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The Self-Work of Planetary Justice

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Abstract
A necessary part of planetary justice is self-work, restoring or forming our being truthful, consistent, dependable, and accountable people. Planetary justice – so-far typically associated with vast, geological scales of space and time – involves an intimate dimension, too. We can work on it wherever we are. Moreover, self-work and planetary justice intertwine historically and conceptually. The historical context for self-work involves the histories of violence that led to the breakthrough of the planetary as a category of thought about justice. Facing this, the essay notes areas for further reflection, study, and action.

Keywords
Planetary justice, self-work, care, force, wonder

Introduction

Work on yourself – "self-work" – improves yourself as a self, for instance, as someone capable of moral commitments (Larmore 2010) and moral accountability (Wallace 2019). In this essay, I argue that work on planetary justice demands self-work, by which I mean *work to become right in one's moral relations*. This attests to a view of the self as intrinsically interpersonal. Self-work also has a psychological dimension. Thus, this essay can be categorized as moral psychological work supporting political transformation. In my opinion, not enough has been said about how planetary justice relates to us personally. Might questions of justice on planetary scales with their complex causal pathways and all the institutional confusion and inadequacy that they disclose of the rough international order today nonetheless have a place inside ourselves, in our interiority? If so, how so? When theorists concentrate on global and far-future scales, even deep time, planetary justice can seem remote and unimaginable instead of being intimate and heart-wrenching. Our ability to be responsive (Haraway 2016) seems thereby diminished. As the problems of climate change, dying oceans, and mass extinction strike at our sleep, it's time for planetary justice to become a household concern that connects with our being in the world. But planetary justice needs to become life-sized for us to do that, relatable wherever we are.

This paper's argument may seem ancient rather than modern (where the theory of justice focuses on the state). The Platonic tradition of thought about justice locates justice inside us as

well as between us (Plato 2004). Governance is personal *and* political. That being so, the Platonic tradition focuses as much on moral psychology as on political structure and process, raising questions about who we are. Yet prevalent strands of indigenous law and of anti-imperialist work proceed from a similar basis: to get right in our relations, right with ourselves, is a source of justice (Liboiron 2021) and a site of governance (Boisselle 2017). In their light, this paper argues from our historical moment, cohering with traditions other than European ones.

A core assumption of this paper is that planetary justice depends on getting right in our moral relations, a matter that is psychological and personal, involving ontological questions. I will locate this task within "self-work" and contextualize its moral urgency within the histories of imperialist violence still shaping important aspects of the social processes forcing our current plight. In that setting, what does the self-work of planetary justice involve? Focusing on coming to terms with "the true" and "the accountable," the paper notes how narcissism and trauma – cycles of abuse and control – interfere with the mind's original joy in letting things be true and in being responsive to each other and the Earth. This approach allows one to argue for self-work alongside civic work for justice in an intimate feedback loop (cf. Latour 2017), even a primary form of "role experimentation" (Connolly 2013) to face our historical moment (Charkarbarty 2021). By recovering from histories of violence inside ourselves, we can shift our relations with other people and with Earth others (Plumwood 2001) so that we may work openly and accurately for justice involving Earth.

Part I explains how self-work involves becoming right in one's moral relations. Part II makes the case for the moral basis of planetary justice in right relations. Part III explains how that basis is both personal and psychological, involving ontological questions. Part IV provides a basic definition of self-work, focusing on its support for planetary justice. Part V contextualizes the self-work of planetary justice within the history of imperialist violence behind our current plight on Earth. This includes concerns about the wanton inertia of capitalism and the divisive frame of nationalism within the prior failure of moral relations involved in domination. It positions part VI to provide more detail about what self-work should involve: attention to the narcissism and trauma produced by environments with domination and abuse structuring them (Nussbaum 2001) reveals that the true and the accountable are crucial directions for the self-work of planetary justice. Moreover, in them, what Martha C. Nussbaum calls after Lucretius, the mind's "original joy" – and what could be called "wonder" (Bendik-Keymer 2023) – should be recovered, protected, and sustained as part of self-work involved in civic engagement and political transformation.

Part I. Self-work & moral relations

Following Larmore (2010), *the self is not an object but an operation* – as it was originally in the Latin *se*, the basis of many reflexive verb formations in the Romance languages. Larmore calls it a "practice." As such, being oneself isn't given or permanent but is learned and can be unstable. Being oneself means committing – or recommitting - oneself to what one believes to be true or what one intends as good. It involves eschewing what one didn't intend and owning up to what

one has desired or felt, even if one finds them bad. Being oneself means taking responsibility for oneself. In these ways, the practice of being ourselves is essentially *the practice of binding ourselves reflexively to the things that we take to matter.* Values and norms are historically shaped, yet they involve the moment of interpretation, commitment, and internalization.

For instance, I happen to believe that it is wrong for our civilization to continue to support fossil fuel use and that it is right for us to phase out of that use as soon as we morally can. When faced with uncertainty about what I should do with regard to energy consumption politics in my political territory, my beliefs should guide me. Being myself then means binding myself to the true (including moral truths) and coming to terms with my inconsistencies or my psychological resistances to it. Being myself also involves acknowledging my desires whether they pull against or support my beliefs. There is nothing mysterious about this reflexive practice. I have to reflect on the true and own up to my feelings, behavior, and patterns of living, reflecting again on inconsistencies and any considerations that come to light, potentially changing what I believe for good reason. Such a process involves checking my intentions and possibly altering them in light of new beliefs or for the sake of consistency.

This reflexive practice is a form of accountability. Therein, moral relations enter as constitutive of the practice of being oneself. Since being oneself is to be accountable for one's commitments, this accountability implies others. When we are accountable, we treat ourselves as another and internalize a relation of respect to other selves who are also, mutually accountable (Wallace 2019). The question, "Am I being consistent with myself?" means also, "Can I honestly say to others that I am so?" Moreover, that I have commitments and stand for something implies that others potentially do too. Respect for each other's selves is basic to the practice of the self. The relation here is minimally, but essentially, moral, but the result is profound: one cannot be oneself without minimal moral relations. The relationship between being oneself and moral relations is conceptual, based on what it takes to be oneself as a person with integrity.

Overall, *self-work is a practice of forming – or restoring – one's practice of being oneself*. It is getting into right relation with oneself by coming into line with one's power of commitment and of accountability. Since being oneself involves being minimally but essentially moral, self-work also involves the practice of forming – or restoring – one's practice of being minimally moral. It involves *getting into better relationship to and with others.* Fundamental to my argument is that self-work and moral relations are entangled, since self and other are related through accountability.

Obviously, a lot more can go into this profound and personally meaningful area of reflective work to be truthful, consistent, dependable, and accountable people. Self-work is the work of forming – or restoring – such capacities in practice, including the psychological capaciousness involved in being an authentic person and not a robot (cf. Kant 1996), something to which I will return below. To form or restore our capacity to be ourselves and to form or restore our practice of being ourselves go hand in hand. In forming or restoring our practice, we open up our capacity, and in opening up our capacity, we empower our practice. Given that the

self is a reflexive practice, not a given, it makes sense to think of self-work as forming or restoring oneself. But the deeper and more precise meaning of self-work is that the work of forming or restoring our "practice of the self" opens up our capacity to be ourselves through the practice, that opening in turn empowering us for better practice in the future.

Part II. Right relations & planetary justice

Overview

Anglophone scholarship on planetary justice tends to focus on vast and deep scales of space and time, geological dimensions of ecological complexity, questions of global governance and poor institutional arrangements, and the possibilities for adapting different human-rights-based conceptions of justice, distributive justice, and other political forms of justice to so-called "planetary justice" (Biermann, Dirth, and Kalfagianni, 2020; esp. Hickey and Robeyns, 2020; Prakash, Biermann, Gupti, Okereke, 2020; Dryzek & Pickering, 2019; cf. Gardiner 2011, 2014; Pedersen 2021a, Chakrabarty 2021), despite challenges that have been raised to thought of the global (Latour 2017, Chakrabarty 2021). There are certainly moral considerations involved in all of these recent approaches to justice. But it is another matter to claim that planetary justice comes into focus partially through work on oneself and one's moral relations. Perhaps only the experimental work of some process philosophers (Connelly 2013) or Haraway's influential response-ability (2016) suggests that.

Yet moral relations should be a focal point of planetary justice work. Justice is a fundamental matter of morality in the Greek philosophical tradition since Plato (2004), and even the Universal Declaration of Human Rights begins with a preamble centered on "conscience" and a "keystone" Article 1 invoking "the spirit of brotherhood" (Morsink 1999). The document states that "every individual and every organ of society, keeping this Declaration constantly in mind, shall strive by teaching and education to promote respect for these rights and freedoms." Nor is it uncommon in anti-colonial traditions focused on ecological justice to find that getting right in our moral relations ought to come first, or accompany as co-primary, political action (Liboiron 2021, Pasternak 2017, Coulthard 2014). The moral and the political become entangled in different ways in these accounts (or worlds; cf. Inoue, Ribeiro, Resende 2020). What is the conceptual connection between work on our moral relations and planetary justice?

Working to make our moral relations just is a *necessary condition* on planetary justice. Here's the argument:

1. There can be no planetary justice that is mere conformity to justice, i.e., not accepting justice in truth.
2. Accepting justice in truth means making it part of yourself (see part III below).
3. To make justice a part of yourself involves working on your moral relations so that they are just.
4. Therefore, there can be no planetary justice without working on your moral relations so that they are just.

Think of that work as *attending to our relations* or "getting into right relation." This way of speaking makes sense across multiple traditions from Aristotelian Thomism to many indigenous philosophies. As Michael Thompson (2004) argued, justice involves "bipolar" claims, relations between two agents. Justice arises when the relation is wrong, i.e., when an injustice occurs. Justice accordingly is a specific form of right relationship between agents.

Of a different tradition, Kyle Powys Whyte (2018) has suggested that Anishinaabeg societies approach justice through respect for the interdependence of people, their non-human kin, and land regions (see also Coulthard 2014, Pasternak 2017, and Boisselle 2017). Interdependence is understood through moral relations wherein the roles and responsibilities of beings allow for high degrees of trust, consent, and other virtuous qualities. Injustice occurs when these relations are violated. By implication again, justice is a form of right relationship.

Beyond human beings

The notion of a moral relation involves what R.J. Wallace calls the "moral nexus" (2019).. But we must make an important qualification. For Wallace, the moral nexus is the space of accountability between multiple agents in which, for instance, claims of justice such as Thompson's bi-polar claims can arise. Wallace holds those agents to be persons in the narrow sense that not even all human beings would be people. People must be able to hold each other accountable and be accountable for their intentions. Thompson holds some such view, generalized to all agents as intentional actors (e.g., including collective agents).

Yet there's no sufficient reason to *exclude* any being from the moral nexus, provided that an agent in Wallace's (or Thompson's) sense can have fiduciary responsibilities to mind that being. Moreover, it may be a moral responsibility of all grown-ups in a just culture to mind beings beyond the world of human agency (Plumwood 2001, Haraway 2016, Winter 2022)! In some such world, any of us could be responsible to uphold a right relationship to a given being even if it could not hold itself accountable in our moral languages (*pace* Vogel 2015). Here, I follow Nussbaum (2023), who argues for justice for animals guided by guardians (or, better, "companions"), and as *our* collective, human responsibility. We can depart from Nussbaum, too, in including landforms, what Marisol de la Cadena (2015) calls "Earth beings," or what Augustin Berque calls the "ecumene" (Ferdinand 2022, 40) on analogy with collectives to which we can be accountable, such as cities. In cases where an agent is responsible for other beings that cannot enter into the practice of the moral nexus, it makes sense to represent the relation between other beings and the actor in question with the responsible agent conceived as an intermediary:

Consider a river, that porous system of many beings, some symbiotic, some antagonistic; its constitution flowing and changing in relation to the physical continuum where it runs. To relate morally with the river – to treat it *personally* in Wallace's sense – is to be under pressure to articulate what it is to attend to its sometimes cacophonous, mostly fluid, energetic and living processes. The moral nexus sets up the river as an Other *in light of which we must justify our plans and not merely use it however we like*. Rather, we must consider the beings we affect in it and the river itself as a system making possible the lives of others. When we then turn to matters of justice involving the river or some of its beings, we will speak to each other and hold each other accountable (following Vogel 2015), *but* with an eye to being responsible for the river and to its beings in the instance. Much of the discussion will be about how to respect the individuals in the system when the system sustains them (cf. Nussbaum 2023). Here, politics belongs to *our* form of life by which we remain morally related with the river and its individual lives through an ongoing practice of accountability given more than selfish values.

Bipolar relations are at stake throughout. Certainly, it will be a matter of justice whether the responsible agent (for instance, the community responsible for the river) is *being* responsible, but the moral nexus remains even when people challenge the river guardians as to whether they are being responsible, only to find that others later challenge the challengers! The threat of regress doesn't undermine justice, because justice should never be closed to contestation demanding proof of the performance of justice. We should never think we have a total and certain grip on what any being deserving justice needs, especially when we must consider the system and the individuals both. That would be delusional and narcissistic. The key thing, and Nussbaum is basically right, is that the moral nexus *in us* extends outward to all striving beings on pain of inconsistency (Nussbaum is only inconsistent to stop right relations at the sentience boundary, since all life strives and strives in systems, and her exclusion of systems ignores justice to collectives). There are many as-yet-unresolved complexities in multispecies and multisystem moral relations, but they are not in principle impossible due to the logic of intermediaries and the ineliminable space for moral critique.

Part III. The personal & psychological basis of planetary justice

By the argument so far, we must get right in our moral relations when seeking planetary justice including when we talk about deep time (Chakrabarty 2021), orbital and global spatial scales (Brenner 2019), or reject the global as a "theological" fantasy (Latour 2017). Even a proposal as basic to planetary justice as the "call for a global constitutional convention to protect [far] future generations" (Gardiner 2014) must address us as moral beings: Do you take this moral demand for a political transformation of our institutions to be true? How are you relating morally to future generations – and what will you do about it?

Yet the deeper issue is what it is to accept justice in truth. Initially, it is to *take justice personally* and to *become psychologically capacious for justice.* To take justice personally is to take justice as something to which I am personally committed. It would not make sense to say that I accept justice in truth if I did not believe that its claims are true in the sense that they ought

to hold. Believing that justice's claims are true implies things for me as someone who, with a sense of self, must live with the implications of what I believe. It means that I must live in the world in light of justice's claims and their implications wherever these clearly arise. If, for instance, I believe that it is unjust to future generations to continue to rely on a fossil fuel economy, then I must work to undo that economy and see how I may withdraw support from it. Anything else would be hypocrisy – the failure to be myself in light of my commitments. Larmore (2010) notes that such clarity involves practice: among other things, recommitting oneself to what one believes or intends. We could also think of Kierkegaard's (1992) use of the language of "inward appropriation" to describe the process of acknowledging what is true with one's whole being, slowly making one's life consistent with it, and taking the entire process as a deeply heartfelt matter.

To speak in such a way as Kierkegaard did is, on reflection, to point to the psychological dimension of living personally with what one takes to be true. Living with things that one takes to be true can stir up psychological resistances. This is especially so when the truths concern matters of justice. Those truths may demand that (to echo Rilke (1908)), "you must change your life." Truths of justice demand of us that we make demands on the world to become how it ought to be (Neiman 2009), not simply how it is given. Implying that we must oppose injustice, justice truths require that we address how even our thinking and speaking can reproduce injustice (Fricker 2007). We must be psychologically capacious enough to be in touch with ourselves *through* justice and to be disposed to change our lives accordingly, not simply relying on convention that may reproduce injustice. Even Rawls (1971), who otherwise focused on the state in his theory of justice, noted this psychological need.

Becoming psychologically capacious with planetary justice asks something substantial of us. The temporal, spatial, ecological, and more-than-human dimensions of planetary justice may appear quite demanding to any society that has a low degree of "collective continuance" (Whyte 2018) and "ecological reflexivity" (Dryzek and Pickering 2019), such, as for instance, much of the still-colonial West (e.g., in the "Americas," Australia, New Zealand) and mainly capitalistic and industrial societies currently (Stevis and Romain 2020). These societies, for cultural or structural reasons, tend to be spatially fragmented and un-reflexive in terms of their ecological footprint (Brenner 2019), temporally short-sighted (Gardiner 2011), ecologically rigid (Mann and Wainwright 2018), and wanton with the more-than-human world of life (Liboiron 2021, Bendik-Keymer 2020). Some theorists even say, simply, that their "energetics" are a mess (Nail 2021). What does it take psychologically for people acculturated in such societies to take planetary justice personally?

This last question is a research question for planetary justice that has not been centered in planetary justice research so far (Biermann and Kalfagianni 2020), even when considering the changed civic ideology of a "planetary polity" (Pedersen 2021b) toward which a personal commitment to planetary justice ought to take one in some form and manner. Self-work ought, clearly, to belong to it, though. For instance, one might note that part of the ideology, practices, institutions, and legal structure of a capitalistic, liberal society is that it alienates us from each

other, "atomizing" us (Vogel 2015). Then the very concept of the self may need to be reworked so that it is moral and relational. Where, after all, might some get the sense that the self is *set apart from* others, or that to focus on ourselves is *selfish*? Part of the challenge in a thorough theoretical and practical program for planetary justice is to include sufficient critical theory and sufficient space for rediscovering ourselves in relationship with others against social alienation. That is not only an activist but a psychological agenda involving ontological questions. Remember, the self is not given or permanent but is a practice that perpetually reinterprets history in light of personal commitments and interpersonal relationships.

Part IV. Self-work & planetary justice

Since planetary justice is a historically novel concept predicated on the rise of Earth System Science and the forcing of planetary-scaled effects of social processes (Chakrabarty 2021, cf. Pedersen 2021b; Biermann, Dirth, and Kalfagianni 2020, Bendik-Keymer 2020, Dryzek and Pickering 2019), its self-work involves forming our capacity to practice the true and the intentional *in light of* planetary systems and matters of justice. Also, in specific cases where we realize that our capacity has been damaged or diminished, self-work means restoring that capacity *in light of* planetary concerns within matters of justice.

To take the first of these areas of self-work, forming our capacity for the true and the intentional in light of planetary systems and matters of justice involves a critical appreciation that Earth system science comes from a discrete world of inquiry and works in a number of counter-intuitive ways for mainstream modern minds (Chakrabarty 2021, Pedersen 2021b; cf. Inoue, Ribeiro, and Resende 2020). It also involves understanding our practical intentions on Earth so that we negotiate "the perfect moral storm" (Gardiner 2011) of global, intergenerational, and ecological confusions in mainstream modern organizational practices, institutional designs, and sovereignty forms. There are many more ways that the concept of the planetary and its entanglement in articulating matters of justice would seem to demand forming new or additional capacity to be a truthful, consistent, dependable, and accountable person in light of planetary justice.

But there are also issues of planetary justice that bear on the second area of self-work, that of restoring our capacity for being ourselves and having integrity. The world that has led to the formation of the planetary is a world of coloniality (Mignolo 2021; cf. Inoue, Ribeiro, and Resende 2020), and Earth system science – like any modern science – is not immune to reproducing colonial, imperial, sexist, racist, wanton, and other forms of injustice (Liboiron 2021; cf. Fricker 2007). Many of us who realize that we must seek planetary justice have also been limited, diminished, or damaged by the world we have inherited in its long unwinding from the history of European imperialism. This unwinding includes ongoing settler colonialism, capitalism and industrialism, and the ideological systems of sensibility and belief that undergirded these, such as racism, sexism, heteronormativity, ablism, meritocracy, plutocracy, oligarchy, and land abstraction (Bendik-Keymer 2020). In so far as we realize that we have been

limited, diminished, or damaged by such a world, we will need to restore our capacity to be true to ourselves and heal by practicing being true to ourselves.

Take, for instance, the practices of modern science. Restoring ourselves can involve extensive work. From the perspective of worlding ontologies (Inoue, Riberio, and Resende 2020, cf. Mignolo 2021), the planetary is a world worth considering but only within moral relations. Yet since restoring our moral relations is part of what is at issue in self-work, such work in light of Earth system science can involve a complex back and forth, transforming scientific practice and the articulation of its findings in terms that are morally acceptable, true, *and* accountable to our moral relations, rather than being merely objective (Liboiron 2021). It may also involve recovering from an understandable distrust of scientific institutions. Yet again, self-work may involve extricating oneself from absorption in social, commercial, and even public media spheres that dilute, misreport, or diminish the epistemic strength of scientific findings. To be ourselves in light of modern science may involve restoring trust, accuracy, and morality in our use of science. We may have to learn to criticize science morally *and* come to terms with its accuracy and mindset-shifting epistemologies.

Part V. Recovering from histories of imperialist violence

The history of "the self" is a complex, modern inheritance. It is not without its problems! For one, we should contextualize the self-work of planetary justice further within the history of imperialist violence, including the wanton inertia of capitalism and the divisive frame of nationalism within the domination underpinning the still imperialist world order. Just as much work (if not more) should be involved in recovering from this history of violence as should be involved with forming new models of justice for the future (cf. Biermann, Dirth, and Kalfagianni 2020). The work of recuperative, "restorative," or "healing" justice has been underplayed in early attempts to theorize planetary justice (Dryzek and Pickering 2019, Hickey and Robeyns 2020). But the self-work of planetary justice primarily concerns the restoration of ourselves - our practical capacity to be true and accountable - rather than the formation of some new self.

For planetary justice to be realized, we of the modern world have to recover from histories of imperialist violence. This involves a specific project of self-work for restoring our capacity to be truthful, consistent, dependable, and accountable people (Whyte 2018). The simplest way I will put the matter is that modern people have to restore themselves from an "ontology of force" to what Shiri Pasternak, in witnessing to the Algonquins of Barriere Lake and their constitution – the *Mitchikanibikok Anishnabe Onakinakewin* – calls an "ontology of care" (2017, 6). Indeed, it is hard to understand how we could develop a "constructive" project of "world-making" (Táíwò 2022) without such a changed ontology (although world "making" may still carry traces of the ontology of force).

By an *ontology of force*, I mean the way of understanding relationships as primarily involving force acting on others so as to make them do what one wants them to do. Ontologies of force involve a range of forms and degrees of force from domination to manipulation or even seduction or sophistical persuasion. Force can seep into Earth system governance through

"fragmentary coloniality," for instance, with respect to the standard understanding of agency in ESG literature of the past decade (Bendik-Keymer 2021). Capitalist and managerial notions such as "incentivization" can drift into force, too, in so far as they speak to the root of "incentive," namely, to "charm someone" (from the Latin, *incantare*, *Oxford American Dictionary,* 2005-2011). Moreover, the capitalist notion of land as a resource or an opportunity for profit has internalized force, since it approaches land as an inert object for manipulation, rather than as a source of moral considerations on its behalf (Bendik-Keymer 2020, chapters 4 and 5). Most strikingly, the international state system can only be understood according to an ontology of force, since its Westphalian-sourced understanding of territorial sovereignty depends on the right to exclude grounded not in care for the land and beings on either side of a territory but on the assumption of prior domination (cf. Ferdinand 2022 on "colonial inhabitation," too). Here "dominion" rests on a history that is at bottom domination to some degree. The "lord" and "master" in the word is accurate to the ontological form of so-called "authority" (*Oxford American Dictionary,* 2005-2011).

By contrast, an *ontology of care* approaches the relationships that constitute our being as primarily involving care toward others with whom one lives so as to seek mutual flourishing as much as one can, given all of one's responsibilities. Whyte (2018) calls this way of thinking "interdependence," and some peoples call it "reciprocity" (Winter 2022). The world is already here *inside* myriad moral relations. To resolve and consolidate them is the task. When we form relationships based in care toward others and ourselves, we do not approach them as objects to be manipulated, but as co-creators of the relationship and as beings who, in having a reality of their own, deserve in the first instance to be let be, free from our machinations and desires. Even when we come to seek good from using them, we can do so only on the basis of practices that support them as well, something that can even involve a caring way of hunting and eating them in cases of need, not gratuitous symbolism (Pasternak 2017; Nussbaum 2023).

The point is that *self-work for the sake of planetary justice should involve recovering from the histories of violence reproduced by ontologies of force by working ontologies of care into our being.* To ground oneself in an ontology of care is a large part of the self-work that is, in our contingent, historically specific situation on the planet now, at issue in seeking planetary justice. The systems forcing the planet are driven by (Mann and Wainwright 2018) or structured by (Gardiner 2011) ontologies of force. The cultural forms that moderns have internalized bear the traces of such ontologies – for instance, in capitalist, nationalist, settler colonialist, racist, sexist, ablist, and speciesist understandings of oneself. Some of these even involve reified self-conceptions, rather than understanding the self as an ongoing, incomplete process, a practice that one learns and refines.

Interestingly, these implications suggest qualifying the "epistemic delinking" and "epistemic reconfiguration" of decolonial theory (Mignolo 2021). Decolonial theory often proceeds by assuming that ideologies – such as the "CMP" ("colonial matrix of power," Mignolo 2021) – *consume* our capacity to show care toward each other. But working against domination through self-work unravels ontologies of force and their ideologies already. When one comes to

terms with the signs and traces of one's society's domination of other beings, one's racism cannot last. So, too, with the other "isms" (cf. Ferdinand 2022). Both people and the more than human beings of the Earth seek to strive in their own way when not kept down (Nussbaum 2023).

Self-work against histories of violence and their ontologies of force cannot unproblematically be a matter of care of the self (Foucault 1988). It must involve care developed *through* oneself *for* others, including the more than human world. What we restore of ourselves is our capacity to relate to others through moral considerations, rather than dealing reactively within cycles of force. Self-work involves becoming right in one's moral relations. But this cannot happen while one is still caught up in an ontology of force, even reactively or in fragmentary coloniality that betrays forms of codependent adaptation to the domination cycling through political or social systems (Bendik-Keymer 2021). Again, the self is a practice, and we have to learn to grow with it.

To get right in our relations demands that we grow soulfully moral selves grounded in care (Ferdinand 2022). This takes self-work, and it is historically opportune that the self-work thus called for also seeks planetary justice. The very forces that led to seeing the planetary as a moral problem (Chakrabarty 2021) are the forces that have ravaged the Earth by understanding it as a mere resource, opportunity for empire or profit, field for domination and exploitation, and playground for the obnoxiously rich to the detriment of the global poor (Kashwan, Biermann, Gupta, and Okereke 2020). For many moderns, the traces of such planetary pillaging and injustice are inextricable from the negative anxieties, reactions, adaptations, and loss of collective confidence and capability that characterize damaged, diminished, or lost practices of self. Part of what it is to become responsive to our situation where we are (cf. Haraway 2016) is to attend to the histories of violence misshaping us inside ourselves and between each other whenever we act as selves.

Part VI. Domination & abuse, the true & the accountable

So, there's clearly a personal, intimate dimension to planetary justice. Since any change to a self that is in relation is a change to our relations with others, one place to start restoring oneself concerns the narcissism and trauma produced by environments with domination and abuse structuring them (Nussbaum 2001). That shifts relations. Within such damaging environments, the true and the accountable are crucial directions for the self-work of planetary justice.

The roughly half-millennium history of imperial violence – entangled as it is with capitalism, industrialism, and nationalism – has normalized fragments of an ontology of force in modern life and in the self-understanding of modern peoples and their interpersonal relations (Ferdinand 2022). The result of this inheritance among the moderns (cf. Mignolo 2021, also, in the context of "North America": Whyte 2018, Pasternak 2017) is a what Whyte (2018) calls a low degree of "collective continuance," that is, an ongoing condition of relative precarity in which people cannot be sure that their lives will be met with care in society. Mignolo (2021) even goes so far as to say that "society" itself is a concept internalizing this precarity and

contrasts it with “community” – a collective life of reciprocal care (cf. Whyte 2018 on “interdependence”). In terms that I have borrowed from Martha C. Nussbaum’s work (2001), what Mignolo calls “society” and what I call “modern life” involve poor “facilitating environments” that, instead of cultivating people’s selves, activate and accentuate people’s “narcissism” (Bendik-Keymer 2023).

Narcissism on my understanding is the orientation of a will (not a "self!") toward controlling other selves instinctively, out of the view that they are not, in the first instance, to be assumed as trustworthy (Nussbaum 2001, chapter 4; Bendik-Keymer 2023). Becoming somewhat narcissistic is understandable, even if it is not morally acceptable. When people are raised to expect varying levels of neglect, callousness, selfishness, use, or abuse, it's understandable to defend oneself against these things *a priori* by approaching the world with some degree of narcissism, even if this is ultimately immoral and counter-productive for one's own relations. Yet sadly, this diminishes one’s capacity for being oneself – for that depends on remaining committed to moral relationship, practicing accountability and self-differentiation inside one's will.

Intermixed with this bleak picture not uncommon to life under capitalism and ongoing settler colonialism (cf. Coulthard 2014 on the importance of practices of “self-recognition”) is the presence and recycling of trauma in modern social systems. “Trauma” comes from the ancient Greek word for “wound,” in a family of meaning where “vulnerability” comes from the Latin for wound as well (*Oxford American Dictionary*, 2005-2011). The long unwinding of the history of European imperialism involves a great many colonial, capitalist, industrial and nationalist wounds (Mignolo 2021). Fragments of the ontology of force define the system, often in highly subtle ways wherein capital interests, state territoriality, or industrial processes intertwine to exploit people’s and the more-than-human world’s vulnerabilities and to leave people devastated in their livelihood, bodies, and cultures (Brenner 2019, Pasternak 2017, Mignolo 2021). The result is that trauma gets normalized to some degree in modern societies, something that one simply has to “get over” or “be realistic about.” Vulnerability then becomes something to eschew so as to narcissistically safeguard oneself against inevitable wounding. But this interferes with the viability of caring, blocking the healthy vulnerability through which we can receive and perceive care. With care thus hindered, our capability to be ourselves through moral relations erodes.

To restore ourselves in environments of abuse and trauma where narcissism and distrust circulate, the true and the accountable become vital. By the “true,” I have not meant only what is factual, but also what is morally true. Moral people live their lives on the basis of some moral truths. That's part of being oneself. Moral truths involve different forms of justification than factual ones, concerned as they are with what ought to be, not what is (Neiman 2009). These truths have implications that can be a self-corrective. For instance, if people deserve equal respect, then people in the future do, too. Accepting political institutions that do not proceed on this basis thus becomes unacceptable (cf. Gardiner 2014).

In the face of the narcissism circulating in modern life, reproducing the histories of violence that have shaped our current world order (cf. Chakrabarty 2021, Mann and Wainwright 2018, Mignolo 2021, Whyte 2018, Coulthard 2014), to internalize moral truths grown from an ontology of care and interpersonal accountability becomes a corrective. Doing so counteracts the impulse to control or deny others *a priori*, including in the normalized ways that such control makes it into ideologies of competitive capitalism, exploitative industrialism, nationalism, and speciesism. When "practicing ourselves" (Larmore 2010) in commitment to what is morally true, we thus restore ourselves significantly. This self-work is an important condition on planetary justice as well as for being moral with others.

The "accountable" is also important for restoring ourselves in the face of histories of violence and the traumatic repetitions characterizing them. When we have been wounded by others (often in the name of their institutions or practices), the most basic thing to accompany the specific wound (whether bodily, financial, cultural, status-based, etc.) is the loss of moral relationship. We must realize that others have treated us narcissistically, as beings to be forced, not as beings who deserve care as all beings do. That is intimately devastating, and adults understandably defend themselves against facing it in order to get on with their days. But practicing accountability to self and others in light of moral truths of care and respect can empower and heal us. For instance, practicing accountability can unsettle normalized modes of slow violence in science and industry, allowing vulnerable people to regain trust in knowing, in themselves, and in collective capability (Liboiron 2021). Understood as calling each other "in" to community, rather than calling others "out" to fraught judgement, being accountable reinforces right relation. Those relations can be understood as relations centrally of accountability out of respect and care anyway! So, elaborating and internalizing the accountable in our lives can restore ourselves while preparing us for planetary justice's demands should these stretch the conventional realm of accountability (Gardiner 2021).

Now one commonality between the true and the accountable is that these both involve what Nussbaum calls, after Lucretius, the mind's "original joy" (Nussbaum 2001, 189). This is more commonly called *wonder!* (Hold for the argument!) Yet the capacity to wonder can be eroded by domination and damaged by abuse (Bendik-Keymer 2023). So, for the sake of both the true and of the accountable, the practice of wonder (Vasalou 2016) should be recovered, protected, and sustained as a part of self-work. Restoring wonder then is morally necessary:

To find something true involves being open to it. To be accountable to others presumes accepting their separateness from us. Both of these capacities presume letting things – truths, beings – be on their own. We have to be able to simply consider them according to their possibilities of sense and meaning, not according to our biases or designs. Wonder – that background condition of the mind appearing by degrees, intensities and in different forms from curiosity to awe – is the caste of mind that lets things be and considers them (Glaveanu 2021, Bendik-Keymer 2023, cf. Nussbaum 2023, 2013, 2001; cf. Ferdinand 2022, chapter 14, on the "politics of encounter"). So, wonder is essential for the project of restoring ourselves with and by the true and the accountable. But we've already seen how these are morally needed.

Conclusion: Original joy & Earth

In short essays, many rich discussions become heartfelt nods. Given planetary *in*justice, I implore readers to let the argument sink in. Imagine the implications for interpersonal growth, study, and action. I've wanted to make a plain and reasonable case for a dimension of work on planetary justice that remains underemphasized in the emerging literature (Biermann and Kalfagianni, 2020; Hickman and Robeyns, 2020). This work matters. Self-work, far from being a diversion from the questions of vast spatial and temporal scale that often characterize discussion of the planetary (Chakrabarty 2021, Nail 2021, Dryzek and Pickering 2019, Brenner 2019), provides people with an intimate connection between the personal and the planetary. It opens up planetary justice wherever we are (cf. Latour 2017, Haraway 2016, Connolly 2013), while counterbalancing against the risk that not being right with ourselves and in our relations will distort our judgments about political matters, something that has been a concern of political theory since its inception (Plato 2004). That self-work also fits decolonial work (Mignolo 2021) and coheres with many indigenous approaches to justice forefronting right relations (Coulthard 2014, Whyte 2018, Liboiron 2021) only makes the call for attention to the practice of the self in planetary justice timelier. As we work for political and civic transformation responsive to Earth, may people undertake honest self-work as needed to reconnect with their mind's original joy and their moral relations.

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