in bringing about the good life, also rethinks and changes the nature of the political animal.

This is not to insist that political praxis should be submitted to the diktats of philosophy or theory in general. It is rather to emphasise the plain fact that theory and praxis are mutually reinforcing and inextricable. The idea that real or material conditions disclose themselves through struggle or political praxis without conceptual and cognitive resources stems from an impoverished conception of materialism in which the real or the material can be determined independently of the dimension of structure or conceptualization. Struggle within such a framework is no more than fighting for unintelligibility and subjectivist dogmas. Changing the world cannot be imagined without the cognitive struggle to change our concepts.

Similarly, the idea that political struggle can materialize and continue simply by virtue of the multiplicity of experiences and desires, in the absence of or in autonomy from theory, philosophical and scientific methods of analysis, or conceptual tools is a practical legacy of naive empiricism which takes experience as immediate, fundamental, and independent of conceptual mediation. Political struggle should be responsive to the multiplicity of individual experiences and desires, but responsiveness does not imply conformity. For such experiences and desires can indeed be the very products of the pathological system that the political struggle seeks to change or abolish. Lived experiences *by themselves* can neither recognize what unites them in their very particularity nor diagnose the global pathological conditions that furtively divide them. The diagnosis of the real constraints of the world in which we struggle, the tracking of our goals and missions—whether we have reached them or not—is impossible without theory or philosophy as critical modes of thinking invested in impersonal objectivity and in the universal capacities of reason.

A veritable struggle should aim at seeing the world—the milieu of struggle—objectively, with the understanding that what is objective does not spontaneously unfold itself before us, but is the product of an ongoing cognitive labour. Enlarging the general field of experience in order to expand the scope of what is objective so as to incorporate and augment objectivity within individual thoughts and desires—the task of concrete

self-consciousness or the craft of the good life—is not an undertaking that can be delegated to either philosophy, science, or politics. It entails a unification and coordination of all disciplines of thought and practice.

By comparing ourselves with this hypothetical general intelligence for which the craft of the good life and intelligence are one and the same, we may say that rethinking ourselves and rethinking what counts as a good life for us can only go hand in hand. In giving up on the universal and time-general thought of a good life and the striving necessary to achieve it, dismissing it as an anthropocentric illusion or an outdated fantasy, we neither rescue ourselves from an ancient philosophical superstition nor gesture toward a disillusioned politics. We instead passively hand the idea of the Good over to the most pernicious ideologies and political projects active on this planet. The immediate outcome of this surrender is the downgrading of the good life into the convenient market of on-demand lifestyles where mere survival glossed over with the triumphs of quotidian exploits is passed off as happiness, and the ego-exhibitionism of trivial psychological needs and entrenched dogmas is promoted in the guise of individual empowerment and freedom.

Yet more detrimentally, in dispensing with the thought of a good life and resigning from the collective striving it entails, we create a political vacuum in which fundamentalisms and theocracies parasitically thrive. To dismiss the universal demands of a good life as superstitious ideals is to grant superstitions authority over such demands. Abandoning the cognitive and practical labour of the good life as a universal collective project on the grounds of potential abuses and possible risks is a license for abuse and a sure formula for disaster.

The striving for a good life as a concrete universal consists of theoretical and practical intelligibilities, and thus explanatory, descriptive, and prescriptive norms required for determining what we are, what is good for us, and how we should bring it about. The ambit of such striving necessitates the rational dialectic between trust and suspicion, hope and despair; it requires that we invest in the cultivation of agency as a collective project that outlives its individual agents, and that we recognize the limitations of ourselves as agents living here and now. Suspicion without trust is the impoverishment

of critique; trust without rational suspicion is the bankruptcy of belief. What underpins this dialectical resilience is neither ideological rationalization nor the absence of reason, but the discursive framework of rationality as the medium of both suspicion *and* trust. Without it, the slide into jaded pessimism or naive optimism is inevitable.[339]

DATUM 8. THE YEARNING FOR THE BETTER

The task of humanity is to make something better than itself. This is the one and only dictum through which philosophy, as that which has a history and not a nature, perilously realizes its craft, the ultimate form of intelligence. The risks it takes in order to understand and realize the good culminate in the realization of that which is better. The image of this form of intelligence is an acrobat who has learned that only by presupposing his full suspension in the abyss can he perform the greatest feats of acrobatics.

Through what is arguably the most enigmatic yet innocuous diagram ever plotted, the analogy of the divided line, Plato presents a curious picture of the Good in which intelligence, the pursuit of the Good, and risk are necessarily intertwined. In grasping the intelligibility of itself, intelligence coincides with the Good; but not until it has begun to perform a series of necessary leaps into the abyss of the intelligible. As the leaps grow in distance or proportion, they become riskier. Absent these leaps—'the acrobatics of the transcendental'[340]—there would be no intelligibility, no nature, no universe of being and no intelligence. Only that which leaps recognizes the reality of the abyss and the abyss of reality.

Perhaps the best way to approach the analogy of the divided line is by examining it in light of Plato's later work, particularly *Philebus* and what has come to be known as one of the most demanding arguments in the entire body of Platonic dialogues: the fourfold regime or the fourfold architectonics of mind. Socrates begins the discussion with a rather elliptical dictum: 'Let us make a division of everything—i.e. the universe of flux of things,

339 See Brassier, 'Dialectics Between Suspicion and Trust'.

340 I owe this term to Adam Berg.

sensations and perceptions—that presently exists (*panta ta nun onta en to panti*).'[341] It is through this division that the necessary link between intelligence and the intelligible, structure and being, can be articulated—and more importantly, the question of what is a good life coherently answered. This division consists of four principles:

(1) *to apeiron*: the unlimited or the indeterminate, without measure (*ametros*) which is by itself unintelligible (*anous*), for example, as in less and more, e.g., vague *sensations* of cold or hot.

(2) *to peras* (the limiting, or, in a less perplexing and more contemporary term, that which determines or structures). Logoi and language as that which brings the fleeting flux of things to 'a standstill' are associated with *to peras* or the determining principle.[342]

(3) *mikton* or mixture, which is produced as the result of the operation of *to peras* on *to apeiron*. A mixture, accordingly, is that which is determinate, objective, structured, and intelligible in the encompassing sense of theoretical, practical, and axiological intelligibilities. As such, Plato equates the mixture with that which is good. Mixtures are then good entities or intelligibilities ranging from things to thoughts, actions, and states of affairs. Furthermore, the mixture can be grasped both as a product and a process of mixing that requires a complex of measurements (modes of determination) and ratios (modes of organizations). There can be a mixture of mixtures such as the good life, which is at once a product of intelligibilities and a process of cultivating intelligence and expanding the horizon of the intelligible.

(4) the cause of mixture: In *Philebus*, Socrates both associates this cause with Forms and identifies the 'making cause' (*to poioun*) with

341 Plato, *Philebus*, §23c.

342 Plato, *Theaetetus*, §157b7.

the neutral name *to dēmiurgoun* rather than with the creator or *dēmiurgos*. *To dēmiurgoun* is essentially the principle of generation and craftsmanship—at a grand scale and in accordance with Forms or Ideas—in which the distinction between the craftsman and the exercise of his craft fades away. Plato identifies the cause of the mixture or intelligibilities with the Good itself, but also with the measuring or conceptualizing mind as that which is *akin to* the Good itself.[343] It is *akin to* the Good since, while the human mind or intelligence is the making cause of intelligibilities (mixed or good entities), it is also itself a mixture of ingredients proper to that comprehensive form of craft which is a good life of intelligibilities. That is to say, the human mind or intelligence is at once a craftsman, the exercise of the craft, and an ingredient in its own craft. Or, more simply, it is a craft-as-product (*mikton*) in the process of being produced. Here, then, Plato foreshadows Hegel's thesis that the mind is the only thing that has a concept of itself and which, by establishing and expanding the objectivity of its concept, objectively and concretely transforms itself.

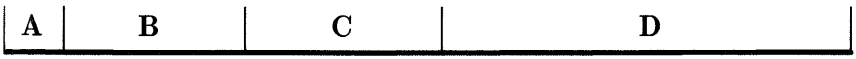
This architectonics allows us to see existent things (particulars) not as products of sensations or of the apeironic flux, but as products of general forms or ideas. We can give an intuitive example via Euclid's *Elements*. Firstly there is the idea of triangularity as such, or what Proclus might have called a detached generality or universality irreducible to all particulars.[344] Then there is the intermediating universal—e.g., an isosceles triangle—connecting the oneness of the detached universal to the multiplicity of particular isosceles triangles. Thirdly, there are intermediating particulars, which are

343 See Donald Davidson's disquisition on Plato's fourfold and the human mind as the Good itself: D. Davidson, *Plato's Philebus* (London: Routledge, 1990).

344 Proclus, *A Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements*, tr. G.R. Morrow (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970); and O. Harari, 'Methexis and Geometrical Reasoning in Proclus Commentary on Euclid's Elements', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* vol. 30 (2006), 361–89.

explicit configurations or diagrams—e.g., isosceles triangles with such-and-such bases, angles, etc.—that mediate between intermediating generalities and discrete particulars. And finally, there are discrete particulars—i.e., thus-and-so relationships between lines, points and angles—which are only particulars by virtue of falling under higher-order generalities. The diagram of the divided line exhibits precisely such a multilevel view expressing the undergirding principle of the fourfold architectonics.

The fact that the allegory of the cave is flanked by two expositions of the divided line should be sufficient reason to dismiss the common interpretations of the cave as a myth about the existence of a 'fundamental ground' or a metaphor about the sun as 'the very essence of purity'[345] as nothing but exercises in the hermeneutic bigotry and cognitive lethargy common to all intellectual platitudes. The instruction for drawing the divided line is simple: 'Take a line divided into two unequal sections, and cut each section again *in the same ratio* (*ana ton auton logon*)'. The diagram of this successively and proportionally encoded structure (*analogon*) can be visualized as follows:



Where the ratio between segments is A : B = C : D or, more accurately, C + D : A + B = D : C = B : A and C + D : A + B = D : B = C : A. The segments can be thought of as levels of a game, or topoi or local boundaries through which the continuum of the line flows. Level A is the level of suppositional opinions or conjectures (*eikasia*) and consists of shadowy images, the confusion of sensory impressions (*eikones*) with a fleeting temporal status. The second level B (*pistis*) is the domain of true opinions or beliefs concerning the natural furniture of the world (sense-intuited or particular empirical objects, *aisthêta*). The realm of forms begins with level C, which is

345 See F. Nietzsche, 'Beyond Good and Evil', in *Basic Writings of Nietzsche* (New York: Modern Library, 1968), 414; and N. Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation* (London: Routledge, 1992), 28.

intermediate between that which is sensible, transitory, and multiple and that which is timeless, universal, and necessary (Level D). C is the domain of universal ratiocinations or logoi. Its objects are analytical idealities or *mathêmatika*. Insofar as C has both the universality and unchanging aspects of D and the particularity (or multiplicity) of the objects in B, mathematics or analytic idealities can be seen as models that endow nature with structure (A and B).[346] Level D—the realm of the *nous* or intelligence—is the domain of transcendental idealities; its objects are the time-general objects of reason or ideas as such (justice, beauty, knowledge, etc.).

The continuum of the line as a whole (*systēma*) and as a principle (*to dēmiurgoun*)—and not merely level D—is what Plato calls the Good, the *form of forms*. The Good is that which lies outside of all temporal succession; yet, in a nonarbitrary manner, it also binds together all the divided parts into a whole without which nothing could be distinguished from anything else. It is a figure of time itself conceived through the history of intelligence *as that which makes intelligibilities and determinations possible yet also posits a whole in which the temporal order of things and synthetic thoughts are conditioned and crafted by timeless forms or time-general thoughts that are of nowhere and nowhen.* This is the Good as the principle by which the whole of the line can be drawn, encompassing ontological, epistemological, and axiological intelligibilities, for which different measures or rules and methods of determination and structuration need to be in place.

The temptation has often been to read the divided line as a temporal order either on the basis of the successive flux of sensations in A, or that of a linear progression from the realm of nature to the realm of forms (from A to D). But this is a mistake, for it reduces the larger segment D to the smaller segment A—another variation of the myth of the given qua data supplied by nature. What structures the sensory flux are not sensations but forms (D). Despite its apparent plausibility, the temporal progression

346 'Plato did not mathematize metaphysics, but, rather he grounded it metaphysically, and so employed mathematics analogically to do metaphysics.' G. Reale, *Toward a New Interpretation of Plato* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 161.

from A to D is also implausible since A, B, and C then would be presented as intelligibilities that are already truth-givens.[347]

The divided line begins from an atemporal point of view, from the timeless domain of transcendental idealities and time-general thoughts (Level D). The site of intelligence as that which acts on the intelligible and crafts what is Good (the continuum of the line as a whole) is the atemporal segment D. In this sense, intelligence introduces itself as that which structures all of *objective* reality (A, B, C and D). The reality of perceptual images (*eikones*) is only posited once intelligence organizes the sensory flux, by introducing pure perspectival phenomenal successions or flows—the shadows on the wall of the cave which appear to be replacing one another, moving, fading, and differing in their degree of vividness. The reality of phenomenal appearances (Level B) can only become intelligible when intelligence posits the unity of the object qua perceptual invariance holding together pure phenomenal successions or local variations, presumably through Level C (analytical idealities). And correspondingly, Level C (the level of *mathêmatika*) can only emerge from the universality of D when contrasted and made continuous (the procedure of analogy or *ana-logon*) with the particularities of B. Thus, from the perspective of the diagram, intelligence not only retroactively structures its reality according to a view from nowhere and nowhen (Level D) but also posits in advance the reality of all that is from the domain of transcendental ideas and time-general thoughts by positing one type of epistemically organizing unity after another: firstly a unity that organizes the confusion of the sensory flux, secondly the unity of the object behind phenomenal appearances, and thirdly the unity of the universal, necessary, and unchanging as introduced to the unity of particular objects in their multiplicity.

In her remarkable work on Plato, Rosemary Desjardins elaborates this point with peculiar astuteness. The following citation is merely the beginning of her argument:

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347 Giovanni Reale proposes that the internal structure of the divided line should in fact be thought as a complex vertical hierarchy with asymmetrical and transitive relations between intermediating levels. Reale, *Toward a New Interpretation of Plato*, 162.

> Faced with the multiplicity of 'many' perceptual images, we actually look for—no, more significantly, we insist on—unity, asserting that beneath the shifting 'many' there is in reality 'one', that multiple perceptual images belong to single entities. Similarly, faced with the diversity of 'different' perceptual images, we look for—or rather, again insist on—sameness, asserting that beneath the difference it is in fact 'the same', that different perceptual images belong to the same entity. The question is, how can we do this? How is it that, given multiplicity, we can assert unity? given differentness, we can assert sameness? In short, what justifies our assertion that beneath the multiplicity and differentness of those sensory perceptions there is something which, as enduring object, really remains one, and the same?
>
> Plato's answer seems to be that—in a leap which, if it were not so familiar to us, would surely boggle the mind—we actually posit a radically new kind of reality. 'Posit' (*tithēmi*) is, interestingly enough, the term Plato has Socrates use when, drawing on the proportionality of the Line, he reminds his friends of discussions 'before and often on other occasions' thereby highlighting a parallel between the processes that allow us to move through the levels of the Divided Line [...].[348]

Intelligence posits the objective reality of that which is, and in doing so retroactively recognizes its conditions of realization. The first operation is a leap from the atemporal domain of ideas into the realm of the sensible (from D to A: the organization of the sensory flux), the second a leap—the power of knowing afforded by the transcendental dimension of ideas—that retroactively recognizes how the ideas are linked to the sensible (from A to D). But as the leaps from the simple reality of the sensory flux to the formal reality of ideas grow proportionally larger, as the positing of a more cohesive reality requires a greater leap over the sectors of the line, as the expanse of what is intelligible broadens, the risks become greater, and there is much more to lose by a misjudged leap. What is at stake now is not the body of intelligence but its very idea. Yet it is only through these

348 R. Desjardins, *Plato and the Good* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 61.

leaps (positing the measures of all reality and the retroactive recognition of its realization as such) that intelligence can bind together and cohere the divided parts—an operation without which there would be no intelligible reality and no realization of intelligence.

The principle necessary for the division and integration of the segments is exactly what Plato calls the Good. For Plato, the Good makes intelligible all of reality, as well as acting on the intelligible. Absent the Good, the indeterminate homogeneity of the apeiron cannot be differentiated, nor can the reality (i.e., identities and differences) of existent things be determined—they all become unintelligible or, as Gorgias would have said, nonexistent. In other words, the line can never be divided and the divided segment can never be integrated, and therefore both the intelligible and intelligence must succumb to impossibility. Intelligence is that which acts on the intelligible, and the intelligible is that which is differentiated and integrated by intelligence. The underlying principle that warrants both is the Good as the principal mutuality of intelligence and the intelligible according to which the conception of intelligence, at every juncture of its history, is simultaneously a craftsman, the exercise of the craft or production of mixtures or intelligibilities, an ingredient of its craft, and the product of this ongoing craft. In so far as the Good is not just one transcendental idea or form but is their transcendental or formal unity (the form of forms), neither intelligence nor the intelligible can ever be taken as a fulfilled ideal or completed totality. Once either of the two is seen as concluded or continued in the absence of the other, the irruption of pathologies and tragedies is certain.

The most curious aspect of the line is that there is always a transcendental excess of ideas, since the continuum or the whole of the line (the Good) cannot be sufficiently captured by its parts. This excess is precisely what demands that intelligence must never rest, but must expand the scope of the intelligible and thus the realization of itself. Nietzsche's charge that Plato posits a fundamental ground is dissolved by this transcendental excess of the Good (the inexhaustible feedback mechanism between intelligence and the intelligible). Driven by the transcendental excess of the form of ideas—the Good—intelligence is compelled to extend

its retroactive power of knowing (the intelligibility of its conditions of realization) and to readjust its realization to new intelligibilities. It is this transcendental excess that enables intelligence to have not only a history, but also a history of that history; not just a concept of itself but also a concept of its concept; and not just a concept of its concept but also the atemporal Idea of its concept. It is the transcendental excess of the Good that deepens the abyss of the intelligible through which intelligence conceives and reshapes itself. Accordingly, transcendental excess (the Good) is what points to the excess of reality. It is because of this transcendental excess that the excess of reality in respect to thinking can be postulated and uncovered. Scientific knowledge of reality is a Good-in-itself, but it is only knowledge to the extent that it is an idea afforded by this transcendental excess, unbound and set in motion by the Good as the idea of ideas, the form of forms.

In so far as intelligence is only intelligence in virtue of recognizing what is intelligible and acting upon it in light of the transcendental excess of the Good, which perpetually dissolves the limits of what is intelligible, if intelligence were to stop at any particular stage and accept it as the totality of what there is, it would retroactively abort its own reality as intelligence. Simply put, an intelligence that takes what is currently intelligible for the totality of reality can never have been intelligence to begin with. The continuity of the line cannot be mistaken for the manifest totality of its segments. The Good, as the expression of this continuity, demands that intelligence dissolve all manifest totalities, suspend itself in ever more bottomless chasms of the intelligible, and, in doing so, transform itself into an intelligence more accustomed to wider domains of intelligibilities and more capable of acting upon what is intelligible. It is only by assimilating itself to the abyss of intelligibilities—ontological, epistemological, and axiological—that intelligence can be realized as intelligence. In the end, it is Plato who stares into the abyss by breaking apart one firmament after another, while Nietzsche rests supine on the ground staring blankly at the given sky above.

What Plato identifies as the Good is the line in its continuity, the continuous line that simultaneously binds different aspects of reality and the

life of intelligence and renders them intelligible as a whole. The interplay of *peras* and *apeiron*, the limit and the unlimited, is on full display in this continuity. The former makes intelligible the abyss of reality, bringing new sectors of it into focus by introducing measures, and thus enabling intelligence to answer the question of what *ought* to be thought and done. The latter, meanwhile, expands the horizon of what can be made intelligible. And finally, the interplay of both is what dissolves any manifest totality that lays claim to reality, thereby enabling intelligence to explore what *can* be thought and done. The relation between the two is one of mutual reinforcement. In this context, we can speak of a maximal communism of the Good as that which dissipates all seeming totalities of history.[349] But this is the Good as an expression of the transcendental excess through which intelligence at once makes itself intelligible to itself in ever broader domains, and reworks itself by comporting itself with what is intelligible. The transcendental excess of the Good is neither that of the transcendent nor that of nature.

It is the objective principle of the Good that at once explains and exceeds even the ideas of knowledge, beauty, and truth, removing the ground under every manifest ideal that appears to be the totality of those ideas.[350] Intelligence as the craft of the Good outstrips any account of nature

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349 'Communism is for us not a state of affairs which is to be established, an ideal to which reality [will] have to adjust itself. We call communism the real movement which abolishes the present state of things. The conditions of this movement result from the premises now in existence.' K. Marx and F. Engels, *The German Ideology* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), 56–7.

350 In a time when the mere mention of Plato sends many into a permanent state of nausea and cringing, Badiou's courageous reanimation of Plato as the one who insists that 'the order of thinking can triumph over the apparent law of things' is nothing but commendable. But removing Plato's most radical and dangerous thesis—the Good—only to substitute it with truth, on the grounds that the Good presupposes a Neoplatonist or Christian opposition to evil, is not only a gratuitous act of vandalism against Plato's project which is entirely held together by the idea of the Good, but also a maiming of the very idea of truth that both Plato and Badiou so vehemently defend. See Badiou, *Plato's Republic*, xv.

or being that has been given as or is deemed to be its completed totality. Its adoption of the objective principle of the Good is now encapsulated in one maxim: Burn what is holy, disenchant what seems mysterious or pretends to be perfect, and nothing will be able to compromise the ethics of thinking or the striving for the Good.

However, as the abyss of the intelligible grows in depth and breadth, as the demands of what ought to be thought and done increase, and as the possibilities of what can be done and thought expand, the leaps of intelligence become riskier. The Good, in this sense, incorporates an ineliminable element of risk. And to the extent that, without the Good, intelligence is neither intelligible nor realizable, intelligence's concrete pursuit of the better is fraught with risk. Here, 'better' does not suggest that which surpasses the Good, but an expression of the Good in the life of intelligence.

The better is what is more adequate to recognize and act on the intelligible, in doing so removing any horizon of experience, thought, or action that presents itself as a given or completed totality in the life and history of intelligence. Defined as *transitoriness* as a necessary feature of partaking in the project of the Good, the better thus takes on an all-embracing quality. It simultaneously includes what is a better life for us, a possible world better than the existing one, what is better than us, and a world better than ours. The relation between these different inquiries and realizations of the better is neither arbitrary nor extrinsic: they are all intrinsically parts of the Good that binds them together.

We began in the spirit of Plato's long voyage for truth, from the possibility of thought or the thought of the origin as a fundamental universe type truth-candidate. As we moved inward from the nebulous boundary demarcated by the thought of the origin, as we meshed together the truth-candidates implied by it, we found ourselves in the realm of the Good as that which coheres all data regarding what thinking is, what it can be, and what it ought to do. The Good is what binds together, solidifies, and orients thoughts and practices. It is, as Natorp suggested, thinking as both the infinite principle and the infinite method or process by which

all thoughts consolidate.[351] It is what makes it possible for our gropings in the dark—data as truth-candidates—to cohere and become oriented in the first place so that we can stumble on the truth of thinking as the truth of the Good.

The pursuit of the better, the craft of a better life, and the realization of that which is better, are all matters of abandoning the given totalities of our history for an open, non-guaranteed frontier. But this open frontier—the incompletion of history—is only possible when it is restored to time as *pure formlessness rife with contingencies* and in which all given or achieved totalities disappear. As such, the better is the area of maximum risk and the search for it a risky, home-wrecking business. By risk I do not mean those risks that can and should be mitigated by increasing the sophistication of our theoretical and practical knowledge, technological systems as well as axiological systems. Instead this is risk as the figure of time itself, the figure of its formlessness and contingency. This ineliminable risk however should be understood as a constraining enablement without which no given totality and hence no precondition of exploitation can be removed, and no intelligibility or intelligence can come into the picture.

DATUM 9. INTELLIGENCE AS RISK AND TIME

Intelligence without risk is an empty thought, as is an intelligence whose realization takes no time. Risk and time are the presuppositions for the history of intelligence in which nothing is given in advance and nothing is completed as the totality of that history.

If the better is fraught with risks—both mitigable and immitigable—then why should we pursue it, why should intelligence strive for the good? This is one objection regularly levelled against any talk of the good and the concrete realization of the better. The other objection is that intelligence understood as the craft of the good has not managed to make anything better, or that this intelligence takes so much time, it is so slow, its ideals so distant, that it is best neglected.

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351 Natorp, *Platos Ideenlehre*.

Two brief answers will be provided in response to these objections. In replying to the first objection, I would like to exactly reconstruct Brandom's argument in *A Spirit of Trust*.

Intelligence is only intelligible as intelligence in the context of its concrete and elaborate commitment to the better (in the sense argued above), in maintaining and expanding its intelligibility, in proving itself equal to the task of what ought to be thought and done, and in extending the possibilities of what can be thought or done. By risking our present life and our given constitution for what is better, we demonstrate that what we currently risk—our life or self-identification with a given constitution—is not an essential part of us, while that for which we risk—namely, the better—is. Intelligence does not identify itself with what presently constitutes it, instead its taking risks in order to become better—i.e., its realizing itself by recognizing what it is currently not—constitutes the essential part of what makes it intelligence. In risking my home and comfort by practically elaborating my pursuit of the better, I make the case that neither my biological life nor what affords my comfort is an essential part of the self I consist of. Indeed, failure to act and seize the opportunity to become better would suggest that what I regarded as myself never existed to begin with. In the same vein, if intelligence gives up its concrete search for the better, then it was never intelligence at all, even when it aspired to be. The propensity to risk the given constitution of that which one identifies oneself as, is in reality the truth of what one is. Intelligence only exists in the domain of the essentially self-conscious mind as a practical object. It is no accident that intelligence is always popularly intuited as a force that arrives back from a murky future—from nowhere and nowhen—along the same path that was once deemed too risky to take.

The commitment to expanding the scope of what is intelligible and to realizing an intelligence that is better than us is a commitment to both our own intelligibility and our own intelligence. In abandoning such a commitment on the basis of its intrinsic risk, we discard precisely what entitles us to any right, freedom, or claim in the first place. To remain intelligible as intelligence is essentially a risk-laden commitment. Without embracing the risk nothing could be said to be intelligible ontologically,

epistemologically, or axiologically: there simply would be no intelligence. The fear of tragedies is justified, but so is the adoption of risk as a vehicle for avoiding tragedies that would be inevitable if we were to abide by the status quo. We should not be paralysed by the fear that, if we take risks for the better, then the worst will happen—for, as Seneca says, 'even bad fortune is fickle'.[352]

The response to the second objection takes the form of a simple reminder: Approximately one billion years ago, the first rudimentary forms of neuronal information processing began to develop. Over five hundred million years ago, during the Cambrian period, the evolution of a more complex nervous system combined with advanced systems of sensory differential responsiveness, particularly the visual tracking system, set off the perception catastrophe that led to the organization of the nervous system as a rudimentary 'organ of alienation' capable of generating a designated mental discontinuity with its surroundings. Through this highly regulated mental discontinuity, the organism became able to differentiate regions of space, optimally distinguishing itself from its food and predators. By simultaneously gaining traction on the spatiotemporal continuity of the organism and the spatiotemporal connectivity of its environment, the nervous system enabled the organism to recognize things other than itself, orienting it toward the problem of exploring and making sense of its environment.

With the beginning of neurulation and cephalization processes in the vertebrates, basic computational barriers such as control of combinatorial explosion, construction of models of choice, predictive calculations, simulation of movement, and proactive adaptation at the level of the organism were one by one overcome. Eventually the neotenous brain brought the complexity of the nervous system to a new stage. Owing to the maximal entrenchment of structural constraints, the magnitude of evolutionary diversification–in this case, the addition of extensive structural change–significantly diminished. While the maximization of generative entrenchment and reduction in the structural diversification of the neotenous brain limited the range of perceptual processes, it also forced homo sapience

352 Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales* vol. 1, 79.

to migrate to a new aperceptual platform with functions of its own: tool-making. The evolution of tool-use and language as scaffoldings for making new cognitive technologies solved two of the most significant problems of computation, namely the qualitative compression and stabilization of information necessary for the communal establishment of knowledge and further augmentation and coordination of understanding and action. But also in enabling new cognitive technologies, they reformatted the shape of homo sapience. Qualitative organization and stabilization of information through the formation of concepts as communal components of knowledge transformed the cognitive possibility of knowledge into a social reality, and thus facilitated the acquisition and exploitation of higher levels of cognition that would otherwise have remained inaccessible from a purely bio-evolutionary standpoint. This is the rough outline of the natural evolutionary scaffolding of cognition.

A few millennia ago, the philosophical amplification of cognition began to give rise to methodical scientific cognition. However, it is only less than five hundred years ago, through the employment of scientific cognition, that we learned that we are not living at the centre of the universe; only slightly more than three hundred years ago that we discovered that the fabric of the universe obeys and is held together by physical laws; and only a century and a half ago did we start to digest the fact that we are not children of God and begin to investigate its implications—even though, to date, the religious view on the origin of species is still widespread and vehemently defended. However, just more than a century ago we began to 'open up a new continent, that of History, to scientific knowledge',[353] realizing not only that history be navigated as a continent of knowledge, but that it is an integrating field in which all other forms of knowledge, theoretical and practical, can integrate and reinforce one another. What Louis Althusser hails as Marx's monumental discovery in the history of human knowledge marks a new qualitative stage in the realization of intelligence—that of an intelligence that treats and intervenes within its own history scientifically. This is a form of intelligence that liberates new demands and opportunities

353 L. Althusser, *The Humanist Controversy and Other Writings* (London: Verso, 2003), 229.

as to 'what to think' and 'what to do' by sufficiently linking epistemic mediation, technoscience, and sociopolitical intervention, consolidating them as an organization necessary for the realization of an augmented cognition that can bring about the better. By theoretically and practically engaging with the question of what it means to have a history, and what it means to reorient, reconstitute, and repurpose that history through the social's present normative attitudes toward the past and the future, social intelligence turns into a force for which cognition registers as social re-engineering of the existing reality.

The discovery of history as a new continent of knowledge wherein technoscience, economy, politics, ethics, and social struggle can be integrated and can reinforce one another is in effect the deepening of the reality of history in terms of both its recollective-retrospective and its diversifying-prospective dimensions. But deepening the reality of history is nothing but repurposing and reconstituting it through a process of rediscovery and intervention. The knowledge of history as a science, as trivial as it may sound, on the one hand opens up history to the abyss of the intelligible, and on the other hand, by demanding that we unswervingly, unfalteringly think and act on intelligibilities, reshapes that history. This is not a progressive march through temporal history, but the determinate conception of history from nowhen and nowhere—a time in which the possibility of overturning any given or concluded totality of history is actualised. Failing this, we might say that we are not creatures endowed with history and, more gravely, that we are still the denizens of benighted ages where history is a domain as opaque as the inaccessible sky whose ineffability is a premise for oppression from the heavens and melancholia on earth.

The knowledge of history as a science is essentially a self-reinforcing tendency toward having a history. But what does it mean to have a history, if not to reorient and repurpose that history toward ends unseen by the past, whose recognition should never be an impediment but merely a way to liberate the present? It is for this reason that Marx's discovery transforms the pursuit of understanding and intervention—the scientific knowledge of history—into a project in which emancipation and the realization of intelligence are intertwined.

Marx's discovery, just over a century ago, in moving toward the realization of an intelligence that recognizes its history and intervenes in it scientifically, emphasizes the work to be done. Yet more importantly, it signifies the truth of our age: that we are merely living in the prehistory of intelligence. Those who moan and are bored with the pace at which intelligence as the concrete elaborator for the better is being realized, should look elsewhere—either to God or some other opiate, or to a mixture of both, magic. The recognition and realization of intelligence as that which dissolves all given totalities of history is a collective and common task whose fulfilment is the only true concrete way toward freedom, in the sense of both sociohistorical emancipation and the liberation of intelligence.

It is against the paralysing mist of philosophies and social prescriptions rooted in boredom, fear-mongering, and fatalism (the ardour for the ordinary, resignation, indetermination, anti-logos, neo-Luddism, methodological individualism, inevitablism, vitalist eschatology...) that the task of intelligence ought to be safeguarded. For what exactly is the alternative to the cultivation of intelligence if not the veneration of cognitive turpitude? And what exactly is the alternative to the pursuit of the better if not the cultivation of social vices?

Intelligence establishes its worth by committing to something better—something that strives harder to wrest its autonomy from what once constituted it and, in elaborating its freedom, becomes more capable of overcoming the given and achieved totalities of its history. Our grasp of that which is better rests upon our recognition of that which, while it recognizes us as its future-informing past, never mistakes us for the possibilities of its future. This is but the veritable course of the self-cultivation of intelligence: to let intelligence cultivate itself by turning ourselves into the history of intelligence rather than founding ourselves as its nature or as a totality that must be preserved as the object of its commemoration or striving. This is exactly the path we ourselves have taken in order to lay claim to a history, to be free and entitled to rights which, however, we constantly mistake for birthrights. If the equality of all minds is the premise of justice and the good, and if we take our rights to freedom as universal maxims, then wouldn't it be a feat of disingenuousness to refuse