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AESTHETICS AND COMMUNITY

Political science and political theory possess a parallel appeal for understanding human society, the one presumably grounded on fact, the other on ideas. 'Presumably,' of course, is an essential qualifier, since, as in religious and moral thought, it is especially difficult to separate facts from ideas, and both of these from ideological presuppositions. Political theory and science, moreover, can be said to have had a parallel origin in western thought, the first in Plato's writings on the state, in which the idea of practice was never absent; the second in the political philosophy of Aristotle, which combined classification and judgment with its descriptions. This tells us something, moreover, about the complementarity, perhaps the inseparability of theory and science.

Yet neither political science nor political theory seems to satisfy entirely our desire to understand the structure and workings of human society. This is in part because the forms and conditions of societies have varied as widely as assessments of their success, and generalization is precarious. Moreover, dissatisfaction and disapproval, from within the social order and from without, have regularly led to efforts at change, some of them transformative. Given such discontent, it is little wonder that since classical times philosophers and political theorists have attempted to envision what a truly satisfactory human order would be like, a moral order, a state of social happiness. Sometimes these proposals have been ameliorative, sometimes utopian, but always significant.

The usual approach to social order is a political one, classification by governmental form, by the pattern in which power is distributed. Hence the common contrast of such forms as monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy, republic, democracy, and state communism. But political order is not the most basic level of analysis. It rests on several assumptions, assumptions about what people are like, including beliefs about human nature and, indeed, that there is such a thing as human nature; about people's motives and goals; about power as an isolable quantity; and about the nature of society. In contrast, I should like to propose a somewhat novel grouping of communities, an order based instead on the character and quality of human relations, on the nature of social experience. Although social experience is not something either simple in structure or quantifiable, it has the virtue of being directly accessible, certainly to the participants and, in one form or another, to everyone, and it can be described in some fashion, literally to a degree and figuratively in ways that can be understandable.

What I should like to offer here is a preliminary sketch of a larger project, but one that I hope makes a significant statement about community. Beginning with some observations about individual and community, surely the central factors in social philosophy, I shall propose a convenient schema within which to place many of the endlessly varied instances of human

association. This is not an exercise in typology, for the rational, the moral, and the aesthetic communities, the forms I shall use, are not pure nor are they logically exclusive. They do, however, distinguish different kinds of social experience and understanding, and they are useful for grouping actually existing societies. Most important, they represent real alternatives in social choice. Since theoretical ideas and moral criteria underlie every conception of community, and since normative experience is the basis on which we must evaluate social forms, let me begin with some observations about ethics.

The rich history of ethical thought contains a wide range of views on issues too different to be presented accurately along a single continuum. These vary sharply in conception and in what considerations are taken as basic. The most common contrast is likely that between utilitarianism, or what may be called the ethics of prudence, and Kantian ethics, or what we may term the morality of conscience. These are not, as is sometimes thought, true opposites, since they do not differ on the same point but rather diverge sharply in approach. Utilitarianism is an ethic of action, endorsing the careful consideration of means and consequences with the object of obtaining maximum satisfaction. And since satisfaction is always a matter of personal experience, the seat of value and the touchstone for judgment lie wholly in the individual. The Kantian ethic, in contrast, focuses on motive, on intent, and the moral process is carried out through introspective examination and the decision of an autonomous will. While all this is well known, it is important to recognize that both utilitarian and Kantian ethics are essentially theories whose moral center lies in the individual: It is the individual whose satisfaction or will determines the moral character of a situation. And while both theories take social considerations into account, the one by calculating the extent of satisfaction and suffering, and the other by the imperative of universalization, it is important to recognize that these extensions to a wider venue are secondary additions to what is at heart a private ethic.

Both the ethics of prudence and the morality of conscience rest, moreover, on assumptions that are, in fact, articles of faith. The first posits the ultimacy of the individual, a distinct and separate being located in a rational universe, a rational being whose intelligence is largely calculative. Mill's introduction of qualitative experience is a futile attempt to correct the private nature of quantitative judgments of pleasure, futile because it attempts to reconcile two antithetical factors: the personal character of experience with cultural standards of value. These are incompatible in practice as well as theory, as social conflict and political controversy in our own day show only too well.

Kantian ethics has its own share of presuppositions, for it inherits the unhappy baggage of the dualistic tradition, locating the will in a hidden noumenal realm and denying the possibility of knowledge there, as Kant bravely affirmed, "in order to make room for faith." Although he had thought to provide an adequate grounding for morality, Kant mistook the uneasiness of his dogmatic slumber for an awakening, as Dewey wryly observed. For seen in the way I have just described, both the morality of conscience and the ethics of prudence are dogmatic philosophies: They make untoward assumptions about experience, about knowledge, and about values, assumptions we now recognize to be fraught with difficulty and infused with error.

The last century and a half has seen important developments in ethical and social thought

that have moved beyond the dogmas that burden the classic accounts. Attempting to overcome their difficulties, many of the later proposals appear to have taken sharply different directions, although ironically the earlier assumptions often seem to reappear in new guises. In Nietzsche's case, the refreshing transvaluation of values onto a naturalistic plane nonetheless preserves elements of the individualism and deliberate irrationality of Kant. Although pragmatism expanded utilitarianism's range of consequences and recognized the inseparability of ends from the means for reaching them, it has had difficulty finding a place for modes of rationality that are noncalculative and for modes of thought that are nonrational. And in existential freedom one can even find a radical Kantianism, with its puzzling juxtaposition of subjectivism and universality. While it is unfair to pass over such important contributions with a mere gesture, we must nonetheless recognize that they have not succeeded in providing a satisfactory grounding for social ethics, and people, desperate for direction, have seized on elements of self-transcendence and mysticism in Eastern religion or have translated morality into technologies of thought control and behavior.¹

Is it possible to restructure moral thought in a way that not only avoids the dogmatic pitfalls of traditional ethics but provides a theory less constrained by self-serving assumptions? I should like to explore some alternatives to see how far they can take us in a fresh direction and, in addition, to determine whether they can offer support for a different approach to the problems of political philosophy. This requires not just reconsidering the assumptions of traditional ethics but grounding ethics in what by now we understand far better about human thought, society, and culture.

Foremost in this rethinking of ethics is our understanding of the essential sociality of human being. Philosophy lags far behind what the human sciences have established to a compelling degree. In both direct and subtle ways, ethical theory struggles with problems involving egoism, conscience, self, moral autonomy, and responsibility, problems structured in forms that preserve in one way or another the discreteness, the separateness, of the moral individual. Reconstructing social thought on the basis of the social human forces us to rethink these problems in radical ways, ways that follow the long-established tradition in philosophy, not of solving such "problems," but of entirely recasting them or even rejecting them entirely.

Consider some of the issues centering around moral responsibility. The traditional construction of the moral universe is one in which motives, decisions, and obligations rest at heart in the autonomous individual. The self must freely make its own decisions and be judged by them, based either on its intent or its actions. What happens to this ordering of the moral situation if we discard the notion of the self-sufficient moral individual and recognize that the self is a social construct and even a social product? We cannot, then, speak of a single person, since persons do not come singly. Conflicts between egoism and altruism, self and other, are transformed into alternative social complexes in which personal and social factors are variously intermingled. The very notion of a moral universal, itself the product of an individualistic ethic as the sum of all individuals, must be transformed into degrees of generality that rest on social groups, not quantitative collections of selves. What this means, then, is that morality is no individual matter but always a social one, that no values exist in isolation, and that moral issues arise in social situations and their resolution is a social process.

Ethical egoism and its contrary, an altruistic ethic, are difficult to overcome. An eloquent illustration of their persistence is the feminist alternative to the theory of rights, the ethic of care. Care appears to be a welcome corrective to the self-preservative notion of rights. Indeed, it replaces the litigious focus of rights with motives of concern for others and benevolent actions. Instead of calculating personal benefit, it directs our regard toward others. Care is not only in sharp contrast to narrow self-interest but it makes a noble addition to a tradition of generosity and selfless service. Another form of altruism, care stands by way of contrast to the masculinist ethic of self-aggrandizement. Yet at the same time the ethic of care remains within an individualistic frame. It informs personal decisions, motivates private acts, and centers on particular cases.

There are alternatives to this egoistic frame. In discussing the inescapability of self-reference in the form of personal satisfaction in any presumably benevolent act, John Dewey draws a critical distinction between acting as a self and acting for a self.² While ethical egoism conflates these, they are actually quite different. Whatever action one performs, one cannot help acting in some sense as a self, since that is the condition of any deliberate action. In any action, a self acts: There can be no action without someone's performing it. This is quite different from performing an action directed to one's personal benefit, that is, acting for oneself. The fallacy in ethical egoism lies in regarding all cases in which one acts as a self as instances of acting for oneself, whereas the latter is only a special case of the former. Ethical egoism is, therefore, not a universal condition but a particular one.

Another example of a non-egocentric ethic is Erich Fromm's distinction between selfishness, self-love, and self-interest.³ From a psychotherapeutic perspective, these are quite different, Fromm claims. Selfishness is a form of self-aggrandizement, feeding one's weakness in a futile effort to overcome what is actually a kind of self-hatred. This is futile, since no quantity of personal gain can fill a lack that is of an entirely different sort, a lack of genuine self-regard. Self-love, on the other hand, is the precondition to loving others, not opposed to it. It reaches out from strength, not weakness, and draws people together toward a common fulfillment. One's true self-interest does not lie in private satisfactions but in the ability to conjoin one's personal value with that of others, so that instead of these interests being opposed, we recognize them as actually interdependent.

What these two cases show us is that resolving the problem of ethical egoism does not require endorsing one form of the egoism-altruism alternative or the other but rather lies in surpassing both, that is, in restructuring the ethical problem in such a way as to transcend the conflict. We begin to realize that self and other are not moral alternatives because there is no separate self and no distinct other. Each is mutually implicated to such a degree that they cannot be thought apart. Self is truly other, other truly self.

Not only, then, is ethics social ethics, morality social morality, but any attempt to rest ethics on the distinct and separate individual is fictitious, albeit a conventional and time-honored fiction. On the other hand, it is equally important to recognize that rejecting a self-centered ethic does not mean endorsing the disappearance of the person into an anonymous society and relinquishing self-direction and responsibility. The dialectical opposition of individual and

society is itself a product of the very ethical individualism we are questioning. In its place emerges the social human, a new concept for moral philosophy but an old reality of moral life.

Three different directions are possible, then: one that centers on the individual, one on the group, and a third that joins them, not in the form of a synthesis, which is a consequent stage, but as a prior, first condition of being human--the social human. With some of the issues and ideas now before us, let us see how they are reflected in different conceptions of community. While these characterizations may not often appear in clear form, they nonetheless represent the dominant tone of many of the societies we find ourselves part of, a social condition that is rarely chosen and often not clearly grasped.

The rational community is a community of individuals that sees society as an artificial construct and the state, as Hobbes characterized it, as a leviathan, a monster to be feared, opposed, and tolerated at best as an unwelcome necessity. The philosophy of this community is utilitarianism in one form or another, from Bentham's classic mode to Rawls's more recent adaptation. Central to the rational community is the individual, motivated by self-interest, guided by reason, and protected by rights. It is the model assumed by political liberalism and economic individualism. Habermas's defense of rationality belongs here, too, for even though the ego may be formed in social relations, the social order consists in the relations of subjective selves with other such selves. In the rational community, the essential antinomy of self and other underlies social experience and the two remain irreconcilable.

What guides individual action in the rational community are prudential motives, a careful calculation of costs and benefits in which nothing is done spontaneously or gratuitously. When collaborative action occurs, it is because people identify common interests. Common interest, in fact, is the vehicle of social action, whether in government, in law, or in the many interest groups that form and dissolve as the occasion demands. Acts of spontaneous generosity may occur in the rational community when people are moved by tragedy, great personal need, enthusiasm, or a powerful common threat, as in war. These, however, are exceptions to the rule, and are always accompanied by opportunists on the prowl for ways to turn every circumstance to personal gain. Yet increasingly complex economic dependencies and increasingly sophisticated technologies require collaborative action and drive people together. And while the rational community continues to characterize the modern industrial nation state, it is coming now to justify internationalism, whether in the form of trading zones, corporate organization, or political union, all these, however, devised for personal, private benefit.

The rational community is more a social order than a community, for whatever is common is so merely by the circumstantial concurrence of private interests. Its principles infiltrate every deliberate action and each social domain. Economically the rational community justifies a pattern of activity in which every individual pursues his or her self-interest. Because interests rest on need and desire, and desire is never satiated, and because in an economy of scarcity there is never enough to satisfy everyone, competition is pervasive. Opposition characterizes all economic relations, those among the producers and suppliers of services, those among the purchasers of goods and services, and those between both groups. Politically, too, a society of individuals pursuing separate and opposed interests means that political decisions are

made with the view to satisfying special interests. Such interests are represented formally by the electoral mechanisms of political democracy in which everyone expresses his or her interests by casting a single vote, and informally by lobbies, pressure groups, and powerful economic and political forces that promote their own interests by soliciting and manipulating blocs of "individual" votes by ethnic, racial, and monetary appeals and promises.

Although the rational society is best known in its political and economic expressions, it is actually pervasive. It informs social thought in the belief in individual autonomy, the idea that we exist as persons separate and apart from society, and in the belief that personal freedom is secured only through watchful opposition to social action. As the adversarial system in law, it is central to the judicial process. As the belief in free will which endows each person with moral autonomy, it stands at the center of conventional morality. Even the goals of psychotherapy--emotional independence, wholeness, self-sufficiency, and freedom--reflect this individualistic social ideal. Moreover, the fixation of the therapeutic process on the "self," on self-development and the cultivation of self-confidence and assertiveness, reflects the same individualistic bent, although viewed from a different perspective, the "self" appears more like a folk category than the entity it is usually taken to be. And, of course, such a psychology encourages and rationalizes aggressiveness, its characteristic and common behavioral form. Finally, there is a whole philosophical industry at work supporting the status quo of the rational society. In addition to utilitarian philosophy, there is the preeminent concept of the ego, expressed in various forms of subjectivism, intersubjectivity, and the correlative "problem" of the other.

Any alternative to this interplay of interests is difficult to envision, so deeply has it become rooted in the modern mentality. Yet signs have begun to appear with increasing frequency, as the twentieth century moves implacably toward its end, signs of changes and of forces that undermine the premises of the rational community. First among these is the growing recognition that self-sufficiency, one of the dominant cultural myths of western societies, is a false ideal. It has, in fact, always been an exaggeration, since wherever it has appeared it has rested on a social bedrock. Embracing the model of economic self-sufficiency, the homesteader or pioneer not only brings along equipment and supplies but, more important still, utilizes a vast body of knowledge and technology developed and accumulated by thousands of generations of hardship and trial. This exposes the fallacy in economic self-interest: that interests are fundamentally private and opposed, and that the independent, conflicting pursuit of those interests, which we call competition, is the best mechanism to their greatest fulfillment. Even that arch individualist, Hobbes, recognized that benefits beyond mere survival require social order and collaborative action. Individualism rests on a social foundation.

It helps in rethinking the ideas that center around the rational society to draw a distinction between weak and strong dependence. Weak dependence is what we usually mean when we speak of dependence, and it is pervasive. In its sexual form, it is found both in taking the other and in giving oneself up to the other. In marriage it is monogamy imposed from without through legal form and social convention. In social groups it appears as hierarchical organization and as the persecution of minorities and the weak. It takes political form in the need for power over others and in the cult of the leader. Psychologically it is found equally in selfish behavior and in selflessness, as Fromm pointed out, the one intended to strengthen a separate self, the other to

evade one's personhood. All these express weak dependence because they derive their force from some external source and their application lies wholly beyond the person. One does not gain strength from weak dependence: On the contrary, it reinforces one's weakness by focusing energies elsewhere and leaving the person essentially untouched.

Strong dependence, on the other hand, is not a sign of emotional or psychological insufficiency; rather, it recognizes the fundamental incompleteness of the human person. Seen in this way, dependence is not a weakness or a defect. Fulfillment is rather achieved through harmonious connections with others, with social forms, and with environment, connections that implicate and change a person. Strong dependence takes equally many forms. Biologically, it consists in promoting life through the family and whatever other forms mutual domestic support may take. Psychologically, it recognizes the manifold ways in which one develops character and personhood through relations with other people. Social, strong dependence finds in voluntary forms of social order a condition for personal growth, each inseparable from the other. Even environment must be reconceptualized from surroundings separate from oneself to a matrix continuous with and inclusive of ourselves, a constant process of reciprocity among all the active factors. Environment becomes that interrelated system of dependencies we call an ecosystem.⁴ Among nations, too, there is a slowly increasing awareness of interdependence, not in alliances and the various forms of political domination, all of which express weak dependency, but in legal relations and forms, such as international law, the United Nations, the World Court, and the gradual realization that national sovereignty is a political myth that has lost its usefulness. Economically, too, strong dependence appears in recognizing ways in which mutual interests can be served by carefully expanding trade relations, removing barriers, and replacing economic exploitation with forms of assistance that benefit both the donor and the receiver of aid. Strong dependence even assumes a cosmic scale as we begin to realize that pollution does not observe national boundaries and that industrial practices and commercial policies and products have planetary consequences. All these expressions of strong dependence rest on the premise, a fact rather than an assumption, that our fulfillment as persons and as societies is part of a single process and a single condition, a process and a condition that involve multiple factors. 'Person,' indeed, becomes a social category, the node of intersecting connections.

Let me speak more briefly of a second social form, the moral community. Unlike the community of self-interested individuals, the moral community rests on the insight that multiple bonds connect people with each other. It recognizes that people are interdependent and the relationships among them reciprocal. The ethical foundation of the moral community is the morality of conscience and its classic formulation can be found in the philosophy of Kant. For him, moral obligation is the binding force that holds beyond choice or desire. An inner self ultimately stands alone with its moral choice. We may not desire its demands and we may choose to disregard them, but this has no effect on its moral authority. The will must determine its guiding principle for itself, yet in doing so it represents every rational being. In this way, the morality of the individual becomes at the same time the force that unites humankind.

This version of the moral community shares two essential features with the community we have just discussed--its rationality and its ultimate individualism. Qualifying the individualism of the moral community, however, are internal forces that press toward a larger

order, embracing and joining together morally separate beings into an uneasy confederation of the private and the social. For Kant this is the powerful stipulation of universalization, which frames the moral demand so that it can extend to everyone. In authoritarian societies, the ethic of hierarchy binds individuals into a rigid pyramid of power. As this amalgam becomes more complete, it may reach a point at which the members not only identify with the community but become utterly absorbed into it, relinquishing independent judgment and personal decision. When it so overwhelms and suppresses individual volition, the moral community has turned into the organic community.

The organic community can assume a variety of forms. In a rigidly structured hierarchical order, power filters downward from its pinnacle, from level to increasingly broader level, each deriving a lesser degree of power until none remains at the bottom. In an autocratic society, a single leader exercises dominant power and its members are subsumed by the whole, achieving their identity, their very being, as part of that whole. While institutional good is the binding element and the ethos of the group glorifies the social process, an authoritarian center of power and privilege wields influence and dispenses goods. To varying degrees and in distinctive ways, most religious groups, quasi-religious cults, corporations, and military organizations exemplify the organic community. At its most extreme form, the organic community absorbs its members into the corporate body, withholding the ability for any independent action, any autonomy of will, any vestige of identity apart from the group, all in the interests of devotion to a "higher" call. The organic community achieves its most complete development in the fascist state or fanatic movement, where the moral imperative of "blood and soil," ethnic purity, national destiny, or religious zeal sucks up all separate wills into the irrepressible force of an exclusive group.

These modes of community--the rational, the moral and its derivative, the organic--are limited, for the quality of human relations they engender lacks a genuine continuity of individual and social. Coolly calculating one's rational self-interest, bravely standing in moral isolation, futilely seeking society through intersubjectivity, lost in the endless depths of a searching conscience or the anonymity of a faceless group, these forms do not succeed in developing the precondition for genuine community--a unity of individual and social in which neither dimension dominates but each enhances the possibilities of the other.

It is this condition to which the aesthetic community aspires. This form moves beyond customary ways of thinking about community and, while it has certain resemblances to the other modes, it is important to avoid the temptation to assimilate it to them. The aesthetic community is not an order of individuals, either in the rational sense or the moral one, nor is it a community whose participants relinquish their individuality and deliver themselves into the hands of a leader or become absorbed into a corporate identity. Its fundamental features are distinctive, and to grasp the aesthetic community, we must stand outside the convenient, conventional categories by which we usually order our understanding of human relations and social groups.

Every community proclaims some kind of unity, sometimes more in word than in fact. Organic unity, in which the parts have no separate existence but are bound to and subsumed under a whole, is often taken as the paradigmatic sense of the term. These parts may have a

distinct identity but they lack independence. Like the limbs and organs of a living creature, the underlying metaphor, they function within a whole from which they gain their value and meaning. Although organic unity is sometimes ascribed to a work of art, the aesthetic bond is quite different. Art carries a more subtle sense of connection that illuminates the aesthetic significance of community, a bond best described by the similar though not cognate word, 'continuity.'

Continuity is not absorption or assimilation, nor is it an external relation between separate things. It suggests, instead, connectedness within a whole rather than a link between discrete parts. Much as William James argued that relations are not external connections but have an immediacy that is directly present and real to experience, relationships in a fulfilled community are not imposed from without but are inherent in the situation in ways that are concrete and operative.⁵ The aesthetic community exemplifies this. Internal relations are, in fact, one expression of continuity. The connections among the members of an aesthetic community are as real, as much a part of the community, as the people, themselves. Not only are there no sharp boundaries; there are no divisions. Nor is there any sense in which the society or state is separate from the people who compose it. Their relation does rest on internalized control (the moral model), on independence and self-sufficiency (the rational model), on isolation (both the moral and rational models), or on domination (the organic model). Relationships of reciprocity and strong dependence among the participants in an aesthetic community replace the barriers and separations that mark the other social modes.

Continuity, moreover, allows for differences, although these are usually not marked by abrupt changes but by gradations, as between the colors in a spectrum. Sharp contrasts may occur, but these are part of a larger harmony. This sense of continuity is not vacuous, however. It denotes a merging that joins things already bound together rather than a combination of distinct and separate elements. As the motivic features of a large symphonic movement contribute to the character of the total auditory experience by their contrasts as much as their resemblances, human continuities denote a bond that overrides differences. Fusion occurs on a more basic level.

One sense of continuity is perceptual and material, a sense of one's body that at the same time incorporates, in a literal sense, the food one ingests, the air one breathes, the clothes one wears, the objects one uses, the place one inhabits, the experiences one has. Consciousness is also part of this perceptual continuity, for whether we describe ourselves as an embodied consciousness or a reflective organism, multidimensional continuities unite our cognitive, volitional, and physical dimensions. Humans have continuity, too, with nature. Nature as we live it is environment, and environment is no external surrounding but the physical context and its order of meanings of which we are a contributing and dependent part.⁶ But it is in the continuities that unify people that community arises. Here are the connections of place, of human association, of language. Here too are the connections of time as history, tradition, and personal experience. What makes continuity aesthetic is the kind of unity it describes: a continuum of body, of consciousness, of context, all joined in the pervasive continuity of perception.

In a germinal sense, we can discover the aesthetic community in the relationship between

close companions or friends, where a bond may evolve that leads people to surpass the conventional limits of the self to attain what Aristotle called perfect friendship. This is friendship between those who are good and who so desire the good of each other that one is able to feel the other's experience as in some way coincident with one's own.⁷ In the community of friends the self expands to include the friend and cannot be known apart. The thought of the one is always inhabited by the presence of the other.

The erotic community may have more persistence. This community of lovers joins people in a multidimensional unity conventionally described as physical, emotional, and spiritual. What is important here is that the erotic community represents a connection that transcends the customary boundaries that isolate people. It is the closest many of us come to the sense of community I call aesthetic, not a loss of self in sexual ecstasy but the dissolution of protective barriers and a heightened sense of self-with-other. This is clearly an entirely different matter from purely sexual release, whose satisfaction is brief and largely organic and may even narrow into self-indulgent isolation.

These germinal communities are usually not residential or continuous in time; they are likely to be circumstantial and may not possess long duration. Still other occasions offer an intimation of the aesthetic community. One is the bonding within the aura of the sacred that sometimes accompanies religious experience. In the feelings of sisterhood and brotherhood, of love and charity, the religious community dissolves the boundaries that separate people and approaches the aesthetic. In its elements of transcendence and its tendency toward the mystical, however, the religious differs markedly from the aesthetic. Another experience of unity occurs in the intimacy of our association with art, where a sense of connectedness may develop that is the prototype of the aesthetic community. At its most generous and powerful, our engagement with art creates a unity of experience that joins artist, appreciator, art object, and performer into a heterogeneous field of continuous forces. This is the qualitative source of the aesthetic community.

In the past some philosophers have recognized forms of bonding that anticipate the aesthetic sense of community. Locke claimed that society exists in a state of nature under the sway of natural law and before any agreement to organize. Nietzsche had the insight that the unifying aesthetic experience exemplified by Greek tragedy offers the ground for life in society, for communality. Husserl's idea that everything must be seen in context and within the horizon of the world in which it is presented led him to the notion that the life-world is made up of communities that exist in a social and historical setting.⁸

What, then, is an aesthetic community? What kind of phenomenon does the term describe, or is it but an assumption, a construct, a fiction, an ideal? Does the aesthetic community realize continuity through certain kinds and networks of relationships? Like all language that does not wholly create its object, the concept is an approximation, an attempt to locate and identify something apprehended more or less dimly yet with the force of significant reality.

The difference between an observer's and a participant's perception of a social situation

may lead us to clearer sense of the aesthetic community. What to the observer is clearly demarcated and structured may, to the participant, be fluid and responsive. Because both the rational community and the moral community are at bottom communities of individuals, they often reflect an ironic contrast between observer and participant. One can think of oneself as an American individualist and yet be enclosed in a stifling corporation, have an overbearing spouse yet feel comfortably married, be politically powerless yet be an ardent patriot. One can be part of a close family or other intimate group and yet feel alienated from it, insecure, lost, helpless, a stranger in a familiar land.

Forms of control are understood somewhat better now than in the past, and we can see how this split between the world of the participant and that of the observer may be fostered by state-organized societies that are inimical to community. People often experience realities falsely, and states may deliberately foster false consciousness. From thought control and news management to outright censorship, the state, whatever its ideological persuasion, has long been adept at manipulating its citizenry, managing from the standpoint of an observer its citizen participants. In all these cases, observer and participant occupy different orders; they speak foreign languages, not easily translated and communicated.

In the aesthetic community, the contrast between observer and participant develops more subtly. These two stances do not occupy different realities, each of which may be false to the other, as in the other modes of community. Rather, they rest on the same level and, when the awareness of an experience becomes yet another dimension of that very experience, they inform one another. Because the participant is, as such, actively engaged in community, this engagement becomes the primary mode and the self-awareness of observation secondary and dependent. The observer who is not a participant cannot truly grasp an aesthetic community. Both observer and participant must inhabit the same harmonious reality.

The aesthetic community is a community in and of experience. Its resemblance to the situation in which we experience art lends it its name. In art when the potential of the aesthetic field is fulfilled, a rich reciprocity develops among the artist's creative force, the art object, its appreciator, and the performer or activator of the work. Contemplative distancing and the presumed objectification of the knowledge process are foreign to this situation. Aesthetic engagement defines its character instead. The same reciprocity of constituent parts, the multiplicity of interrelated functions, the assimilation of observer into participant, the salience of qualitative experience--all these distinguish the aesthetic community, as well.⁹

* In a compelling passage in I and Thou, Martin Buber describes the personal encounter that establishes what he calls the world of relation.¹⁰ The intimacy of this world joins what are ordinarily considered quite disparate things, and the kinds of things with which we can engage in this way, Buber shows, are perhaps surprising: first nature, then people, and ultimately, the creative engagement of art.

Nature we regard as the exemplary object of the sciences. Its philosophical ramifications excite the foundational questions of metaphysics and particularly of ontology--questions of order, of purpose, and ultimately of the very meaning and being of reality. Yet the usual way of

understanding nature, both for science and for philosophy, rests on objectification and analysis. Furthermore, over the past century and a half, the social and behavioral sciences have taken the field in their examination of human orders and institutions. The philosophical dimensions of this are nearly as ancient in their origins as ontology, for the quest for an ethical grounding of human relationships has preoccupied thinkers since Socrates and K'ung-fu-tsu (Confucius), and the authors of the Old Testament were concerned with such matters long before that. Here, too, the cognitive process has, until recent times, followed the same scientific and philosophical model of disinterested objectivity and rational analysis.

Yet both our relation with nature and with people can transcend the objectification with which we ordinarily think to distance them. In what Buber calls 'life with nature,' we join in a relation of undivided reciprocity with things. In 'life with men' we do not separate ourselves from others but experience a personal bond that joins us. But it is in the third order, life with spiritual beings, that the transformative process of intimacy reveals itself most compellingly. It may seem strange for Buber to place art here, but once we recognize in it the act of origination, the discovery that had not found its tongue before, we realize how art epitomizes so fully this high human accomplishment. Yet this kind of life appears not only in the objects and occasions we fashion by our art; they are still more pervasive in that kind of experience which we associate with art objects and by which we identify them as such--aesthetic experience. Such experience, moreover, is not the exclusive province of art but can be extended to embrace nature, as well. And more to our point, it also encompasses the human.

In Buber's world of relation, then, we do not objectify, rationalize, order, and control things, but rather enter into an intimate association with them. All three of its modes exemplify an association that does not join together discrete entities but involves a kind of giving in which we establish a deep connection. Carrying this farther, we can see in it more than a connection but a continuity, and, eventually even more, a community, an aesthetic community.

A social aesthetic here joins an aesthetic of art and an aesthetic of nature with an aesthetic of humans. All three of Buber's worlds--nature, humans, and art--are domains of the same aesthetic realm, a remarkable coalescence of diverse orders into a single, embracing unity of experience. What science has divided into the natural world, the human world, and the mythological world; what philosophy has separated into metaphysics, ethics, and the philosophy of art--all regain their primal unity in the region of the aesthetic. The aesthetic community is a social aesthetic joining humans and environment in multidimensional reciprocity. As the human environment consists not of places and buildings but of their complex connections with human uses and human participants, an aesthetic community recognizes the social dimension of environment and the aesthetic conditions of human fulfillment.¹¹

These forms of community--the rational, the moral and its offspring, the organic, and the aesthetic--are clear forms, ideal forms of a sort but not unattainable "ideals," for they occur in different spheres and in a variety of ways. By identifying instances of such communities and by articulating their character and their differences, we can know better how to live in them and how to guide them. Understanding the alternative forms of community also enables us to make deliberate choices of which to pursue. What stands here as a study in social philosophy and

political theory is, at the same time, a matter of political science and practice, and perhaps the cardinal occasion of applied aesthetics. At this stage in social evolution and at this millennial point in human history, is any task of philosophy more compelling?

*Chapter Nine of A. Berleant, Living in the Landscape: Toward an Aesthetics of Environment (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997).

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1. B. F. Skinner's, Beyond Freedom and Dignity (New York: Bantam, 1984), is a notable example of the latter.
 2. John Dewey, Human Nature and Conduct (New York: Modern Library, 1922).
 3. Erich Fromm, Man for Himself. An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics (New York: Holt, 1947).
 4. My recent book, The Aesthetics of Environment (Temple University Press, 1992), expands and applies this idea.
 5. See William James, Pluralistic Universe, 1909, Lectures 2 and 9.
 6. See The Aesthetics of Environment.
 7. Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, Bk. VIII, Chs. 4, 13.
 8. John Locke, Second Treatise of Government, 1700. Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy. Edmund Husserl, Cartesian Meditations, Fifth Meditation; The Crisis of European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology.
 9. See Arnold Berleant, The Aesthetic Field (Springfield, IL: C.C. Thomas, 1970). See also

Arnold Berleant Art and Engagement (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991).

10. Martin Buber, I and Thou, 2nd ed. (New York: Scribners, 1958), pp. 6-10.

11. "Environmental aesthetics does not concern buildings and places alone. It deals with the conditions under which people join as participants in an integrated situation. Because of the central place of the human factor, an aesthetics of environment profoundly affects our moral understanding of human relationships and our social ethics. An environmental aesthetics of engagement suggests deep political changes away from hierarchy and its exercise of power and toward community, where people freely engage in mutually fulfilling activities. It implies a humane family order that relinquishes authoritarian control and encourages cooperation and reciprocity. It leads toward acceptance, friendship, and love that abandon exploitation and possessiveness and promote sharing and mutual empowerment." Arnold Berleant, The Aesthetics of Environment (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992), pp. 12-13.