



OPUSCULE



6

THE ESSENCE OF THE POLITICAL | Including a comparison between the
by **JUSTIN CARMEN** | Ancient Greek and modern conception

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“It is evident that the state is a natural growth,
and that man is by nature a political animal.
And that he who is citiless is either low in the
scale of humanity or high above it [as a god].”

ARISTOTLE



Congratulations and Thank You

While it may sound cheesy, I do think it is worth welcoming you to this salon by way of both a congratulations and a thank you. Firstly, congratulations for having the resolve to join this salon. I do understand that it takes some courage to speak in public and with strangers on the 'touchy-feely' topics which might fall under the banner of 'politics'. And secondly, a thank you. This salon exists because of a personal want to speak on politics with a living-breathing community. It is through philosophy that I want to firstly be, and exercise myself, politically. Therefore, in that you are here, together with me, you have allowed me that possibility.

About your facilitator

As for who I am, my name is Justin Carmien. I grew up in Northern Indiana, where I experienced both a somewhat well-off and also somewhat poor childhood. On my father's side, my great-grandfather, John Raber, ran for the congressional office of Indiana's second district. After losing to incumbent Republican leader of the House of Representatives, Charles Helleck, in 1964 my great-grandfather contributed to the community in another way—he established Raber Golf in Bristol, Indiana. This business has remained under family operation up until today. My father, for example, oversees lawn and machine maintenance. Then, on my mother's side, my grandfather was a middle school art teacher and my mother a nurse. After my mother divorced my father, she moved me, together with my sister and brother, to a trailer park. There I spent formative years of my life—from the age of eleven to fifteen.

In my adult life, I pursued a career within product design and marketing. This career began by establishing a publishing company, here in the States. Later I moved to Denmark and during the last four years of that career I served as a member of a leadership team. Together, with four other design managers, we ran a graphic design department of forty employees. During those later years in Denmark, I also established cooperation with a municipality-run community and historical center, Spinderihallerne, in the provincial town of Vejle, Denmark. There I partnered with international community developers to host salons on philosophy. The topics of those sa-

ions ranged from love and free will to aesthetics. However, my main philosophical interest is metaphysics—particularly a reading of metaphysics which I have named *first economics*. *First Economics* philosophy is founded upon the writing of German philosopher Martin Heidegger, specifically Heidegger’s interpretation of Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* and Heidegger’s interpretation of Friedrich Nietzsche as a value-metaphysician. I’m also quite entertained by the contemporary generalist intellectual Bonnitta Roy, whose philosophy I understand as closest to my own.

Now, as part of this introduction to myself, I should also say that I’m not an expert on our topic for this salon. I have no university degree in either philosophy or politics. The highest level of public education which I completed was high school. If anyone asked me for a reason, I would simply say that the classroom setting never made sense for me. I am rather inclined towards education by what is commonly referred to as self-directed learning. However, of interest to me currently is what might be called *village learning* or communal learning, which rather pursues public education by way of tradesmanship (that is, the master-apprentice relationship) and seeks a collective intelligence. However, and despite this, you should not have concern that either myself or anyone here is undereducated on our topic. As we proceed with this salon, I hope to show you that having no expert among us is actually beneficial to our goal. After all, this is a *philosophy salon*. And this means we are here to *philosophize*. By way of our engagement together, we seek to experience something novel and emergent within ourselves. In full disclosure, my personal ambition is to establish such emergent knowledge by way of philosophy, outside of the university.

Setting the Stage

1. **Topic of our salon**

Looking at the title of this salon, the word *political* firstly draws our attention. And rightly so. It is clear to each of us that *here*, in this salon, we are directed by *the political*. However, it is also clear from the title that we are not here to primarily reflect on historical or current political events. Such facts can only provide us with examples for reflection, but could never constitute the actual subject matter of our salon. This is because we are guided by *the political*, as such. And this is indicated already by the second word which draws our attention within the title—*essence*. The guide which we have for carrying us through this salon is *the essence of the political*. We are interrogating, or asking after, the essence of the political. Inasmuch, it should be clear that we are not here to share grievances on or rally for any particular politician or political party.

Now, not to be mistaken, in asking after *the essence of the political*, we are not asking for what is common or universal among all political activity or all political

objects, generally. Instead, we are asking after the ground or foundation of what we think of as political. Our question could be phrased, *from where does the political come?* The answer to this question will provide us with the foundation for *being political*—or, rather, what it means to *be political*.

2. **Method of our salon**

Philosophy, or rather, *philosophizing* will be our method by which we seek the essence of the political. And this means that we must assume that *none of us yet knows what the essence of the political is*. Now, in saying this, we should not be mistaken that we are here to flatter the virtue of humility. We are not here to find our respect for each other by way of such degradation—even through the healthy ‘self-degradation’ of humility. The reason for this is because degradation, of any kind, is not beneficial to our goal. Rather, in order to achieve our goal, each of us requires some audacity. And while this may sound perverse, this audacity is for the sake of respecting our goal, and inasmuch, respect each other who share in this goal.

In accordance with the practice of the ancient philosophical dialogues, we understand that any essence

can only be constituted by the people who use the word *in practice*. In order to achieve that “*practice*” we must not be shy. Taking-up the method of the Platonic dialogue as our model, we will present the *ειδος* or *ιδεα*, that is, the outward appearance of that essence. Perhaps we could think of those ideas as tools in our practical dealing within this salon. The truth of any one idea presented here can only be proven in the fact that it provides traction and propels the dialogue further. Insofar as this is the case, only together, here in this salon, with the very people you see around you, will we be able to qualify the essence of the political. Of course, in another group, at another time, you might encounter a description of the essence altogether different than the one which we will encounter here. This is to be expected.

3. **Note on essentialism**

What should also be clear, then, given what has been said, is that we are not committing ourselves to essentialism, despite that we seek the essence of the political. Essentialism is the idea that there is one true essence behind each idea which stands before human practice; and furthermore, that this essence is universal at every moment and every time, among us or among others. When coupled with any kind

of substantiality (say, materialism or physicalism) essences could be thought of as the *thing-in-itself*. And today, such reification (that is, a making into a substance) of our descriptions of reality is assumed by the scientific and the religious alike—whether the essence, or thing-in-itself, in question regards physical material, the soul, or simply the ‘I, myself’. Of course, such substantial essentialism is quite favorable to our practices, today. We make a virtue of objectivity in order to achieve an established and agreed upon standard by which to measure and qualify our objects. However, the object of our salon, *the essence of the political*, resists such measurable standardization. As has been made clear, such an essence can only be qualified in its practical usefulness. And, in explicitly stating that we are not committing ourselves to essentialism, we free ourselves from the concern of achieving such objectivity. In doing so, we equally free ourselves from the concern that none of us here are educated enough to speak on the essence of the political—a concern which, after all, might render this salon useless.

4. **Purpose of our salon**

What we seek here, in this salon, is to step away from politics as we experience it, in our daily lives.

This is, of course, with the purpose of speaking more intelligently with each other about factual political matters. Yet, it is also with another and, perhaps more important, purpose—what might be called a *spiritual opening*. Now, when we use the word *spiritual* today, we are likely to think of things like gods, angels, demons, and other such occult objects. However, that we think immediately of such occult objects is only a sign that the spiritual offering today is quite narrow—and when looking backward into history this becomes overly-obvious. When we use the word *spiritual*, in the case of a “*spiritual opening*”, we are speaking more broadly. Specifically, we are speaking of that which puts the spirit into motion—that which makes things happen. In this sense, we would affirm those who say that both art and music provide for a spiritual experience. And yet, despite this broad qualification of the spiritual, our spiritual landscape on offer today is still very narrow. While this is no fault of our own, this fact is likely obscured by our own values.

Since the early days of modern commerce, we have made a virtue of removing spirituality from everyday practices. Early in the development of liberal values, for example, spirituality had been pushed aside, reserved for Sundays. Of course, today we

understand that this was with good reason. And we are thankful for such a separation of church and state. However, today we experience not only a separation, but also a subordination of spirituality to everyday human commerce. This is evidenced in our saints, those who are successful entrepreneurs and financial controllers. It is also evident in our popular music, which celebrates a material world. And we could even argue that the imported Eastern spiritual practice of meditation serves to balance the life of those moved by the spirit for Western productivity, manifest for the individual as career.

However, even if we admit that the spiritual offering today is quite narrow, we must still answer the question for ourselves, *what spirituality can we hope to open here in this salon?* Well, it is no accident that the essence which we seek is that of the political. We seek an opening of a political spirituality—an opening which, according to our definition here, puts the world into motion.

No doubt, pronounced for us today is the understanding that the democratic ideal can no longer be satisfied by the mere vote, but instead by the larger civic commerce which precludes the

vote—whether that be by way of an engagement at the family dinner table or the publicness of the internet news journal. We only need to remember that the vote is a mere object of measurement for what has already been secured long before any ballot has reached the hand. It is a guise of an industrialized way of life to think that our politicians stand outside of us. If we allow ourselves a bit of a characterization, let us imagine that voter who complains that our politicians are corrupt. For us today, this character can no longer make sense. Each of us bear the burden of acting as politicians. Democracy, as a rule of the people, demands that each citizen is a politician. The purpose of our salon is to motivate each of us, as politicians.

5. **Structure of our salon**

- Introduction to your host.
- Framing the salon: topic, method, and goal.
- Around the table: who are each of you.
- Preparation for guided discussion.

In order to prepare ourselves for the salon, we must firstly equip ourselves with some common tools. This will be accomplished by way of a historical account of the essence of the political. Our historical account of the essence will firstly revisit interpreta-

tions of Ancient Greek texts, from where our Modern English word, *political*, comes—from the Ancient Greek *πολις* (*polis*, ‘city or one’s community’). Specifically, we will cite Plato and Aristotle. Then, we will conclude our reflections on the Ancients with a few remarks on the German socialist philosophers, Karl Marx and Martin Heidegger. This is in order to further pronounce the Ancients’ conception of the essence of the political.

Secondly, our historical account will revisit Enlightenment literature. While I do not wish to turn this salon into a lecture, which no doubt would bore even myself, there is no avoiding the history. What we call the political, today, owes its heritage to the philosophers and statesmen of this period of political writing. Specifically, we will reflect on passages from John Locke’s *Second Treatise of Civil Government* and Thomas Jefferson’s announcement of “*a wall of separation between church and state*”.

- Guided discussion on the essence of the political, as we experience it here and now.

6. **Salon materials**

- Handout: Opusculum 06.
- Visuals.
- Recording the salon?

The Essence of the Political: Classical Greece

7. **Ἀγαθόν** (*agathon*, ‘the good’)

Today, it is trivial to recall that for the Ancient Greeks, *αγαθόν* was paramount. But, of course, taking for granted *the good* can only lead to dispute. After all, while any one of us could answer for ourselves the question *what is good?* without too much difficulty, in public we may meet with difference. Therefore, we must ask further—*good for exactly who or for exactly what?* It is here, in answering *the good for* that we can come to understand *the good*, itself. Of course, it is not arbitrary that we begin the preparation to our salon with *αγαθόν*. Answering the *who* or the *what* will allow us an understanding of the Ancient Greek experience of the political—one which we can take forward as we encounter our own understanding today.

8. **Ποιησις** (*poiēsis*, ‘creation, production’)

In order to answer the *who* or *what* by which *αγαθόν* is to be measured, we must firstly acknowledge that, for the Ancients, *ποιησις* was paramount. Testament

to this interpretation is recorded throughout their writing. Recalling Plato’s dialogue *Charmides*, for example, we remember Socrates’ interrogation into the virtue of temperance together with the Athenian noble Critias. A definition is put forward: *temperance is knowing oneself*. Of course, we should remain vigilant to our task at hand. What is important for us is not the definition of temperance, itself. Rather we turn towards *Charmides* because the exchange between the two Athenians provides us with evidence of *ποιησις*, as paramount within the Ancient Greek experience. The above definition of temperance as *knowing oneself* provokes an objection. Socrates explains himself,

“If temperance is a knowing, obviously it must be a kind of science, and it must be a science of something, must it not? | If I were asked if medicine, as a science of health, is useful to us, and what it produces | I should say it is of very great benefit, since it produces health; an excellent result. | And so, if you should ask me what result I take to be produced by building, as the builder’s science, I should say houses; and it would be the same with the other arts.”

“Now it is for you, Critias, in your turn, to find an answer to a question regarding temperance—since you say it is a science of self—and to tell me what excellent result it produces for us.”

For those of us acquainted with this dialogue, we know that Critias fails to produce an answer which satisfies Socrates. However, for the sake of our goal, here in this salon, we must suspend any want for an answer. In any case, our point has been made. *Ποιησις*, production, is paramount in the Ancient Greek experience, as evidenced in the writing.

9. **Δημιουργος** (*dēmiurgos*, ‘creator, craftsman’) and **δημος** (*dēmos*, ‘the public, the people’)

Now, given that *αγαθον* seems to be measured in terms of material production and results—that is, curing our bodies from disease or building shelter for the homeless—we may wonder if we should understand the Ancients as early industrialists. Of course, our conclusion is that, certainly, we should not. This would, after all, be to inject our understanding of industry into the Ancient Greek experience. To be sure, *ποιησις* is not merely constituted by a commerce with the material substrate. The Ancient’s economy was equally concerned with the presencing

of the *ιδεα*—that is, the presencing of the outward appearance of the world within the commerce of public uses of things and communal life.

Etymologically, *ποιησις* is related to the Ancient Greek *ποιεω* (*poieō*, ‘I make’). Therefore, when we read the word *ποιησις* we should not simply substitute in our minds the Modern English word *production*. We should instead couple it with *personal creation*. Note that the Modern English words *poet*, *poetry*, and *poetic* also derive from Ancient Greek *ποιεω*. The contemporary philosopher John Vervaeke, in his description of transjectivity, calls our apprehension of the phenomenal experience (and our objectifying of the phenomenal experience) as a “poetizing”.

Δημιουργος, then, is the Ancient Greek description for that way of being which presences the *ιδεα* of the *δημος* through any and all walks of life. Every *πολιτης* (*politēs*, ‘citizen’) as *πολιτης*, has, as their way of being in the Ancient Greek experience, *δημιουργος*. Inasmuch, *ποιητικη* (*poietike*, ‘production’) was not merely activity of the craftsman, the *τεχνιτης* (*technitis*), it was equally that of the *πολιτικος* (*politikos*), the politician.

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10. **Κοινωνία** (*koinonia*, ‘joint participation, a share which anyone has in anything, fellowship, or communion’)

What should be noted is that, for the Ancients, words such as *society* or *culture* would have no sense. There was no conception of ‘the objective’, such that any one could be as a scientist of sociology or anthropology—that is, as an objective scientific observer. In Aristotle, for example, we do not find a conception of either culture or society (the grammar does not allow for it), but instead the being of those having shared language or, rather, *λογος* (*logos*) as a *being with one another*, or *κοινωνία* (‘joint participation or a share which anyone has in anything’). Our Modern English word *communion* is related to the Ancient Greek word *κοινωνία*. Indeed, even the Ancient Greek *πολις* is used to mean both *city* (the material substrate) and *that with which one has communion*—namely, *one’s community*. The *πολις* is that where there is a communion which produces the outward appearance of the world within the commerce of public uses of things and communal life. The location of a *people* is a *city*.

11. **Freedom**

The state by which a people are free for the product-

ion of idea, we know today as freedom. Such freedom is that of a *people*—it denotes the ability of a people to constitute themselves as a people through production. We can perhaps imagine here the popular legend of the Hebrew people, who during the time before the exodus from Egypt, were not a free people—that is, they were not able to constitute themselves through their own production. Instead, they were subordinated to the pharaoh, and to his projects and the overall projection and preservation of the Ancient Egyptian people.

Now, while this definition of freedom may seem obvious, incontestable, and on that account perhaps quite uninteresting, we should not proceed with this definition all too quickly. If we do, we may miss all that should be interesting in our reflection upon the Ancients. After all, this conception of freedom is quite unlike what is meant by that word, today. What should strike us as peculiar is that in the Ancient Greek experience, various duties and responsibilities may be imposed upon individuals for the sake of freedom. Thus, it is not an individual freedom, but a freedom to be as *πολιτης*. Indeed, it is this ‘citizenship’ which constitutes the human animal, as the human animal—that is, as distinct from lower animals or from god.

This is Aristotle's foundational claim, as presented at the inception of his *Πολιτικά* (*Politika*, 'the things concerning the *πολις*'). Of course, we should not be surprised if this understanding of freedom would produce objection from our libertarian friends. After all, according to the philosophies of more rural areas, any man could only ever be truly free when he is to himself. Modern society simply demands too much. And repeating the French philosopher Jean Paul Sartre, postmodern challengers might even be tempted to say that "*hell is other people*". Alternatively, cosmopolitans would have their own concerns—namely, that this understanding of freedom is archaic, and if this value were to guide us today, we would likely arrive at the political ideal of nationalism. Therefore, taking political directive from the ancients, in the mind of cosmopolitans would, no doubt, sound dangerous.

However, and despite these initial objections, Aristotle's claim at the inception of his *Πολιτικά* goes further. And what we find in his proceedings is, perhaps, an even further estrangement from the Ancient Greeks. Indeed, Aristotle follows his claim by stating that "*the state is a prior condition to the individual*". No doubt, this second claim has the

potential to produce dissonance. Because, if this is actually the case, then Aristotle must surely be thinking of *the state* as something other than what we think of today. No doubt, what we think of the state today, as a body of laws and the officers and administrators of those laws, must be, without a doubt, a construction of the human animal. And then, in this case, *the state* could not be, as Aristotle claims, *a prior condition to the individual*. Therefore, let us now turn towards Aristotle's *Πολιτικά* for further reflection. This reflection will help us understand the essence of the political as experienced within Ancient Greek life. This will then, in turn, provide us with material for reflecting on our own understanding of the essence, as we experience it, today.

12. Aristotle's claim

Within Aristotle's *Πολιτικά* we read that, "*It is evident that man is by nature a political animal*" and that "*the state is a natural growth and a prior condition to the individual*". Aristotle provides proof for his claim. That proof runs as such,

"The proof is that the individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing; and therefore, he is like a part in relation to the whole."

Now, we should not proceed all too quickly and assume that Aristotle simply means that we are all materially dependent on the whole of human commerce—which is arguably truer today than in ancient times, given our highly-complex economic structures. However, this interpretation is unsatisfactory because turning towards “*material dependency*” does not resolve Aristotle’s statement that *the state is a prior condition to the individual*.

Now, if Aristotle’s claim that “*the state is a prior condition to the individual*” produces in us dissonance, then it must be because we have (and are operating with) two quite different positions, which each seem to describe reality with some truth. One position says that *man is a product of the state*, and another says that *the state is a product of man* or that *man produces the state* (note that the difficulty remains even if we substitute the word *the state* with *society*). Therefore, which can it be? Or do both positions retain explanatory power, each within their own contexts and applications? In order to address these questions, and arrive at the essence of the political, as it is experience in Ancient Greek life, we must revisit the Ancient Greek *ενεργεια* and *πραξις*.

13. **Ενεργεια** (*enērgēia*, ‘human activity’) and **πραξις** (*praxis*, ‘doing’)

For the Ancient Greeks—at least, the natural philosophers before Plato—there was no theory apart from practice. Theory, as the Ancient Greeks understood it, was the highest mode of *ενεργεια* (‘human activity’), but they understood it only as the supreme realization of genuine *πραξις* (‘doing’), the innermost determining center of their entire existence as a people. For these ancients, theory springs forth from doing. It is dependent on it. Perhaps we could think of the *doing of a people* by way of an analogy. Imagine, for example, some primordial ooze which, by way of its practical dealing with its environment, draws definition in that environment, such that this ooze not only comes to a ‘theory’ about the world, but also come to the descriptions which belong to that theory—whether that theory is of material nature, and includes descriptions such as *food* and *chair*, or whether that theory is moral, and includes in it, for example, *feminism* and *liberty*. Now, we could think of this primordial ooze as a human animal, perhaps a child, and we could then further think of this process of articulation within the environment by way of a child’s development—this process, then, accounting for the way in which the child learns to operate with

the objects *mom* and *spoon*, and even the object *me*. In this case, we may say that this primordial dealing with the environment is the condition for both language and cognitive representation. Though, we should beware of getting too caught up in this specific psychological analogy. Within socialist or economic theory (say, Marxist literature, for example) it might be common to translate this *doing of a people*, *πραξις*, simply as *production*. However, we should equally beware of translating *πραξις* into modern thought solely through the framework of material economics. Instead of using either psychological or material economic terms, we can use our analogy of the primordial ooze to consider exactly, this indefinite organism, *a people*—or rather, *the doing of a people*. If we do, then we can say that, just as with the human child, this *doing of a people* allows for the world to be articulated, as the world which it is, in its intellectual or theoretical fashion. This primordial ‘state’, so-to-speak, then, is the very condition for knowledge, itself. It is the condition for any science, from psychology to economics. Inasmuch, we can say that this commerce is prior to even material description. That is to say, it is prior to the discipline of physics, which is, after all, one type of language or ‘theory’—and that is to say, this particular conception of a

doing of a people, *πραξις*, as a primordial commerce, belongs to metaphysical description.

With this interpretation of the Ancient Greeks, we can begin understand Aristotle’s claim that “*the state is a prior condition to the individual*”. This metaphysical *state* is a condition for the individuation of any particular *you* or *me* or any individuation of *ourselves*, as who *we* are. Only first are there Americans, and only on account of their being Americans among us, can an individual American come to be individuated as such. However, if this is the case, then we are now thinking of “*the state*” as something more robust than a mere body of laws and the officers and administrators of those laws. Indeed, if this is the case, then we are thinking on the state more in communion with Aristotle, as that primordial dealing which is the essence of being political. In identifying this object, *πραξις*, we have now named the essence of the political, as experienced in Ancient Greek life. Remembering back to the inception of this salon, in asking after *the essence of the political*, we are not asking for what is common or universal among all political activity or all political objects, but instead, the ground or foundation of what we think of as political—that is, the ground for *being political*.

14. **German philosophy and socialism**

We should not be surprised, then, that such an understanding of the essence of the political has inspired socialist movements—from communism to national socialism. And what should not be overlooked is the fact that these socialist movements arose, each in their own respective periods and locations, to address social and psychological symptoms arising from changes in labor. Socialism has, since its inception, problematized *πραξις*.

15. **Alienation**

Within communist literature, for example, we find concern that the stratified social classes produced alienation. According to Marx, the industrial worker loses the ability to determine both life and destiny when deprived of the right to think of himself as the director of his own actions, or to determine the character of his actions, and to own the items of value produced by his own labor. The industrial worker is subordinated (much like the Hebrew to the pharaoh) to the bourgeoisie. Of course, today, looking backward to this period of industrial development, we can surmise that the symptoms described by alienation must not have been merely an illness of the proletariat, or for those employed on the assembly

line. Instead, these symptoms must have been conditioned by something much more pervasive.

16. **Rootlessness**

From the higher vantage afforded us today, we can understand industrialization as referring to the specialization and the compartmentalization of system operations, generally. If we consider the ‘system operation’ of an individual’s perpetual interpretation of the sensual experience, then it seems that the very digestion of the world, as we experience it through industry journals and other news media, had given cause for a certain alienation. This source of alienation is evidenced in the many critiques we hear waged against that form of government which has been called *technocracy*—a form of governance in which industry specialists contribute to the world picture, by way of various public touch points. We can find further evidence for the proof of this alienation, today, in the attempted solutions to technocracy. No doubt, the self-help industry has been supplanted with what has been called a *meaning and sense making* industry. This industry then giving rise to YouTube gurus who provide relief to their audience by digesting the various public touch points, from specialists and

non-specialist alike, across both broadcast and social media, into digestible world-encompassing *grand narratives*.

However, what should not be overlooked is that early in the twentieth century, during the period of the German Conservative Revolution, this alienation had already been identified. In the words of the interpreters and translators of this period, we read of a *rootlessness*—an estrangement from that which is produced in the proximity of the workshop, through trades, and *of the people and of the land*. This period of writing produced a romanticized picture of the Ancients—a picture which we can still find resonate within ourselves, even today. We only need to consider the thousands of years of conditioning which the human animal must have adjusted for during the polytheistic agricultural period—a time we imagine as characterized by a harmonious feedback loop between labor and the proximal phenomena of our experience. Undoubtedly, the source of this alienation, which we might diagnose as *a lack of individual affectivity in the process of producing the world* (in the Ancient Greek sense of production) is attested for in the cool-alooof or sarcastic-cynicism of late twentieth century popular culture. No

doubt, any one of us can recall our sympathy for the apathetic characters of Donn Pearce's *Cool Hand Luke* and Marshall Mathers' Eminem.

Therefore, while Karl Marx is likely to be considered the greatest philosopher of social economic theory (or, at the least, the one most likely to be targeted by opponents of social economic theory), it is Martin Heidegger, as the premier philosopher of socialist literature during the German Conservative Revolution, whose vision of socialist economy calls for our reflection today. After all, within his writing we find a description of the conditions for the world to be presented over, as the world which it is. His metaphysical architectonic of *πραξις* constitutes a description of *world-disclosure*. This architectonic, then, provides us with vocabulary for reconciling with the sociological and psychological symptoms described through alienation and rootlessness.

Finally, what should be admitted is that the previous exposition on the Ancient Greeks and, in particular, the interpretation of Aristotle's *Πολιτικά* could not have been possible without the scholarship which has followed from Heidegger's lecture course material on Ancient Greek literature.

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“If man in the state of Nature be absolute lord of his own person and possessions, equal to the greatest and subject to nobody, why will he part with his freedom and subject himself to the dominion and control of any other power?

The obvious answer is that though in Nature he hath such a right, the enjoyment of the property he has in this state is very unsafe, very insecure.

This makes him willing to quit this condition [within Nature] which, however free, is full of fears and dangers; and, therefore, it is not without reason that he is willing to join in society with others who are already united in the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties, and estates, [those things] which I call by the general name—property.

The great and chief end, therefore, of men uniting into commonwealths, and putting themselves under government, is the preservation of their property; to which in the state of Nature there are many things wanting.”

JOHN LOCKE, 1689



The Essence of the Political: the Enlightenment

17. Characterizing the Enlightenment

As we proceed into the second half of our preparation for the salon, let us remind ourselves of the purpose of our preparation. We seek to distinguish terminology and tools for use within the salon. Therefore, in pursuing this goal, it will be advantageous for us to characterize the Enlightenment, and to place this characterization in clear contrast to our characterization of the Ancient Greeks, as presented in the first half of our preparation. While such a diametric positioning of these two human economies could, at other times (outside of this salon), be seen as dramatizing the reality, our dramatization will allow us distance from either historical lineage. We can use this position to then bring into question liberal values, as they were established in the English Enlightenment and, also, liberal values as they came to serve the American Founding Fathers. This is not with the purpose of rejecting liberal values, outright. Instead, we bring into question a certain *historical*

liberalism for the sake of establishing for ourselves, for the first time, the essence of the political, as it stands, here in this room.

18. The project of the Enlightenment

So, then, from where do we draw our inspiration to characterize, with some level of truth, the project of the Enlightenment? No doubt, from the Enlightenment literature, itself. Within that literature, we find a project to liberate the vessel of human potential, the blank canvas which is the human 'subject', the *tabula rasa*—John Locke's "*white paper*". The liberation of this subject is promised by way of *rights*. Now, rights, themselves, exist in many variations—*inalienable rights*, *natural rights*, and also *human rights*, for example. And while history lessons have a reputation to bore, a history of rights will allow us to emphasize the essence of the political, as established within Enlightenment literature.

19. Inalienable rights

What should be noted is that long before Thomas Jefferson penned the Declaration of Independence and announced "*inalienable Rights*", those rights which are characterized by "*Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness*", these rights—namely, *inalienable*

rights—once referred to a purely metaphysical, or ‘mental’ category—those of ‘internal’ constitution. As internal, these rights referred to the principle that no matter what earthly rule any man found himself under, his inner world was a realm which was inalienably his own. Consider, as an example of these rights, the story of Christ’s forty lashes, as he sat on trial before the Roman governor of Judea, Pontius Pilate. Upon Pilate’s interrogation into his kingship, Jesus simply replies, “*my kingdom is not of this world*”. Pilate responds, “*So, you are a king, then!*” To which Jesus rebuttals, “*You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth.*” With these words, Jesus has qualified the domain of his truth as extraterrestrial. Of course, today, we might find this mere ‘mental’ freedom as a slave’s freedom. However, what should be admitted is that as a pre-physical category, these rights were absolutely inalienable. However, within Enlightenment literature, we find that these inalienable rights were replaced to the domain of social and material commerce. We could say that the project of the Enlightenment sought to bring this internal ‘mental’ freedom into the exterior.

20. Natural rights

Within Enlightenment literature, inalienable rights transformed into something natural. Within the writing of Locke, for example, *the state of Nature* refers to that of the individual subjects’ primordial commerce. This state is governed by *the law of Nature*, “*which obliges every one, and reason, which is that law, [that] no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions [insofar as each individual is equally independent and equally governed by the law of Nature]*”.

Rights, then, in the writing of Locke, seem to refer to the power which anyone has in this state of Nature. Locke understands these rights exercised by two powers. The first of those powers is to do “*whatsoever he thought fit for the preservation of himself and the rest of mankind*”; the second, “*the power to punish the crimes committed against the law [of Nature]*”—and that is to say, the second power is to punish those who violate the preservation of any other individual and the rest of mankind.

The project of the Enlightenment sought to guarded these rights (then appropriately named, *natural rights*) from the violence of the state of Nature, which (repeating again from John Locke’s *Second*

Treatise of Civil Government) “is full of fears and continual dangers” on account that men are “biased by their interest, as well as ignorant for want of study of [their interest], are not apt to allow of [the law of Nature] as a law; and that, furthermore, men are partial to themselves and “passion and revenge carry them too far, and with too much heat in their own cases, as well as negligence and unconcernedness, make them too remiss in other men”.

21. **The legislative power**

As part of the Enlightenment’s liberation project, natural rights were to be secured through human reason. Reason was manifest in the commerce of the human animal as *law*. Locke recognizes in his treatise that every man entering into society with others must give over his power in the state of Nature (as defined above) to the legislative power. Therefore, the first and most fundamental of any law, in the words of Locke, “is the establishing of the legislative power” which is to be governed itself by natural law, for “the preservation of the society and (as far as will consist with the public good) of every person in it.” The only superior to man was reason, over any king and before any god. The promise of liberation, then, was to be achieved by way of democracy—a rule of the people.

22. **“a wall of separation between church and state”**

In 1802, Thomas Jefferson penned a now historical letter to the Danbury Baptist Association in Connecticut. In this letter, we find the kernel of what would later become a foundational mantra of the liberal project—the *separation of church and state*. When we learn of this separation at a young age, we are likely to think of the hocus-pocus of religion and the powers of governance. The blessing of the tsar by the priest, or the consultation of oracles before going to war. Yet, any primordial reckoning which these fanciful images provoke fades beyond the playground imagination. Even a staunch rejection of such magic signals immaturity. Instead, what calls for such a reckoning today is the function with which each half serves within the whole of the dichotomy. We surmise that this functional division must have been clear in Jefferson’s mind—a separation of action over-and-above belief,

“Believing that religion is a matter which lies solely between Man & his God, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach **actions** only, & not **opinions**, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people

which declared that their legislature should ‘make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof’, thus building a wall of separation between Church & State.”

23. **Mercantilism**

Of course, when looking at our historical records, we understand that the foundation for this wall had been trenched long before Jefferson’s pronouncement; and yet, its popularity signals a utility. Insofar as the legislative power regulates, curates and develops fair exchanges in the commerce of man, Jefferson’s separation animates a spirit of mercantilism. This animation is in favor of a form of governance which, say, animates a community-bodied projection towards the future. Neither does the legislative power animate other functions within man’s union—pronounce are those which the Church meant to satisfy in the whole of human commence—namely, *hope*, *inspiration*, and *communion*. Indeed, we find in Jefferson’s pronouncement of a separation between church and state a repetition of Locke. The purpose of uniting men into commonwealth is “*the preservation of their [liberty and their] property*”.

24. **Denominating liberalism**

Now, perhaps at this point in our development, having acknowledged mercantilism, as a spirit for commerce which is supported and encouraged in maintaining liberal values, it would be correct for us to acknowledge *liberalism*, as this term is used today, in modern political discourse. Today, the word “liberal” is used sometimes alongside *progressivism*, which would, admittedly, more appropriately be contrasted to *conservativism*. Furthermore, the word “liberal” is also used to refer to the whole value-system of the United States Democratic party, or to the whole value-system which is appealed to within Left media narratives. And this is despite the fact that both the Democratic Party and the Left media narrative have, at times, also championed for and supported a nationalization of industries such as healthcare, among others. What should be noted, here, is that these two words, *liberalism* and *nationalism*, if no other, stand in stark contrast to one another.

Of course, today, we speak of *classical liberalism*, and we do refer to *libertarianism*, in order to draw a distinction from the “liberalism” stated above. And that is not to be shunted aside, even for us

here, in this salon. However, this ‘denomination of liberalism’ only shows us that liberal values are hardly characterized by any one ideology, today. (And this, then, is an unfortunate state for political theorists, to be sure. Though, perhaps it should be noted that in the common parlance of Europe, the term “liberalism” retains a clearer and consistent lineage with Enlightenment literature.) Therefore, it is worth stating, before we proceed any further, that here, in this salon, if we speak of liberalism, then we are speaking of the entire project to liberate the vessel of human potential, the blank canvas which is the human subject, John Locke’s “*white paper*”. We also understand this liberation to be secured through law. This is, after all, the red-thread which unites all uses of liberalism, from the Enlightenment up to, and including, our use today.

Inasmuch, we should refrain from treating of the political narratives of Left and Right—where one could be “financially conservative” and “socially progressive”. Instead, if we speak of liberalism, then we are referring to either of those positions along either axis within the whole project of the liberation of the human animal.

25. **Contrasting Ancient Greece and the Enlightenment**

What should be clear, then, already now, through our project to characterize the Enlightenment as distinct from Ancient Greece, is the central role which *the state of Nature* comes to serve in determining the essence of the political. Within Locke’s *Second Treatise of Civil Government* it is clear that man is naturally a lonesome creature and that he is naturally separated from other men and, therefore, that their communion is neither in nature nor natural. The essence of the political, then, as characterized by the Enlightenment, and attested for through this particular piece of Enlightenment literature, is the “*mutual preservation*” of property between individuals. This mutual pre-servation of property, or “*commonwealth*” is, then, with the purpose of securing the ideal of justice from the dangers of a savage world. What should not be overlooked is that the legislative power within this commonwealth is concerned with and animates man’s domain—this domain, therefore, not only provides for a domestication of nature within that domain, but also a domestication of each other who we equally call ‘man’. However, neither should we overlook the prior condition which is

necessary for such a domestication project. What is required is a negative characterization of nature and of the nature of the human animal—perhaps, for example, that the natural state of man is as a savage. Through both surveillance and punishment, the liberal project can be, therefore, characterized by overpowering actions, including an overpowering of even one's self. Still today, we hear appeals to the savagery of the world, whether the purpose of this appeal is to encourage the necessary protection of one's property (liberal gun rights, for example) or for appealing to a self-sacrifice for *the benefit of the greater good*. We should not be mistaken. Liberalism has, since its inception, problematized savagery.

This problematization of savagery, then, stands in stark contrast to the Ancient Greek philosophers, and in particular to Aristotle, who understood that man is, by nature, a political animal; and, furthermore, that *"the state is a natural growth"*. However, what was left unstated in the first half of our preparation, but is now invaluable to our contrast, is that, for Aristotle, whatever is natural is necessarily *αγαθον*. It is exclusively from within man's communion with nature that he can produce *the good*. Therefore, in order to bring the Enlightenment and Ancient

Greece into clear contrast, let us now simplify the characterization of each of our two periods of political thought. Let us simply contrast *domesticative rights* with *creative production of the good*.

Of course, this characterization of the Enlightenment, and of the liberal project, generally, may perhaps produce a bit of shock. Certainly, we can expect a reaction from those who want to remind us of the universal ideal of *human rights*. And, after all, we can sympathize with them. Are not the various projects which are motivated by the ideal of human rights productive?—feeding the hungry or building shelter for the homeless?—for example. And even if this production is achieved through *"sacrifice"*, can't this production have a creative self-expression, in each unique case of it? Despite this, if we allow ourselves to suspend consideration of human rights for the time being, then we can further characterize our contrast between *domesticative rights* and *creative production of the good*. To do so, we will now take into our account the very foundation on which the Enlightenment literature had been built. Without spending too much time, let us consider the metaphysics which the statesmen of the Enlightenment took for granted.

26. **Dialogue contra Reason**

No doubt, the history of what we call the Enlightenment began with an application of the epistemologist's metaphysical subject to the domain of governance. Note that this word, "*subject*", is a terminological word within the tradition of philosophy. Today, we remember the French philosopher Rene Descartes for setting forth the tradition of *subjectivity*, later further articulated by the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant. While a metaphysics of subjectivity has propelled us towards a virtue of *objectivity* and, in doing so, expedited the project of modernization, we can also understand the perverse consequences of subjectivity.

If we consider the factual life of the philosopher as informing his or her philosophical doctrine (and this is something we should encourage), then we are granted perspective on the philosopher's doctrine, itself. If we then consider the factual life of Descartes, we find a world characterized by lonesomeness. Recalling Descartes' second meditation, we can imagine a man sat alone, isolated in his apartment. And in such a place of body and mind, he found himself dependent solely on his reasoning faculty—perhaps we could even say that Descartes was with an over-dependence

and, therefore, unhealthy dependency on his reason. If we consider Descartes' reflections on his fellow man from within this state of being, then we begin to experience, for ourselves, exactly the perversion which follows from such an over-dependency on the reasoning faculty. No doubt, through a dependency on reason alone, the human animal appears like an alien and mechanical phenomenon,

"...what do I see from my window, but hats and coats which may cover automatic machines? Yet I judge these to be men."

—these are the words which Descartes writes (a philosopher, who has, by the way, been called *the father of the metaphysical foundations for science*)! Should there be any surprise that maintaining a subjectivist metaphysics, as we have done, has produced an enormous administrative machine, governed by a democracy, 'yes'—though not by a democracy of fellow nationals—but instead, a democracy of strangers? In contrast, we call to our Ancient Greeks, once again, whose world was informed not through an internal and lonesome *reasoning faculty*, but instead through an external *dialogue* of reasoning. Much like we are preparing ourselves for, here in this salon

27. **Critique of the liberal project**

Therefore, we should not be surprised to find the consequence of this subjectivist paradigm the way we do—namely, falling to critique. Of course, the critiques which follow from this paradigm are so commonplace that it is hardly worth our time to consider, here in this salon. And, anyway, if we are to remain committed to our goal, then grieving on what is beyond our control is undoubtedly wastefully spent energy. We should, rather, only mention (but not discuss!) the academic critique which has been waged against liberalism—namely, *neoliberalism*—a term which refers to a period of market-oriented reform policies, eliminating price controls, deregulating capital markets, lowering trade barriers, and reducing state influence—especially through privatization and austerity. Nor would we be honoring our goal if we were to discuss the critique offered by the French philosopher, Étienne Balibar, who had announced that following the Bretton Woods institutions and the end of any economic nationalism, the legislative power had come under subjection to market demands. Inasmuch, the legislative power had devolved “*from a protective function to a function of destruction of its own civil society*”—a destruction which Balibar characterizes

as “*not ‘totalitarian’ in form, but ‘utilitarian’ in form, which is hardly less violent*”. At most, we should consider the critique waged against the subjectivist paradigm offered by James Gustave Speth. As the American presidential advisor on Climate Change, Speth had made the dramatic claim that in order to correct ecosystem collapse, biodiversity loss, and climate change what is required is a “*spiritual renewal*”. That “*greed, selfishness, and apathy*” are causing destruction to nature. Of course, even if we do acknowledge Speth’s critique against subjectivist paradigm, we have to ask ourselves, in all honesty, how else is the individual supposed to manifest himself within market economy? Putting aside nasty psychological diagnoses, such as the ones offered by Speth, we should not overlook the fact that when the value of a product is determined by the market, the individual creator is forced to look towards his activity, his busyness, as the object of his own value. It is no surprise that following a virtue of objectivity, career success would become the barometer of anyone’s contribution to his or her people. Greed and selfishness might just be the wrong diagnoses.

Now, of course, having acknowledged all of this, we should proceed. In doing so, let us no longer use this

salon for grieving on such matters, but instead, let us use this salon for the construction of something positive—namely, an identification of the essence of the political as we experience it here, in this very room.

28. **Postliberalism and Prefigurative politics**

Now, in leaving behind considerations of “*neo-liberalism*” we should not proceed all too proudly thinking we have singled out our enemy—and that all that is required now is to defeat the libertarians, or the supporters of the Republican party, which favors the selfishness of the rich over the poor, or which values personal wealth and career over the environment. After all, the Democratic Party too carries on the tradition of subjectivity—and it does so in a fashion likely more subversive, yet more pronouncedly, than the libertarian. We only need to acknowledge the domestication project, as it manifests most radically today.

There can be no denying that domestication, today, is no longer conducted by way of ‘administrative’ law, surveillance, and punishment, but is, instead, conducted by way of ‘social justice’. In redefining the ‘subject’ of liberalism’s rights (which, according to the Left-leaning political-market narrative, is

no longer the individual-subject, but is instead the gender, race, or sexually-orientated identity group) social justice activism carries on liberalism’s project of domestication. And while this is perhaps a shocking claim, if we are honest with ourselves, Grete Thunberg style climate change activism, Black Lives Matter, feminist activism, and LGBTQ+ activism, while positive in their intentions, do maintain a character of law, surveillance, and punishment. Notice that each of these movements are only possible from a position of liberalism’s problematizing savagery.

Of course, perhaps it might be wise, at this point, to remind ourselves of the purpose of this preparation. We are distancing ourselves from any biases, or any established and overly-marketed political narratives. We do this so that we may constitute for ourselves, together, the essence of the political, as we experience it here in this room.

Now, as we have seen, the critique against liberalism’s subjectivist paradigm has been waged against neoliberalism and the economic description which we know as capitalism. And this means that the critique against the subjectivist paradigm has not been waged against subjectivist metaphysics,

or liberal values themselves (whether we are, again, speaking of the liberation of the individual-subject or the group-subject). However, there are examples to be found in recent history. We can find an example in the network of grassroots urban-based projects which began in Southern Europe and rose to their peak popularity and influence in 2017. During those years, these movements coalesced by defining themselves by way of a socialist ideology from the nineteenth century: *municipalism*. By way of city-based infrastructural projects these “*new municipalist*” movements were contesting local elections and winning seats within public offices. However, what is important to our narrative of subjectivist metaphysics is that these movements had manifested something of a *prefigurative* approach to politics—an approach not *pre-* in the developmental sense, such that the configuration (or the ‘subject’) is anticipated, but instead as a constant *pre-configuration*. As *prefigurative*, these movements manifested as a negation. However, that negation, not to be mistaken, is its positive characteristic. After all, only from a *postliberal* position can political activism move beyond liberalism’s *battle of selfishness*. Repeating testimony by way of an anonymous representative of Naples-based new

municipalist movement, Massa Critica,

“[Municipalism] is not a battle for ourselves, for our identity—we are communist, we are anarchist, we are...No. [Municipalism] is a battle directly from the people. For example, I fight for the hospital, I fight for commons, I fight for water. I fight for these single rights. I fight in a near, near way, for some rights where normal people are directly involved.”

Of course, what should not be overlooked is that exactly because these municipalist movements operated outside of the existing administrative government infrastructure, they could appeal to those with agendas extraneous to what is on offer through colonialization and patriarchy.

Repeating from a representative of Argentina’s Ciudad Futura,

“[Municipalism offers] the possibility of constructing a new kind of power in society which is precisely in the hands of ordinary people”. A “local governance, which allows for proximity” and “allows us to project our experience on another scale”.

Congratulations and Personal Disclosure

This, then, is the preparation for our salon. However, before we proceed to the salon itself, I want to take just a few minutes to say congratulations. I do believe this is in order. After all, there can be no doubt that it takes a bit of curiosity, courage, and naivety, or perhaps some other strange cocktail of predispositions, to bring into question our most sacred and cherished values—whether those be our liberal values, or some other. The fact that you are still here, together with me, signals to me that each of you respect the goal of our salon, and you respect each other who are here together with us, in pursuing our goal.

Of course, given the presentation, there is no hiding the fact that I, myself, am animated by theories of *πραξις*; and therefore, am also interested in animating considerations on creation, as the constitution of the essence of the political, here in this salon. It follows from this, then, that I am less interested in liberal values and, truth be told, I am less animated by liberal values in my own life. If this was not clear, I now make it explicit. However, and despite this, it must be said: I will not defend any values (or lack of values) which may or may not have surfaced, either explicitly or inexplicitly, at any time throughout the preparation. This is not because I am shy to do so, or that those values do not deserve defending. Instead, I want to use this opportunity to remind us of the method and goal of our salon. We are here taking up the Platonic dialogue as

our model. By presenting the *ειδος* or *ιδεα*, we will seek the essence of the political, together. Only here in this salon, with the very people you see around you, will we be able to qualify the essence of the political, as it stands in this very moment. The truth of any one idea presented here can only be proven in the fact that it provides traction and propels the dialogue further. Therefore, in announcing my own values, I have also released them from my own ownership. It is now for us to consider if those values can describe the essence of the political for us. Of course, it must also be said, I do not have a unique privilege in this salon. After all, it is not only I, but also you, who are free of the responsibility of defending any one idea present here. This, then, should reduce the anxiety which accompanies thoughts of disclosing yourself and your thoughts to us. Here, in this salon, we must encourage authenticity for the sake of our goal.

Therefore, having already stated an idea—namely, the characterizations of Ancient Greece and of the Enlightenment—I am now free to assume the role of the facilitator of our salon. The floor is now yours.

—Justin Carmien, November, 16th, 2021



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