laboring with industrial machinery, claiming that both share an element of “shock.”<sup>960</sup> That is, the lived experience of modernity is one of shock, one of continual exposure to rigid, even violent, stimuli that demand particular bodily reactions. Both factory machinery and traffic signals demand a certain automatic deference to their operations by the subject confronted with them, and failure to comply with these demands can be met with serious physical injury or death—one cannot negotiate terms, one must simply react. Being the denizen of a world made of such objects means to mimetically assimilate oneself to their mechanisms, and thus to submit to their training, to the uniform and constant movement characteristic of a *drill*, rather than a practice. As Horowitz notes, drills are without the rhythm that characterizes practice of all kinds: poetry, music, human speech and expression—drills possess virtually no rhythm at all.<sup>961</sup> Insofar as shock experience reduces the practices that make up lived experience

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<sup>960</sup> Walter Benjamin, “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), 176.

<sup>961</sup> Horowitz, *Ethics at a Standstill*, 111-112.

to drills, then the bodily experience of modernity is a radically impoverished form of experience,<sup>962</sup> one perhaps even describable as *inhuman*.<sup>963</sup>

Adorno assents to much of Benjamin's critique and the central place of shock experience within modernity<sup>964</sup>; however, for Adorno it is precisely the inhumanity of this experience, which, mediated through art, offers the possibility of socio-political transformation. Modern artworks make possible a transformation of the subject produced through shock experience by mimetically reproducing this shock;<sup>965</sup> in so doing, the shock is alienated from its function in the reproduction of modern society, and becomes instead poetic—it gains something like a rhythm. Of course, art must radically alter its received categories, forms, and techniques in order to render itself capable of expressing this shock, and the 'rhythm' it produces in doing so is like no rhythm before it. Gone is the classical claim to wholeness and harmony—what is left are only twisted fragments: the wreckage of the world as it had been and the rhythm that animated it. What Adorno calls the shudder is shock experience reflected through the artwork: it makes directly palpable the truth of the experience of modernity that would be hidden by the primacy of the subject and the positive articulation of humanity, the person. Thus the truth of the work is revealed to the

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<sup>962</sup> Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 180. Cf. Rosen, *On Voluntary Servitude*, 243;248.

<sup>963</sup> Indeed, Benjamin will refer to the jostling crowd, fomenting as it does this shock experience, as "essentially inhuman." Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," 172.

<sup>964</sup> Cf. *MM* A33, 54.

<sup>965</sup> Cf. *PMM*, 39.

spectator “as if it must also be his own”<sup>966</sup>—the indigence and the distortion of the work reveal the indigence and distortion of the spectator. It is for this reason that Adorno refers to the shudder as “a memento of the liquidation of the I, which, shaken, perceives its own limitedness and finitude.”<sup>967</sup> “Convulsed by art,”<sup>968</sup> the subject can no longer maintain its veneer of independence, and the object shines through the widening fissures.

This aesthetic rupture of the subject by its objectivity is, as we have seen, a turn to animality. Thus Adorno writes that “[a]rtworks win life only when they renounce likeness to the human,”<sup>969</sup> approvingly cites Schoenberg’s praise of Webern for having spurned “animal warmth,”<sup>970</sup> and lauds Baudelaire for his work that “wipes out any human trace.”<sup>971</sup> However, disrupting the subjective coordinates of the human in this manner cannot be all the artwork has to offer if it is to contribute to socio-political transformation. Adorno is quick to point out that though the shudder reveals the human subject and its self-preservation to be semblance, the conditions from which this semblance is born persist. Or in other words: the receptive experience of art makes promises it cannot keep.<sup>972</sup>

Moreover, as we have already seen in his critique of Aristotelian poetics, Adorno

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<sup>966</sup> *AT*, 269.

<sup>967</sup> *AT*, 245.

<sup>968</sup> *AT*, 269.

<sup>969</sup> *AT*, 168.

<sup>970</sup> *AT*, 43; *PMM*, 118; Adorno, “Arnold Schoenberg, 1874-1951,” in *Prisms*, 158; Adorno, “*Vers une musique informelle*,” *QF*, 309. What Schoenberg calls “animal warmth,” a sense of comfort and familiarity, of surety in oneself and one’s surroundings, is not animality in the sense I have been using it, but rather part of the positive articulation of humanity, the person, which his music would transcend.

<sup>971</sup> *AT*, 21.

<sup>972</sup> *AT*, 245.

considers overvaluing aesthetic effects to run the risk of making art into a form of “substitute satisfaction” to be manipulated and administered by the culture industry, and so serve the forces of repression.<sup>973</sup> That is, while the very power of *mimesis* serves to reveal the truth of shock experience in its semblance, in being an aesthetic semblance, distant to some degree from the actual shock experience of the crowd or the factory, it serves to make the aesthetic experience of these things *pleasurable*.

This is part of the reason why Adorno claims that “artworks tend a priori toward affirmation”: artworks “bring forth another world,” detaching themselves from the empirical world.<sup>974</sup> In doing so they not only reveal the truth of the object, and so alienate the apparent naturalness of the empirical world and one’s own subjective place in it, but they also do so in a manner that gives the subject pleasure—thus anesthetizing the subject to the suffering expressed in the work, which, as art, is enjoyable. In this way artworks serve to reconcile the aesthetic subject to the empirical world, by way of the image of the other world they offer. Insofar as the experience of subjective displacement and alienation found in the shudder lasts but a moment, it is possible for the pleasure one receives from the work to annex the transformative moment the shudder reveals, and so to make it part of the overall effect of the work to be manipulated and administered. Instead of experiencing the dislocation of the social objects of which one’s

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<sup>973</sup> *AT*, 238.

<sup>974</sup> *AT*, 1.

subjectivity is composed as a moment from which return becomes impossible, one instead comes to seek out those artworks that provide one with this affect, delighting in the *frisson* of inhumanity they provide as one does the tingling on the tongue one feels eating blowfish, touched as it is by poison.

Indeed, this particular mode of experiencing artworks Adorno polemically refers to as “culinary.” Though *Aesthetic Theory* is replete with references to the culinary character of artworks,<sup>975</sup> for a definition one must look to Adorno’s writings for Americans. In *Current of Music*, Adorno writes that the term “culinary” is used to denote musical qualities that provide instant and transitory sensual pleasure, serving to stimulate the senses.<sup>976</sup> These qualities, and the problem with art (or in this case, music) structured around its culinary consumption, or even a disposition toward artwork that would seek out such qualities, is that it ignores the *truth* of the artwork, and thus fails to provide anything for the listener or spectator that might displace his or her subjective coordinates, that might threaten his or her personality. If art is indeed the unconscious writing of history,<sup>977</sup> then to experience the truth of an artwork is to grasp in some sense the truth of the movement of history as the possibility of

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<sup>975</sup> See for instance, *AT*, 157; 276; 333; 334; 347.

<sup>976</sup> Adorno, “Radio Physiognomics,” in *Current of Music*, 123.

<sup>977</sup> Adorno, “Those Twenties,” *CM*, 48; Cf. *PMM*, 43. Or in more Hegelian terms: “Artworks are enigmatic in that they are the physiognomy of an objective spirit that is never transparent to itself in the moment in which it appears” (*AT*, 128).

redemption, of the possibility of a world not constituted by violence, in the fragment that is the individuality of the particular work.<sup>978</sup>

Thus the image of redemption that was found in philosophy to be a conceptual trick played at the expense of concepts is made palpable in the artwork—it becomes not simply a cognitive experience, but a bodily one: it is the intimation of truth that makes one shudder. It is for this reason Adorno claims that art that is experienced only in relation to who one already is, art that is classifiable into the world one already knows, is *not experienced at all*,<sup>979</sup> for the truth of the artwork is not visible within the confines of the world as it is—from the perspective of one’s positive humanity. Just as “Utopia goes disguised in the creatures,”<sup>980</sup> so does the future come disguised in artworks: artworks are fragments of a future world that express themselves in the language of the present, but in so doing, the language of the present is transformed—it thereafter bears the imprint of the future toward which it now points. The “culinary” consumption of artworks is the reduction of their truth to the terms of the human subject, which thus serves to shore up its primacy and provide sustenance to the ersatz experience possible in the modern world.

What is needed, then, in order for the receptive experience of artworks to be capable of grasping their truth, is an active moment, an activity that, while

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<sup>978</sup> Cf. Raymond Geuss, “Form and ‘The New’ in Adorno’s ‘*Vers une musique informelle*’,” in *Morality, Culture, and History*, 143.

<sup>979</sup> *AT*, 246. Cf. *AT*, 183.

<sup>980</sup> Recall *MM*, A146, 228.

remaining receptive to artworks, at once resists their culinary appropriation and persists in the inhumanity of the subjective displacement found in the shudder. Hullot-Kentor provides a hint of what this activity might be when he equates Adorno's use of the Greek *thaumazein* in "The Idea of Natural History" with "shock."<sup>981</sup> *Thaumazein* in Aristotle is typically understood to be something closer to "awe" or "wonder" than the modern "shock," with its violent and mechanical associations; *thaumazein* informs philosophical activity—it is the wonder one feels in being confronted with nature that propels one to inquire and to reflect.<sup>982</sup> Though the harmonious experience of *thaumazein* as wonder is transformed in modernity to the fragmented experience of shock that would turn one *away* from reflection, mediated through the artwork as the shudder, this bodily disposition to objects might likewise provide an impulse to reflection, just as the addendum demands its own reflexive interrogation. It is worth recalling here that in *Politics* VII, Aristotle includes "study and thought [*theoria kai dianoeseis*]" among the components of a life of action (*bios praktikos*).<sup>983</sup> Adorno echoes this view in "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis" when he writes that "[t]hinking is a doing" and that theory is itself a form of praxis.<sup>984</sup> That Adorno cites Aristotle here, noting both the ideological function of his emphasis on the

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<sup>981</sup> *INH*, 118. Cf. Bob Hullot-Kentor, "Introduction to Adorno's 'Idea of Natural History,'" 107.

<sup>982</sup> *Meta*. I.2 982b12-13.

<sup>983</sup> *Pol*. VII.3 1325b13-23.

<sup>984</sup> "Marginalia to Theory and Praxis," *CM*, 261; 277.

life of contemplation and its truth content,<sup>985</sup> further illustrates the degree to which his treatment of these questions is bound up with Aristotle's problematic.

As we have seen in Chapter 10, the *praxis* of *theoria* in Aristotle is specifically bound up with the civic rites of tragic spectatorship, and it is through these that both the hierarchical division of human beings into higher and lower sorts based on their animal proximity is established and reconciled. Adorno relies on the Aristotelian formulation of theory and praxis in order to turn it against itself, to turn it against the production of the human as master and the animal as pet, prey, or slave, which in turn involves the domination of some humans by others. The "irruption of objectivity into subjective consciousness"<sup>986</sup> in the experience of the truth of art is the animal shedding its human confines, and so offering an image of its subjective possibilities re-constellated. The practice of theory is the active moment of the receptive experience of artworks that makes possible the grasping of their truth, and thus what establishes their greatness, for it is only insofar as an artwork is true that it can be said to be great. It is for this reason that artworks, "especially those of the highest dignity," can be said to "await their interpretation."<sup>987</sup> Interpretation, commentary, and critique are all internal to the artwork, to its process of becoming, for these serve to transform the artwork which has through expression captured a socio-political

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<sup>985</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>986</sup> AT, 245.

<sup>987</sup> AT, 128.

antagonism at a certain point in history.<sup>988</sup> The understanding of this socio-political antagonism and its place in history, and so the understanding of future possibilities, and so the possibilities one understands to inform one's own life, are thus transformed through the interpretation of the work.

In this way we find the receptive experience of artworks to indeed be capable of displacing the subjective coordinates of the human. However, do all artworks enable this experience alike? If an artwork's greatness concerns the truth of its expression of a particular antagonism, which is itself determined through *critical reflection*,<sup>989</sup> how could there be a significant distinction between different kinds of artworks and their relative suitability for interpretation? Are not all works equally in need of interpretation, and thus equal in their possession of truth content? Though Adorno does indeed claim that truth content can assert itself through even the most ideological works,<sup>990</sup> and that art wholly free of ideology is probably impossible,<sup>991</sup> he nevertheless does hold that certain artworks do a better job of expressing a given historical moment than others, and thus that artworks possessed of certain qualities have greater truth content, where the relative truth content of a work is related to its power to disrupt the subject's coordinates.

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<sup>988</sup> *AT*, 194.

<sup>989</sup> Cf. Peter Uwe Hohendal, "Adorno: The Discourse of Philosophy and the Problem of Language," in *The Actuality of Adorno*, ed. Max Pensky (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), 78.

<sup>990</sup> Insofar as ideology is itself "the distorted image of the true" (*AT*, 233).

<sup>991</sup> *AT*, 236. *Contra* the notion that Adorno is a champion of art's "purity." See Rancière, *Aesthetics and Its Discontents*, 132; Albrecht Wellmer, "Adorno, Modernity, and the Sublime," in *The Actuality of Adorno*, 124.

Thus it is not simply a matter of the quality of the interpretation—Adorno does not, as Jameson would have it, wish “to reinvent a new kind of primacy of philosophy over artistic experience.”<sup>992</sup> Rather, the truth content of works is entwined with the work itself, and the particular way in which its form reveals its material as content.<sup>993</sup> For instance, Adorno claims that though interpretation gives to artworks the life in which they become what they will be, in which the antagonism captured in the work at its birth is theoretically elaborated and grasped, this process is finite, in a sense. Eventually the work will be conceptually grasped such that its content and its form will be assimilated to the dominant constellation of social objects, and it will cease to be experienced as a work of art—it will no longer possess the power capable of dislocating the social objects that compose the subject, for it will be among the objects that constitute the subject as it is. Or more bluntly: even inhuman art risks becoming human.

For this reason, art must perpetually re-invent itself in order to be experienced, and so must continually invent ways to break from past forms and techniques that have become assimilated by the order of what is: art must be *new*. The necessarily antagonistic character of newness makes new artworks *dissonant*, in that they must disrupt the harmony established in the order of what is: their newness is heard as the torture of accepted forms. The new must also be *abstract*, for insofar as its innovation calls into being a world that does not exist,

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<sup>992</sup> Jameson, *Late Marxism*, 208.

<sup>993</sup> Cf. Paddison, *Adorno, Modernism, and Mass Culture*, 61.

it is a world that is unknown, like “the secret of Poe’s pit.”<sup>994</sup> Opposing these are artworks that can no longer be experienced: artworks that have become “archaic.”<sup>995</sup> However, Adorno insists this process of ossification, this becoming-archaic, has no fixed trajectory, for “[m]odernity is a qualitative, not a chronological category.”<sup>996</sup> Rather, the process of becoming-archaic is fragmented, dynamic, and dependent upon the modern, upon the new, for new artistic innovations may serve to appropriate the past in novel ways that serve to breathe into it new life. Artworks of the past might live again by finding themselves in new light, and it is their distance from this light that renders them invisible.

Thus important, even definitive, examples of new or modern art for Adorno, such as Schoenberg’s *Five Pieces for Orchestra*, Op.16, called by Adorno the “oldest, boldest and most important” of large scale atonal works,<sup>997</sup> today might be confused with parts of the soundtrack of *Planet of the Apes*. Yet even if the culture industry has managed to assimilate the most dissonant examples of modern art and transformed them into fodder for the reproduction of positive humanity, it has done so in large part by managing the contexts in which a subject is exposed to it. The experience of musical dissonance outside of the

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<sup>994</sup> *AT*, 15; 20. Together these three form the core of Adorno’s modernism. See Peter Osborne, “Adorno and the Metaphysics of Modernism,” in *The Problems of Modernity*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1991), 36.

<sup>995</sup> *AT*, 349.

<sup>996</sup> *MM*, A140, 218.

<sup>997</sup> Adorno, “*Vers une musique informelle*,” 291.

context of expressing the intensity or psychological distress of a scene in a film, that is, outside of a context in which it is expected and so forms part of the social objects in which personality is constituted, might still threaten to displace our subjective coordinates.

One might imagine, for example, the confusion and even distress at having Op.16 being piped into the food court at a shopping mall. The fact that Schoenberg could still today empty the food court lays bare the antagonism between the kind of experience captured in his work and the kind that supports the activities appropriate to a food court. Thus even the now century-old music of Arnold Schoenberg—considered by some passé even at the time of Adorno’s writings—might be seen, thanks to the abstract and dissonant qualities of the work, as something like an undigested stone, even a tumor, in the bowel of the culture industry. Whether or not this tumor proves to be benign or malignant depends upon how it is articulated theoretically and appropriated by future art, but its availability for such appropriation is fundamentally different than works that have never at one time been new.<sup>998</sup> Works that have once been new thus embody a transformative capacity that carries with it moral and political

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<sup>998</sup> A work can be said to never have been new if it was never the attempt to express an experience that necessitated innovation in artistic techniques, and whose own experience never served to displace the subjective coordinates of the listener/spectator. Works that lack sufficient contact with the material to require a transformation in their techniques fail to express the experience of the social antagonisms from which they were born; rather these works would hide this antagonism with pseudo-experience. Such works are *born old*—they are already “archaic” the moment they hit the shops.

possibilities, even though these works reject direct moral and political association.

In this way, the receptive experience of artworks that contributes to the emergence of the subject of aesthetic comportment is one wherein the bodily reaction to new artworks disrupts the subjective coordinates of one's personality—of one's humanity—and becomes mediated by reflection in a manner that resists re-establishing the subjective coordinates of humanity. While this experience is without positive political content, in serving to undermine the relation between the subject and the objects of which it is constituted, and opening up the subject instead to its own animality and reflection upon this animality, a wrench is thrown into the gears of society as it exists, opening up an interval from which transformation is possible. Yet just as man cannot live by bread alone, so the animal cannot be sustained merely by reflection on aesthetic experience. Aristotle's poetics, though reserving a place for the lower types within civic and even properly human life through tragic spectatorship, nevertheless do so in a manner that reproduces the division between higher and lower, human and animal, for it is left for spectators to identify through contemplation the highest human types as they reveal themselves through their speech and overall bearing, and reject what they see as animal. In this way, tragic spectatorship allows for the lower to participate in the higher so that they might

be reconciled to the higher *as lower*, and so to a conception of the human that serves to cordon off other animal possibilities.

If Adorno is to appropriate from Aristotle an idea of aesthetic education yet transcend Aristotle's manner of dividing higher and lower, human and animal, then he must also transcend Aristotle's aesthetic education based solely or even primarily on spectators assimilating themselves to social objects by way of aesthetic experience. Instead, Adorno requires an aesthetic education that also includes subjects being capable of learning for themselves to produce the objects that will form part of the constellation of social objects from which they will in turn be produced. The practices needed to sustain the transformation of the human subject in this way must thus extend beyond the active moment in the receptive experience of artworks, reflection, which, like *theoria*, serves to make the subject of receptive experience a *critic*, and connect to a productive experience of artworks, wherein the subject becomes an *artist*. Becoming an artist in this way means to enter into an active relationship with the techniques used to produce inhuman works of art. Thus while new works of art, as we have seen, serve to disrupt the subjective coordinates of humanity, I shall argue below that in order for Adorno to transcend Aristotle and so theorize the possibility of a truly aesthetic animal, he must incorporate the practices required to create these works. While the receptive experience of art serves to disrupt and resist the subjective coordinates of humanity, truly aesthetic comportment that might

actualize a practice of animality requires more direct engagement with the production of art.

### *Animal Technique*

The subject of Adorno's conception of aesthetic comportment is one for whom the relation between *mimesis* and reason have been radically altered, such that reason is no longer a domineering force oriented to maximizing individual benefits in the interest of self-preservation. Instead, reason is oriented to inventing ways to express the mimetic impulse toward contact and solidarity with others. I argue that the subject of aesthetic comportment is not human, but some other kind of animal, an animal that emerges through a kind of aesthetic education comprised of both a receptive and a productive experience of artworks. The receptive experience of artworks, discussed above, is comprised of a passive moment, the involuntary shudder that runs through a body confronted with the new, and an active moment of reflection upon the shudder and the works that invoked this reaction. While the passive moment disrupts the subjective coordinates of the human, the active moment serves to resist the re-constitution of the human, and thus allows for the persistence of animality.

However, insofar as the receptive experience of artworks leaves the subject in a position of dependence upon artworks produced by others, there remains a division between the critic and the artist characteristic of the division of labor

that has enabled socio-political domination. If this division is to be transcended, from Aristotle's distinction between action as speech and action as contemplation, to the Leninist division between revolutionary vanguard and masses, a productive experience of artworks is required. This productive experience must be one wherein the inhuman subject of receptive experience learns to act according to impulses other than those of self-preservation, and at the same time produce the social objects from which new forms of subjectivity will spring. In this way the productive experience of artworks is a kind of alienation of alienated labor: it seeks to appropriate the most advanced productive techniques and the discipline necessary to employ them, but turned toward the production of objects that are without the instrumental function of reproducing the world as it is.

In producing objects that are not immediately or obviously part of any system of equivalence, the subject experiences activity irreducible to that necessary to reproduce the existing socio-political world, while at once contributing truly individual objects to the socio-political constellation from which new subjects will be formed. In this way "art becomes the schema of social praxis," and every "authentic artwork is internally revolutionary,"<sup>999</sup> for such works are expressions of the possibility of production organized otherwise than it is in the world of domination. Insofar as the experience of producing objects

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<sup>999</sup> *AT*, 228.

according to impulses other than those of instrumental reason amounts to a kind of education of the impulses and the rationality needed to express them, this productive experience must be seen as a moral one, and insofar as its products contribute to the order of social objects from which subjectivity emerges, it must also be considered political. We must read Adorno's thoughts on artistic practice or *technique*, then, as part of a kind of moral and political education, one where subjects practice the activities which will serve to produce a subject of a certain sort: in this case, *the good animal* of which Adorno has written, the actualization of subjective possibilities repressed by the human.

Like the receptive experience of artworks, productive experience consists of passive and active moments. The active moment of the productive experience of artworks concerns forming activity, that is, the mastery of artistic material through techniques that serve to dislodge the material from the forms in which it is historically sedimented and so make from it something new. Like the shudder, which was found above to be the shock experience of modernity aesthetically pacified, so is the aesthetic mastery expressed in form and technique a kind of pacified mastery. The technical mastery of artistic material is a pacified image of the technological domination of nature, for the former is mastery without violence, mastery that expresses what lay trapped in the material but would otherwise remain mute. In offering an image of non-violent mastery, the technical practices of artistic production provide an education of animal impulses

that would enable their articulation in a subject whose reason is the agent of animality, rather than its censor. Understanding this non-violent mastery involves understanding its status in relation to concepts and reason.

Just as concepts are for Adorno the means by which humans carve up and identify objects in the material world, so are forms the way in which artists have served to organize the plethora of possibilities available through artistic material, rendering it as content.<sup>1000</sup> Forms are thus analogous to concepts without themselves being conceptual—we might say that forms are to *mimesis* what concepts are to reason. Forms and concepts are the means through which mimetic and rational impulses are bound up with the world: they are the point of contact where the body meets objects and is itself constituted as an object, capturing the world and in so doing being captured by it. Content is material given artistic form, and thus *transformed*. The material as it existed in the socio-political world—what Adorno calls the “empirical world”—through artistic form acquires an individuality and a degree of distance, of *autonomy*, from the socio-political world. As we have seen, this autonomy is not so great as to render artworks incapable of being re-integrated into the socio-political world and so incorporated into its reproduction, and even this autonomy itself can be seen to harbor an ideological element insofar as it is possible for art’s refusal of the terms of socio-political world to have a quietist dimension—hence the impossibility of

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<sup>1000</sup> “Artistic form, when properly constituted, serves to liberate content from its chaotic and inarticulate state” as material. See Zuidervaart, *Adorno’s Aesthetic Theory*, 128.

art wholly free of ideology.<sup>1001</sup> Nevertheless, even the tiny distance opened up between the world as it is and the world as it appears through artistic form is enough to introduce new possibilities into the world as it is.

Adorno offers an example of new possibilities introduced through artistic form in his account of Morike's poem "Moustrap Rhyme," wherein a child circles a mousetrap, calling for a mouse to come pay him and his cat a visit. The social material upon which this poem draws concerns the human practice of identifying some animals as friends or allies to be cared for (the cat), and others to be identified as vermin and destroyed (the mouse). Reduced to its social material, the poem indeed appears to be an allusion to this practice through the taunts of a sadistic child, intent on seeing the triumph of human mastery and identifying with it as his own in the dangers posed to the mouse by *his* cat and *his* trap. Yet Adorno claims that to interpret this poem as simply a taunt referring to this "miserable, socially conditioned ritual," that is, to reduce the poem to its social material, is precisely to overlook the poem as a work of art, and thus its form and content.

The poetic allusions to the mouse's capture, the child's claim that they will "sing" and "dance," transforms the violence of the social material into the ambiguity of poetic content, calling up "involuntarily" the "friendly image of

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<sup>1001</sup> Recall *AT*, 236.

child, cat, and mouse dancing, the two animals on their hind legs.”<sup>1002</sup> In this way, even an artwork that takes violent material as its content transforms this material into content whose meaning can no longer be reduced to what it was as material. Once appropriated by art, the material no longer has the last say: the “ritual” of which the child’s taunt is a part becomes through artistic form a kind of counter-spell to invoke the liberation of the child, cat, and mouse from their socially-determined antagonistic roles. Thus through the artwork, even the practice of destroying vermin can be recast as the utopian image of solidarity between animals.

The importance of technique here is twofold: 1) it is technique that serves to impart form to the material, transforming it into content and thus giving it the critical distance from the empirical world necessary to introduce new possibilities; and 2) technique serves as an example of activity that is both rational and conceptless,<sup>1003</sup> that is, activity that attempts to give rational expression to the non-identical as non-identical, as something that does not yet exist, rather than identify non-identity with a concept and so assimilate it to the conceptual order of the existing world. Artistic technique can thus be said to be both mimetic and rational activity. It is mimetic in that it is organized along formal rather than conceptual lines, and it is rational insofar as it is logical and calculating—artistic technique employs all the resources of cunning in order to

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<sup>1002</sup> *AT*, 124.

<sup>1003</sup> *AT*, 213.

invent means of expressing an experience of the material through a new form, rather than identifying it with a concept.

In this way technique is a practice that is not human in the strict sense, for it demands a different relation between reason and mimesis than that which serves to constitute the human. Whereas humanity is born in the failed attempt to repress its mimetic impulses through the rational deployment of concepts, artistic technique attempts to make reason an ally of *mimesis*. In this way, the artistic techniques deployed in the production of artworks can be seen as moral *praxis* in the Aristotelian sense, that is, as practice that serves to engender the practitioner with the kind of constitution capable of supporting certain values. However, where Adorno continues to resist Aristotle is that not only are these practices not aimed at values thought to be derived from what is naturally and necessarily human, but are rather linked to human animality, and their practice encourages the emergence of a different subject, one opposed to the human. In this sense, artistic practices retain for Adorno an important *critical* dimension: they are not aimed at identifying different actualizations of human animality with the concept of the human and so reconcile the former to the latter, but rather with fostering an unruly profusion of individuality in solidarity with each other's difference.

In terms of artistic technique, these practices are critical through their engagement with the material and its history. Adorno writes that form

“converges with critique,”<sup>1004</sup> for the material itself is already the sedimented forms and contents of the past.<sup>1005</sup> Material is thus already, in a sense, a graveyard of forms and their contents. Finding ways of giving expression to the material is thus a way of individuating through re-division what is already artistic, historical, social, and political: it is a way, as noted above, of giving voice to a particular antagonism that their sedimentation has produced, and in so doing, acquiring a distance from this antagonism that might conjure up the image of its solution.

It is for this reason that articulating the new is an historical process, for in working through the material one is necessarily working through the ways in which past artists have employed different techniques in order to impart form to the material with which they were confronted. Producing an artwork that is new, one that might possess the power of disrupting the subjective coordinates of its audience, thus involves technical innovation in order to master the material, to transform the way in which it presents itself such as to be cast in a new light. The practice of applying these technical innovations and creating the new is moral through the kind of education of the impulses it requires, and can be called political insofar as it involves transforming the overarching structure in which moral activity has its force, through the production of new social objects that will enter the constellation constitutive of subjectivity.

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<sup>1004</sup> *AT*, 144.

<sup>1005</sup> *AT*, 145. Cf. Robert Hullot-Kentor, “The Impossibility of Music,” in *Things Beyond Resemblance*, 182.

In order to accomplish this expression, however, the productive experience of artworks requires also a passive moment: form must not be simply be imposed upon content haphazardly; technique must not simply be applied to material arbitrarily: rather, both form and the techniques of which it is composed must themselves be responses to material necessity. It is thus only through a passive attunement to the material, to a sensitivity to its structure, that an artist might know how techniques might be employed and transformed to express it, and form might emerge out of the content, rather than remain something antagonistic to the material.<sup>1006</sup>

It is this passive moment that serves to limit the subjectivity of the artist, to make this subjectivity the agent of the material's objectivity, and so ensure that the mastery learned through artistic practice is indeed non-violent. Thus, while Adorno will refer to technique as being "mastery," and "repression," and even "domination," he also can claim that the artist mobilizes this domination against domination for her domination of the material through technique is at once her submission to technical dictates emerging from the material.<sup>1007</sup> Adorno compares this reciprocal form of mastery to linguistic fluency: one can claim to have mastered a language only insofar as one has allowed oneself to be mastered by that language. Thus, if the logic of technique is one of "authentic control,"

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<sup>1006</sup> *AT*, 142. Cf. Hullot-Kentor, "The Impossibility of Music," 183.

<sup>1007</sup> Adorno, "Reaction and Progress," In *Night Music*, trans. Wieland Hoban, ed. Rolf Tiedemann (London: Seagull, 2009), 223.

then it must also include its opposite, “the education of the subjective sensibility to respond to the impulses of whatever is not the subject.”<sup>1008</sup>

In this way Adorno rejects the model of the artist as creator, both in its explicitly theological articulation and in its humanist echo, for in attuning herself to the material the artist accepts the technical demands necessary to express it, and so makes herself something like the “extension of the tool,” the means through which the potentiality of the work latent in the material is made actual.<sup>1009</sup> The artist’s reason then is not god-given or definitively human, but rather an animal impulse entwined with the mimetic impulse that might participate in the invention of forms to express this animal, and in so doing, produce the new—the nature that does not yet exist. In the moral sense, this passive moment involves practicing one’s attunement to the objective animality the receptive experience of artworks serves to foster, such that employing artistic techniques and producing artworks becomes a kind of mastery in service of animal solidarity. Read as political activity, then, artistic technique is the mastery of reason deployed in order to solve the problems that surround expressing the objective animality the human world characterized by domination would suppress. Artistic technique is reason convulsed by the animal, reason driven to invent ways of enabling animal expression.

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<sup>1008</sup> Adorno, “*Vers une musique informelle*,” *QF*, 319.

<sup>1009</sup> *AT*, 166. The speculation demanded by the antinomies of Adorno’s aesthetic theory does not to my mind render them theological, as argues Hohendal. See Peter Uwe Hohendal, *The Fleeting Promise of Art* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013), 61.

Moreover, by introducing new objects into the social constellation of which subjectivity is constituted, such activity might then contribute to the creation of a new kind of subject. In this way, art, through the receptive and productive experiences of its works, serves to cultivate resistance to the subjective coordinates of humanity and precipitate their transformation. The subject educated by these experiences, the subject of aesthetic comportment, is one for whom violence is intolerable, and who is compelled toward solidarity with the suffering. Where this aesthetic comportment serves to foster solidarity between such subjects, a global subject might be constituted, one for whom the intolerable status of violence serves as the necessity of its change, of transforming the world such that the possibility of “total disaster” is no more.

It is for this reason that Adorno will claim that “watching over the artist’s shoulder is a collective subject that has yet to be realized”<sup>1010</sup>: the “I” that speaks in artworks is not the “I” of the individual ego of the artist, his or her positive humanity, but the “We” of a collective subject. This collective subject found in the image of reconciled humanity thus becomes the wound around which subjectivity is displaced and re-organized toward the construction of a global subject pushing towards this image of a future humanity, which, as we have seen, is human no longer. It is by way of artworks and the techniques that produce them that the animal that is reconciled humanity weighs upon the subject,

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<sup>1010</sup> *AT*, 231.

displacing this subjectivity and enabling its reconstitution around the experience of displacement—the experience of animality. Thus artworks “anticipate a nonexistent social whole,” a “non-existent subject,”<sup>1011</sup> the reconciled humanity that they call through the creation of a global subject. In this radically transformed world, the “nonexistent social whole” produced through the cultivation of animality, the human would become nothing more than a memory, the ancient nightmare of an animal that now finally wakes to life, eyes open.

What might such an animal be, one who was human, but now no longer? What would such a society be like, where self-preservation and its violence no longer occupy the center of gravity around which all else orbits? A society where none are dominated? What suffering would drive artistic expression, if suffering as the experience of one’s mortality and fragility was without the razor’s edge that accompanies life lived each against all? Adorno writes that art in such a society would be “wholly different” than it is in the society of the present, that its role would be transformed.<sup>1012</sup> But transformed how? Would such animals “construct their edifices and works of art as birds build their nests and spiders spin their webs,” or “perform musical concerts after the fashion of frogs and cicadas,” as Kojève fancies? It is just as easy to laugh at such propositions as it is impossible to say. Violence is so deeply embedded in the human constitution that its displacement from the central place of life’s organization—not even its outright

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<sup>1011</sup> *AT*, 167-168.

<sup>1012</sup> *AT*, 338.

eradication—could mean the introduction of radically new ways of living. Radically *new*, even if this possible future already goes disguised in all the ordinary little fragments of peace we experience without even realizing it, entwined as they are with the different privileges particular to our societies.

Perhaps we might think of this possible animal future as a piece of music to be played with the instrument of our bodies. A work for the modern piano, say, Schoenberg's *Three Piano Pieces*, Op. 11, was already *physically* possible the moment the piano as it presently exists came into being. In this sense, Opus 11, and every piece for the modern piano before and after it, was inherent to the very construction of the piano as a physically possible combination of sounds. And yet, it took the history of compositions for piano in order to produce the particular combination of sounds that is Opus 11, and its existence transformed what was known about the possibilities inherent to the piano, and how it would be played thereafter. In this same way, while the animal agency that would transgress the rules of composition that is the human is as old as the body, it has required the history of humanity to make possible this animality, to make possible the subject that might reveal just how our understanding of what a body can do has been obstructed by our own understanding of its possibilities. I have argued that Adorno theorizes the possibility of the transformation of these obstructions—that a different animal is possible, one we might call *aesthetic*, not

after the senses endowed by nature from which it might be thought to spring, but from the sense of a nature it will invent.

## Chapter Sixteen: Conclusion

The rhinoceros king Archibald has a golden crown with a fat pearl and golden layers of skin over his eyes, but stands aloof from active government. He is having an affair with the giraffe 'Gazelle', occasionally wears a silk-grey pair of pyjama trousers, and has published a pamphlet, the pan-humanist manifesto. It has appeared in the publishing house of the united jackals and hyenas. For years he has been working on his magnum opus. It is called 'The Rhinoceros Whip', and is the theoretical groundwork of a human society that includes the animals.

--Adorno, letter to Horkheimer<sup>1013</sup>

I have attempted to show the prominence of Aristotle's place in the Western conception of the human being, and that this conception is misrepresented by Nietzsche, Heidegger, and those thinkers working within their paradigm. The result of this misrecognition is that the promise of the Aristotelian problematic—the promise of a beautiful life lived in leisure, beyond the necessities of self-preservation—is lost. In order to retrieve the promise of the Aristotelian problematic, a promise also obstructed by different elements of Aristotle's thought, I have argued that Adorno's work serves as our best guide. Adorno does not present us with a return to Aristotle, but a recovery of the promise of his thought, transformed in a different constellation of socio-historical objects. It is through Adorno, then, that we might think the possibility of a posthuman subject, an *aesthetic animal* that might draw on repressed animal potentials in order to reconstitute the human subject in a way that no longer makes central the

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<sup>1013</sup> Cited in Stephan Müller-Doohm, *Adorno*, 240.

drives that have produced this animal as human, as one whose quest for self-preservation has been realized through the oppression and domination of others.

However, the imperfections of my argument, like so many loose threads in a hastily knitted scarf, remain hanging from the article, no doubt irritating the reader, who might like to give one or two of them a good pull. I would thus like in conclusion to address some of the more prominent of these insufficiently examined questions, and with them also indicate some possible avenues for future research. These questions include: 1) how might this emphasis on the nonidentity of the human subject and the recovery of its repressed animal potentials differ among human subjects classed according to different particularities such as gender, race, or sexuality? If the process of disrupting the reproduction one's human subjectivity in the interest of becoming some other kind of animal is different for different kinds of human subjects, should not I be referring to aesthetic *animals*, not the aesthetic *animal*? Does not the subjective transformation I advocate neglect human plurality? And 2) What of the animal rights and liberation movements relative to the subjective transformation I advocate? Am I not neglecting real pragmatic changes that can be accomplished here and now through political reform for some utopian dream of a post-revolutionary future? What about the alleviation of suffering that can be accomplished more or less immediately, irrespective of grand claims to subjective transformation?

With respect to future avenues of research, my use of Adorno to unlock the animal potentials originally repressed in the Aristotelian problematic might be seen to point in a number of directions for new and original research. These avenues include, but are not limited to: 1) an examination of other instances in the history of political thought, or even other kinds of literature, that intimate this posthuman subject, suggesting that they too, are messengers from a future yet to be realized. In this way, our relation to the history of Western thought might be re-oriented through Adorno, allowing us to 'brush it against the grain,' as Benjamin put it. 2) This theory of an aesthetic animal, recovered as it is specifically from a problem that characterizes the Western philosophical tradition, is worth examining the light of other traditions of thought, in an attempt to see not only the way in which this problem is formulated differently in other traditions (or not at all), but also how these traditions might indicate different routes of exit, different possibilities for subjective transformation. 3) The relation of Adorno's critique of the self and personality, though clearly indebted in different ways to phenomenology and psychoanalysis, remains largely implicit and undeveloped. To use Adorno to think through in greater detail the meaning of a subjective transformation that would displace and perhaps ultimately leave what we consider human behind appears to require a more detailed engagement with the phenomenological and psychoanalytic traditions than I have been able to do here, and so would benefit from further

investigation. And lastly, 4) what does this radical transformation of the human subject mean for democracy, for democratic possibilities? It is noted above that Adorno does not himself have a democratic theory, yet his critique of philosophical anthropology and the way it has so frequently accompanied our understanding of political possibility may have important and wide ranging consequences for democratic organization, and to this end it would be well worth examining Adorno's relation to democracy in greater detail than has been possible here. I will begin by examining the first two clusters of questions outlined above concerning various insufficiencies within my argument before turning to these last four points indicating new avenues of research opened up by this study of Aristotle and Adorno.

*The Animality of Human Plurality and Other Suffering Animals*

It has undoubtedly been noted by the reader that one is never simply human in general—one is only ever constituted as a human subject through a constellation of socio-political objects that will differ not only according to the place of one's society in history and in the prevailing global order, but according to one's own particular place in that society. Consequently one is not simply interpolated through this range of objects as a human subject in general, more or less equal to all others in this society, but as a classed, gendered, and racialized subject of a certain sexual orientation, whose relation to the dominant conception of

humanity will be different according to the particularities of the ways in which power is exercised in one's society. Consequently, while the animal is non-identical to the human subject, turning toward the animal as I have discussed above will differ markedly between human subjects whose humanity is interpolated in different ways.

For instance, in societies wherein the paradigmatic representative of the human subject is a white, heterosexual male, the identity of say, a black homosexual woman becomes non-identical to this conception of humanity. This is among the reasons that different kinds of human subjects have been in different times and places considered 'deviant,' associated with animals, and denied the rights and privileges accorded to those more clearly identifiable with the dominant conception of the human subject. From this perspective, affirming identities such as black, female, or homosexual all serve to oppose the dominant identities of white, male, and heterosexual, and so might potentially displace and even transform this conception of the human subject, insisting on a greater plurality of possible human subjects than that which identifies as white, male, and heterosexual. This possible displacement of the dominant conception of humanity in the face of greater plurality might be seen as an important part of the progressive vector of identity politics.

However, such identity politics is also possessed of a regressive vector. As I have attempted to show, Adorno argues that the way in which identities have

been formed is bound up with the struggle for survival and the oppression and domination through which this struggle has been expressed in most human societies. Consequently, the identities of subjects in societies characterized by domination necessarily carry exclusion within their very structure—such identities *are* by way of excluding that which they *are not*. Consequently, even the identity of a subject defined as black, female, and homosexual will necessarily exclude some other subjective possibility in order to affirm this identity. More importantly, just as Adorno's negative conception of humanity as the opposition to violence was bound up with the violence it would oppose, along with the subject who would mask this violence, so are subject's constituted in this oppositional manner bound to that which they oppose. Thus what is understood as being "black," "female," and "homosexual" in this instance are all the mirror images of the dominant subject against which they oppose themselves—they are, in effect, excrescences of the dominant identity, and to assume them un-critically is to accept the range of subjective possibilities consonant with that identity in society as it exists. To actively identify with a given identity and the range of subjective possibilities given in the dominant order is thus to desire the amelioration of one's own position in that order, but to otherwise accept that order as it is. In this way, the dominion of humanity remains one constituted through the violence of oppression and domination, even if the humanity constituted through this violence is now a richer, more complexly plural subject.

This is not to say that the kind of identity politics sketched briefly above is to be rejected, however. Rather, its progressive vector found in the opposition to and displacement of the dominant conception of humanity must be accompanied by a second progressive vector: an opposition to and displacement of the fixed identity one assumes in opposing the dominant one. This later opposition or negation is the utopian moment of the struggle: like Adorno's conception of reconciled humanity that serves to displace the permanence of the struggle between negative and positive humanity, the particular identities assumed in opposition to the dominant human subject must themselves be displaced by a utopian image of this subject transformed beyond the exigencies of the struggle for its survival if they are to avoid being trapped in a permanent struggle that ultimately maintains the dominant order. How exactly "black" or "female" or "homosexual" are to be imagined in utopian images, shorn of the violence to which they are subject in the present, is a matter to be decided by those who struggle through these identities—it cannot be imagined or imposed upon them from without. While others critically working through different sets of identities can offer their solidarity in these struggles—and *must*, if a global subject is to be constituted such as to radically transform society—the particularities of these struggles beyond the basic aversion to violence must be navigated by those caught up in these struggles.

Turning to animality then, to what remains non-identical to one's constitution as a human subject, would necessarily take on a plurality of forms, for it must work through the plurality of ways in which the human subject is itself constituted, along with various non-conceptual moments produced through different struggles and oppositions to that which is constituted as the dominant or paradigmatic representative of humanity in different societies and cultures. It thus makes little difference to refer to *the aesthetic animal* or *aesthetic animals*, for *the aesthetic animal* is always already an historically, socially, and politically situated possibility, and insofar as different societies and moments of history present different challenges to the realization of aesthetic animality, so this transformation will be different at different times and places. What allows these struggles to resonate with each other is the common movement toward a society free of domination, populated by subjects who are likewise not constituted through the violence of oppression and domination.

Though there has been a wide range of views about the relevance of Adorno's work for feminism, from those who focus on its limitations or ambivalence to those who see in it an important ally,<sup>1014</sup> to those who even

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<sup>1014</sup> On Adorno's limitations in this regard, see Regina Becker-Schmidt, "Critical Theory as a Critique of Society," in *Adorno, Culture, and Feminism*, ed. Maggie O'Neill (London: Sage, 1999); Sabine Wilke and Heidi Schlipphacke, "Construction of a Gendered Subject," in *The Semblance of Subjectivity*, ed. Tom Huhn and Lambert Zuidervaart (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997); on its ambivalence, see Rebecca Comay, "Adorno's Siren Song," *New German Critique* 81, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (2000): 21-48; and on its possible allegiance with feminism, see Lisa Yun Lee, *Dialectics of the Body*; and Maggie O'Neill, "Adorno and Women," in *Adorno, Culture, and Feminism*.

recognize in it the possibility of a transcendence of feminism's basic concepts,<sup>1015</sup> there has been comparatively little written about how Adorno's ideas might be fruitfully cultivated in thinking about race.<sup>1016</sup> While I have not in this study contributed to changing this state of affairs, I hope the above comments and the more broad strokes I have painted concerning Adorno's ideas on humanity and animality above will aid in clearing the way for other future studies of how Adorno's conception of identity might intersect with different ideas concerning identity politics in new and novel ways. It remains now to briefly engage the second set of questions concerning the loose ends I would, if not tie up, then at least call attention to here: those concerning animal rights and liberation, and the relevance of my study to them.

I noted in the introduction that without Adorno's radical ideas concerning the philosophy of subjectivity, and with it the subjective transformation that must accompany socio-political transformation, the kinds of reform-minded consensus-building activities to which the animal rights and animal liberation movements tend to direct themselves, and which theories of animal rights and animal liberation would justify, are without, as it were, *teeth*. As I have attempted to show by way of Aristotle and Adorno, violence, oppression, and domination are intimately connected with human evolution and the manner in

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<sup>1015</sup> See Juliet Flower MacCannell, "Adorno: The Riddle of Femininity," in *Adorno, Culture, and Feminism*, 156.

<sup>1016</sup> For exceptions to this rule, see Fred Dallmayr, "The Politics of Nonidentity," *Political Theory* 25.1 (1997): 33-56; and Asha Varadharajna, *Exotic Parodies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

which what we call human has been socially and politically established and perpetuated. To simply include animals as persons or selves within this order is to overlook the violence that established and continues to perpetuate this order, even in terms of the subjective constitution of the human being itself. Thus if animal liberation or the advancement of animal rights is to be successful, it must be tied to broader socio-political goals that include the transformation of society so as to eliminate oppression and domination as such.

However, like the progressive vector of identity politics, the insistence upon a more radical, utopian dimension here should not be understood as a rejection of more pragmatically oriented goals tailored to particular situations that might alleviate the suffering of different animals therein. Efforts by animal rights activists and proponents of animal liberation to outlaw animal testing for commercial and scientific purposes, the successful campaigns in many countries to criminalize cruelty to nonhuman animals, the insistence on better treatment of animals being harvested for their meat or milk, and even the insistence that meat and milk harvesting be themselves outlawed, are all laudable projects that the more utopian emphasis on radical subjective and socio-political transformation would not—indeed, *could not*, as we have seen through the way in which Adorno conceptualizes the relation between particular struggles and the constitution of a global subject—sacrifice for so-called greater aims, such as the radical transformation of society and its subjects. The kind of global subject that Adorno

envisions transforming both the objective and subjective dimensions of society could not be one that suppresses particular instances of resistance, but that emerges out of these particular instances and allows them to resonate together through relations of solidarity.

However, without this utopian dimension, the particular efforts of animal rights activists and their supporters fail to take into account the violence of oppression and domination through which humanity is itself constituted. The persuasiveness of the arguments put forward in favor of animal rights and liberation concerning the more or less essential commensurability of humans to other animals depends upon materialist and scientific revolutions that have eroded previously dominant conceptions of the human being as an utterly distinct entity. Moreover, the fact that the case for animal rights has come to seem so reasonable to many in a world characterized by flagrant violations of human rights, including violations of these rights made in the very name of their preservation, should indicate to us the degree to which the metaphysical elevation of the human being has collapsed into a material subject, more or less reducible to a body to be manipulated or protected. Put differently: though the reduced status of the subject, or the fact that the human subject is now no more than an animal body, allows for other animals to potentially be included in the human category, at least its legal dimension, the underside or obscene secret concealed here is that this is so because humans are being treated almost as

viciously as other animals. To ignore this is to overlook the way in which oppression and domination operate in contemporary societies.

The likelihood of being subject to such violence—to the violation of one’s human rights—is radically different for those of different positions in society and in different parts of the world. Consequently, a promulgation of animal rights that fails to address the broader issues of socio-political oppression and domination would mean a return to the possibility of being treated like a human or animal to depend not on species, but to class, race, gender, and sexuality—much like in the ancient world of poetic myth, where power defines the way in which one is a human and how one relates to other animals. Only the attempt to build on the gains of animal rights by linking them to broader struggles against oppression and domination would thus avoid the age-old problem of the affluent caring more for their pets than the poor. Or more bluntly: in a world where the majority of humanity suffers the scourges of poverty, malnourishment, and preventable disease, a devotion to the welfare of other animals devoid of any intent on transforming this basic state of affairs can only be a bourgeois conceit. I have argued that Adorno is the most apt guide to this world and theorizing its transformation for he not only allows us to see our own animality and take the possibilities for transformation to begin from this situation, but unlike those who would neglect the universality of a global subject to focus entirely on particular struggles to the point of exhaustion, Adorno shows us that we cannot get rid of

the universal dimension of political struggle; rather, we must seek to realign the relation between universal and particular in a non-violent manner if a truly radical transformation is to be possible.

*Future Avenues, Possibilities*

I would like now to turn to a discussion of some of the possible avenues of future research I see being opened up by this work. One of the things I have attempted to show in my studies of Aristotle and Adorno is the way in which the animal is non-identical to the human: that is, the way in which what we think of as ‘animal’ often represents alternate subjective possibilities to the ‘human’ that have been repressed, often violently, in order that the human might emerge. While I have argued that Aristotle helps us understand how this dynamic has been related to art and politics in the history of political thought in the West, and that Adorno indicates a way in which this dynamic might be transformed, the emphasis placed on these two thinkers should not be understood as a claim that *only* these two thinkers offer useful insights concerning this knot of issues. Instead, the history of western political thought, and even other important literary texts not typically seen as being political, might be read in this light and so examined for further insights.

One potentially fruitful line of inquiry in this vein might be formulated as a recovery of the ideas of Diogenes of Sinope, the infamous Cynic. Diogenes is

known today primarily for artists' depictions of him in his domicile (a bathtub by the side of the road), and a host of alleged capers: he is said to have eaten a raw, and hence, un-sacrificed and therefore unclean octopus, masturbated publically, and, when asked by Alexander the Great to name a favor he might be granted by the Macedonian, Diogenes responded only with a curt, "stand out of my light."<sup>1017</sup> Moreover, Diogenes is said to have been one of the earliest examples of a cosmopolitan, claiming world citizenship and rejecting membership in the polis. Thus we see in Diogenes a figure who challenged the subjective coordinates of what was considered to be a good human being in his day, a fact highlighted all the more by the school of thought associated with him today, the Cynics.

The word 'Cynic' comes from the Greek *Kyon*, meaning dog: it was *Diogenes the dog* who transgressed the religious and political rites that bound the consumption of animals and allowed for the unstable relationship between gods, humans, and other animals to be regulated in the polis; *Diogenes the dog* who denied the shamefulness of pleasure and hence the proto-possessive-individualism that can be found in its enforced privacy; *Diogenes the dog* who wandered between borders, indifferent to their authorities. Diogenes thus stands as an important early instance of the turn to animality and the attempt to displace the human subject, and a Socratic figure who never seems to have found his Plato. Diogenes the dog may even be seen as something like the non-identity

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<sup>1017</sup> Cited in Sorabji, *Animal Minds, Human Morals*, 158.

of the philosopher Socrates likens to a well-trained hound in Plato's *Republic*—a mangy, urban mutt transgressing boundaries rather than the aristocratic thoroughbred trained to police them. In this sense, Diogenes stands as a non-identical excrescence of the founding moments in of the western tradition of political thought, offering an alternate path than the one that would become the tradition we know. Building on the partial recovery of Diogenes found in Sloterdijk's *Critique of Cynical Reason*,<sup>1018</sup> it may be possible to draw upon the idea of an aesthetic animal in opposition to the human to construct an alternate conception of cosmopolitanism, one which criticizes Nussbaum's brand of humanist cosmopolitanism and the theoretical place it reserves for the Stoics,<sup>1019</sup> erstwhile philosophical competitors of the Cynics.

However, though the preceding study has concerned thinkers who form part of the western tradition of political thought, I do not for this reason think that my study is without relevance to other traditions of thought, or that interesting and novel results might not be obtained through their cross-pollination.<sup>1020</sup> How exactly the human-animal distinction has been conceived, along with its possible relations to art and to politics, in other traditions of thought are of eminent importance to the possible consequences of this study. As

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<sup>1018</sup> Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

<sup>1019</sup> See especially Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996); *Upheavals of Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>1020</sup> Indeed, it has been noted that Adorno's work may particularly be suited to such contact. See Horowitz, "Adorno and Emptiness," 256.

noted in the brief discussion in Chapter 14 concerning the possibility of a posthuman future outlined by Kojève, it was precisely his encounter with Japanese society which forced him to rethink his ideas concerning the end of history.

In this way, an examination of certain elements of Japanese society, culture, and thought may perhaps prove especially fruitful in thinking about how the vicissitudes of the human-animal distinction have been understood in the West. The work of those thinkers identified under the moniker of 'the Kyoto School,' such as Kitaro Nishida and Jun Tosaka, seem of especial importance. Nishida and the Kyoto School are perhaps best known for attempting to think through the insights of Western thinkers such as Hegel, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche in light of different ideas concerning nothingness and the self drawn from the Buddhist tradition, and Tosaka also attempted to connect some of these innovations to a critique of Japanese fascism. For these reasons, trying to work through different points of contact between Adorno's critique of personality and the self with ideas drawn from the Kyoto School of philosophy may prove important for understanding the limits of the Aristotelian problematic, along with other possible means of rethinking the subjective transformation I have argued to be necessary in redrawing the human-animal distinction as it is currently understood in the West. Recent years have seen a number of important

texts of the Kyoto School translated into English;<sup>1021</sup> however, there are to date only a few attempts to submit their work to comparative studies with other prominent texts in the western tradition of political thought, and the possibilities of cross-cultural theoretical enrichment presently remain underdeveloped.

In developing Adorno's critique of personality and the self in this manner, and attempting to use his work to theorize a subjective transformation that might extend beyond what we call human, it may also prove helpful to re-think Adorno's relation to psychoanalysis and phenomenology. While Adorno himself draws heavily on Freud in parts of his work, he remains critical of different aspects of the psychoanalysis of his day; likewise, though Adorno devoted considerable attention to certain strains of phenomenology, he tends to keep a kind of aloof distance from its insights that keep them from flourishing in his work. Adorno's own statements concerning selflessness and the place of 'I' in relation to domination are highly provocative but often elliptical; a more sustained examination of this aspect of Adorno's thought could perhaps put flesh on these statements.

To this end, one might draw upon psychoanalytic theory to better understand the possible relationship between the repressed animality upon which our conception of the human depends, and the geography of the

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<sup>1021</sup> See for instance Nishida Kitaro, *Ontology of Production*, trans. William Haver, eds. Rey Chow, Harry Harootunian (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Nishida Kitaro, *Place and Dialectic*, trans. John W.M. Krummel, Shigenori Nagatomo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); Tosaka *Jun: A Critical Reader*, eds. Ken C. Kawashima, Fabian Schäfer, Robert Stolz (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2014).

unconscious psychoanalysis has gone to some lengths in mapping. Contact with recent work in phenomenology could also be productive: the ideas of Evan Thompson and others, drawing not only on the phenomenological tradition etched out by the likes of Husserl, but also the Buddhist tradition and recent research in cognitive science, may help construct a theory of the selflessness to which Adorno only alludes.<sup>1022</sup> Moreover, Adorno's work might enrich the work of these philosophers, who despite the sophistication of their understanding of the self and selflessness, tend to follow certain Buddhist ideas in emphasizing the moral dimension of transcending the self, while acknowledging yet downplaying the important political dimension of this endeavor. Adorno might here, perhaps somewhat ironically, be the one to bring politics back in, for as we have seen, the subject is for Adorno a product of its society, and thinking its transformation cannot be separated from socio-political transformation.

Lastly, at least in terms of the avenues I want to mention here, is Adorno's possible relation to democratic theory. Though Adorno does not, as I noted above, have a theory of democracy, insofar as he can be seen to theorize the radical transformation of the human subject, the subject often understood in various philosophical anthropologies to be essentially political, the transformed range of possibilities such a subject would actualize suggests the possibility of a transformed politics. While recent work on affectivity and its relation to

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<sup>1022</sup> Incidentally, these phenomenologists also draw on the work of Kyoto School philosopher Keiji Nishitani. See Francisco J. Varela, Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch, *The Embodied Mind* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 243-244.

democracy may prove helpful in understanding some of the possible political consequences for a posthuman aesthetic animal,<sup>1023</sup> Adorno's ideas on freedom may prove the most substantial foothold within his work for developing a contribution to democratic theory.

As Castoriadis claims, in ancient democratic Athens the *axia* of the democrat, that is, the "merit" or "measure" by which eligibility for political participation was to be established according to democrats, was freedom.<sup>1024</sup> Consequently, re-thinking the idea of freedom along lines that at once challenges communitarian ideas of freedom influenced by Aristotle and Hegel, on one hand, and the atomistic 'libertarian' ideas concerning individual freedom on the other, which have gained a worrying degree of currency in popular political discourse today, may in fact serve to enrich democratic theory. Such an attempt to use Adorno to formulate a theory of freedom would perhaps follow in the footsteps of such attempts by Brown<sup>1025</sup>; however, Adorno's emphasis here on a radical subjective transformation of the human, such as to no longer even be called human, would likely demand a greater degree of attention to the ways in which other animals are seen as being un-free, and therefore incapable of politics, which Brown has to my knowledge not examined.

In this way, Adorno's ideas on art and its relation to the human-animal distinction as I have examined them here place them at an intersection of

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<sup>1023</sup> See for instance Lars Tønder, *Tolerance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>1024</sup> Castoriadis, "Value, Equality, Justice, Politics," 297.

<sup>1025</sup> Cf. Wendy Brown, "Introduction," in *States of Injury* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

different trends in political theory, and future studies might thus both provocatively engage and challenge prominent ideas within these trends, while at once serving to shed further light on Adorno's own work and how we understand the possibilities of a posthuman subject—the possibilities, of an aesthetic animal. As I have attempted to show through a look at these possible avenues of future research, retrieving the possibility of the Aristotelian problematic through Adorno's theoretical insights is not simply a look backward, to both the horrors and the un-kept promises of history, but to the future and the hope and the menace of its unknown possibilities. It thus appears that in order to be aesthetic animals we must also be, after all, time travelers—if indeed such a thing is possible. Or as Pynchon writes, in a feat of ventriloquism, allowing subjects to crystallize around the words he would give them:

We make our journeys out there in the low light of the future, and return to the bourgeois day and its mass delusion of safety, to report on what we've seen. What are any of these 'utopian dreams' of ours but defective forms of time-travel?<sup>1026</sup>

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<sup>1026</sup> Pynchon, *Against the Day*, 942.

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