

Faculty Scholarship

---

Summer 2019

## Lostness

Jeremy Bendik-Keymer

Case Western Reserve University, [jeremy.bendik-keymer@case.edu](mailto:jeremy.bendik-keymer@case.edu)

Author(s) ORCID Identifier:

 [Jeremy Bendik-Keymer](#)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.case.edu/facultyworks>

 Part of the [Philosophy Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Bendik-Keymer, Jeremy, "Lostness" (2019). *Faculty Scholarship*. 143.  
<https://commons.case.edu/facultyworks/143>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarly Commons @ Case Western Reserve University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Scholarship by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons @ Case Western Reserve University. For more information, please contact [digitalcommons@case.edu](mailto:digitalcommons@case.edu).

CWRU authors have made this work freely available. [Please tell us](#) how this access has benefited or impacted you!



Sardinians, Barcelona, 2006

### Abstract

In this paper, I argue that lostness is the life of wonder and that it carries the weight of human striving as understood in the neo-Aristotelian tradition exemplified by philosophers such as Martha Nussbaum and Michael Thompson. Being lost in wonder is an especially important part of human dynamism without which our excellence, or virtue, cannot be grasped. I explore the first part of this argument in some detail and situate it within the wider question I am pursuing about a politics of wonder in conditions

of dissensus. Overall, I seek a revised understanding of democracy as collective capacity grounded in isonomy - (revised to mean) equality in finding the sense in shared life. Being lost in wonder is important for how isonomy can emerge from dissensus.

### Introduction

1. I am interested in one particular moment in the operation of wonder. This is the moment when, wondering, we find what makes most sense or, failing that, remain lost in thought.

2. I think that this moment is important for a number of reasons, foremost among them that a collective operation of wondering constructed around this moment appears to be a useful condition on people finding what makes sense to them in and through disagreement. The disagreement continues when someone remains lost and another's sense of things does not find its way to the world of the one lost. The disagreement resolves (1) when what some have found to make sense makes sense to everyone there or (2) when those who still remain unsure decide that the disagreement makes enough sense in the way that it is going to share a world with those with whom they disagree.

3. Whether people reach consensus or trust in the ongoing disagreement, the world becomes *pluralistic*, since it began in disagreement and wonder between different people's different worlds and since it is capable of persisting there.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

4. I think that such a situation – one in which everyone disagreeing about what makes sense knows that the condition of the world is that it be sensical to everyone there – is *isonomic*. And I think that isonomy is important, because it implies a world in which people are autonomous together, relationally, and are thus not under any imposed rule that goes against their sense of things.

5. Such an understanding of isonomy is not traditional. “Isonomy” was traditionally understood – for instance, by Herodotus – as equality under the law especially with respect to distributive justice.<sup>2</sup> But some modern re-interpreters have stressed a different meaning.<sup>3</sup> In linking isonomy to the conditions of sense, I am linking it to the modern interpretation of the conditions of autonomy – a social process in which the social world makes sense to those who act in it.<sup>4</sup>

6. Finally, I think that an isonomic situation matters, because – being structured by wondering – it does not devolve into mere opinion-giving. Rather, the issue is whether we – those who disagree – can figure out what makes sense and, if not, whether we can be true enough to ourselves to remain lost. I call this additional dimension of the operation of wonder its *sincerity*.

---

<sup>2</sup> Josiah Ober, “The original meaning of ‘democracy’: capacity to do things, not majority rule,” Princeton/Stanford Working Papers in Classics, version 1.0, September 2007

<sup>3</sup> See for instance, Hanna Arendt, *On Revolution*, New York: Penguin Classics, 1963, p. 20 as cited in Kōjin Karatani, *Isonomia and the Origins of Philosophy*, translated by Joseph A. Murphy, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, translated by Julie Rose, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004 and Axel Honneth, *Freedom’s Right*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2015. I have also been influenced here by multiple works by Jean-Luc Nancy and by Philip Pettit’s understanding of civic republicanism.

7. So the work in this paper concerns the point and the limit of wonder and its relation to isonomy – equality in finding the sense in shared life, or what has been dubbed, "no rule."<sup>5</sup> This relation takes many argumentative steps. I will be exploring only one of them here.

8. At the most general level, I am orbiting a question about wonder and politics. What could we construct of a relationship between wonder and politics? One possibility is this: Take dissensus and construct social practices around wonder.

9. Dissensus is widespread and especially deep – intractable – disagreement. If we understand wonder as an operation, not as a sensibility,<sup>6</sup> we can ask, can we construct

---

<sup>5</sup> See Karatani, 2017, pp. 14-17, who appears to take the expression from Arendt, *op. cit.* Karatani focuses on the joining of economic equality with freedom. However, he understands that there are also wider normative conditions of isonomy, found for instance in his exploration of natural philosophy and the critique of religion within Ionian society and among Ionian thinkers.

One might also think of Reiner Schürmann, *Heidegger on Being and Acting: From Principles to Anarchy*, translated by Marie Gros, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987. Schürmann does historical work along the entire philosophical tradition to try to understand how acting might be understood outside of the notion of rule. While not entirely successful in presenting a plain understanding of how one might be without rule, his study is suggestive and powerful.

One could assume that "no-rule" is anarchism, and Karatani suggests as much at times. But to live without a principle – *archē* is the Greek for what becomes *principium* in imperial Latin, as Schürmann studies – is to open up a space where accountability is at risk. By contrast, the civic republican tradition, which has also formed modern conceptions of isonomy as equality under the law, should make us aware of the need for equal accountability. For this reason, I am hesitant to lump isonomy together with anarchism. See Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom and Government*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. To be fair, however, Schürmann suggests that principle based accountability creates an ontology of control and mastery that formalizes class antagonism and other dualisms.

<sup>6</sup> A sensibility called "wonder" is simply part of an operation involving psychologies, but the operation is practice-based. One version of the operation of wonder – the most common – scales that operation to psychologies. This is where wonder is traditionally located, including in Martha Nussbaum's work (see Jeremy Bendik-Keymer, "From Humans to All of Life: Nussbaum's Transformation of Dignity," in F. Comim and M. Nussbaum, eds., *Capability, Gender, Equality: Toward Fundamental Entitlements*, New

wondering around dissensus?<sup>7</sup> If so, what would this involve and entail as deliberate, social construction?<sup>8</sup> Since wondering is intimately linked to both authenticity and to autonomy,<sup>9</sup> would wondering produce more relationally autonomous interactions? Would, then, such interactions be conducive to – or be building blocks for – a social and deliberative form of democracy?<sup>10</sup>

As I have implied in the past, I believe that they would,<sup>11</sup> but only if democracy is understood in a sense that does not imply simply majority rule or even rule by popular vote.<sup>12</sup> Contemporary forms of so-called “democracy” seem to harbor a curtailment of wonder in their commitment to being a form of rule through popular vote.<sup>13</sup> Rather, a politics of wonder implies isonomy – equality in making sense of how to live together

---

York: Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 175-200). But attention to the logic of wonder shows that the operation can be set into practices – as is common in educational and artistic practices – and can also be institutionalized – as is found, actually, in many deliberative spaces, at least partially, and certainly in experimental ones, again sometimes only partially.

<sup>7</sup> This is a complicated area, where I have thought that social practice art might help (see for instance, my “[Reconsidering the Aesthetics of Protest](#),” *Hyperallergic*, December 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016). But the institutional dynamics of the high art world curtail the possibility. See for instance my “[Beyond Gestures in Socially Engaged Art: Community Processing and A Color Removed](#),” *Public Seminar*, September 6<sup>th</sup>, 2018 and “[Art’s Plain Art of Living](#),” *eFlux Conversations*, May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2018. Possibly protest of a different sort has more potential (see “[How To Do Things Without Words](#),” *Public Seminar*, June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2018).

<sup>8</sup> Here, I am responding especially to Steven Vogel, *Thinking like a Mall: Philosophy after the End of Nature*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015. One point of the project is to literalize social construction through insights provided by social practice art, pedagogy, and activism.

<sup>9</sup> This is a line of argument I develop in *Involving Anthropomony in the Anthropocene: On Decoloniality*, New York: Routledge, 2020, chapter 2 especially.

<sup>10</sup> Of course, “social” is used here abnormally to indicate a democracy born of relationship, rather than a welfare state. “Deliberative” is also used abnormally, since wonder does not necessarily press to a determinate action, as deliberation traditionally does in ethics. Nor does it necessarily provide sufficient, public justifications, as deliberation often is thought to do in political liberalism. Wonder may involve lostness, for instance, where justification falls away in the face of being lost.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, “[Democracy as Relationship](#),” *eFlux Conversations*, April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> See Ober, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> The epistocratic critique of democracy is relevant here, but not for the conceptual reasons I will provide. Its reasons are empirical and draw on an understanding of conventional majoritarian democracy. To epistocrats today, actually existing democracies tend to suppress wonder by promoting inconsiderate polarization, closed mindedness, and widespread comfort with ignorance. See Jason Brennan, *Against Democracy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.

resulting in collective empowerment (- *kratos*, the root of the suffix, “crazy”<sup>14</sup>) – foremost through collective *intelligibility*, *understanding*, and *legitimacy*.

10. To develop this conclusion demands more steps of argument than the room of this paper allows. Still, the hinge in the argument depends on seeing what I call the “ontological openness” of wonder.<sup>15</sup>

11. The ontological openness of wonder is the way that wonder seeks a determination of being in a given context in a given way.<sup>16</sup> Wonder is open to the sense of being and seeks what is determinate depending on the focus of the wondering. Moreover, when in wondering we don’t find a determination of our being, we can remain true to wonder – and to ourselves – only by remaining lost. Between being lost and being determined, wonder works at the edge of judgment – political judgment included. It is constitutively open to what comes to light.

---

<sup>14</sup> Thanks to Timothy Wutrich for help on the history of this word. See Ober, 2007

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Irad Kimhi, *Thinking and Being*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Jean-Luc Marion, *Being Given: Toward a Phenomenology of Givenness*, translated by Jeffery L. Kosky, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1997.

12. Through wonder, we become lost in thought or find our being. In either case, imposed rule falls away.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, lostness, not being, is the life of this searching.<sup>18</sup>

13. To talk about the “life” of searching, however, involves turning to a separate line of research. My question about “the politics of wonder” began in 2007 at the New School for Social Research meeting of the Human Development and Capability Association. It arose from interpreting Martha Nussbaum’s writing on justice and other animals, following her publication of *Frontiers of Justice*.<sup>19</sup>

Some years later, I came to an unresolved question about the relationship between wonder as an *object-centered* operation and wonder as a *subject-centered* operation. In the first, we focus on the striving of life, wondering over it as Nussbaum

---

<sup>17</sup> The stakes of this conclusion are critical also of some forms of contemporary and popular anarcho-socialist protest and culture that depend on objectifying others in a calculus of strategy. See my debate with one such perspective, “[The Neoliberal Radicals](#),” *eFlux Conversations*, February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017. The implications of such a criticism involve high culture thinkers such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari as well as trendy critics such as Natasha Lennard, each of whom have contributed to an anarchism of militants that, I think, undermines isonomy by contagion.

<sup>18</sup> Overall, then, I am interested in a politics of wonder that privileges lostness as the resolving edge of dissensus. Fundamental and widespread disagreement ought to, on my understanding, seek lostness, searching, as a kite hangs in fluent air. This is a strange and novel form of political skepticism.

<sup>19</sup> Martha Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006. I was surprised to find wonder grounding her biocentric turn. See Bendik-Keymer, 2014. My interpretive work on Nussbaum’s philosophy continued over the next years to develop what she later accepted should be called her *biocentric wonder*. I pointed at the same time to its *aporias*. See Jeremy Bendik-Keymer, “The Politics of Wonder: The Capabilities Approach in the Context of Mass Extinction,” in M. Qizilbash et al., eds., *Cambridge Handbook of Capabilities*, New York: Cambridge University Press, forthcoming. Nussbaum accepted the expression *biocentric wonder* as a basic assumption of her approach and her view of what should be included in the capability list she has developed. See Martha Nussbaum, “Human Capabilities and Animal Lives: Conflict, Wonder, Law,” *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 18:3, 2017, pp. 317-321. Following that interpretative work, a different stretch, more synthetic, responded to questions concerning the reasonableness of biocentric wonder as a medium of public reasoning in liberal, pluralistic societies. The questions emerged in discussion at the 2016 annual meeting of the Human Development and Capability Association at Hitotsubashi University and resulted in my article, “The Reasonableness of Wonder,” *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 18:3, 2017, pp. 337-355.



does. In the second, we focus on the reflective self and wonder within it, as I think many phenomenologists do.<sup>20</sup> The first has its roots in Aristotelian natural teleology, while the latter does in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. The first is ancient – the second, modern.<sup>21</sup>

The tension between these two orientations of wonder is between whether wonder is a name for a form of biophilia by which the “awe-inspiring” nature of life’s striving appears,<sup>22</sup> or whether wonder is an operation that privileges “the possibility of possibilities,”<sup>23</sup> using the “free play of the imagination.”<sup>24</sup> (I will discuss this idea about wonder in section 29ff.) The former of these seems narrowly ethical in relation to the far-reaching possibilities of wondering, moored only to the striving of life. The latter seems to entail no relation to living form, however one construes that form.

14. One thing I want to do is to relate the two orientations together. Looking at lostness helps me accomplish that. Our form of striving structures sense-seeking, and wonder is

---

<sup>20</sup> Arguing for this claim is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it may help to understand that I take the *epochē* at the basis of the phenomenological tradition to be an operation of wonder. See in particular, Jean-Luc Marion, *Réduction et donation*, Paris : Presses Universitaire de France, 1989.

<sup>21</sup> Both of these directions have been constructively criticized. On the side of biocentric objectivity, see Jack Griffiths, “Difference or Deviation? The Ontology of Life and the Prospects for a Liberal ‘Politics of Wonder,’” MS, 2019; and on the side of subjectivity, see Urszula Lisowska, “Wonder – Through Aesthetics and Environmentalism to Politics,” MS, 2019.

<sup>22</sup> See the discussion of Nussbaum’s use of Aristotelian biocentric awe in Bendik-Keymer, 2014. See Griffiths, 2019 for careful analysis and critique of the stakes of how to interpret life as its object.

<sup>23</sup> Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by Joan Stambaugh and Dennis Schmidt, Albany, N Y: SUNY Press, 2010

<sup>24</sup> Immanuel Kant, “Analytic of Aesthetic Judgment,” *Critique of Judgment*, translated by Werner S. Pluhar, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987

a purposive activity opening up sense within that structure. Striving haunts wonder.<sup>25</sup>

Because striving haunts wonder, lostness is its life.<sup>26</sup>

Understanding lostness can help us understand the way striving relates to sense-finding.<sup>27</sup> Striving has a role to play in illuminating the way sense figures in wonder. This is to involve the object-centered understanding of wonder within its primarily subject-centered sense in a somewhat novel way.<sup>28</sup>

15. In this paper, I will argue first for the claim that lostness is the life of wonder. Then I will show that lostness expresses striving in wonder's openness. At that point, I can conclude with some remarks about where the wider argument is heading, specifically in relation to authenticity, autonomy, and isonomy.

---

<sup>25</sup> "Haunt" is not meant in reference to mourning or to ghosts. It is meant in the sense of "frequenting" and with an ear to the root of "haunt" in "home." Striving brings wonder home, frequently, giving it pressure and shape in ways I will discuss below. See "haunt," *Oxford American Dictionary*, Apple Inc., 2005-2017.

<sup>26</sup> "Life" is deliberately equivocal here, between a life form and something which we take, figuratively, to be alive, or lively. I will explain this deliberate use of equivocation once I have made my argument about the background shaping of striving on wondering's searching for sense.

<sup>27</sup> That in turn can help clarify how authenticity, autonomy, disagreement, and isonomy go together.

<sup>28</sup> So, while the opening of this paper already suggested that I am interested in the subject-centered operation of wonder, that is, in subjectivity in a *broad* sense, there is a sense in which the paper also focuses on the object-centered sense. Also, I say "broad," because I have in mind the operation of what Heidegger, *disavowing* subjectivity, nonetheless transformed into *Angst* in *Being and Time*. That *Being and Time* remains, in its problems and forms, haunted by subjectivity is a complicated claim to argue well and which I can only assert here. But it is one Heidegger well expected, having only begun the deconstruction (*Abbau*) of the history of the metaphysics of presence in *Being and Time*.



Alphabetizing inherited music, Ohio, 2019

Part I. Lostness, the life of wonder

16. The argument for lostness being the life of wonder begins with what the operation of wonder is. At the center of that operation is wonder's ontological openness – the way in which it seeks a determination of the sense of being in a given context with a given focus while at the same time searching side to side for what has not been considered or may yet come to light. This openness, which is characterized by some of the most elemental aspects of searching, is crucial for understanding the role of lostness in wonder, including the way in which lostness is wonder's life.

17. To wonder is to consider the sense of things as *relatively undetermined*. To wonder *about* anything involves some sense being determinate enough that one has something with which to begin wondering over. But this sense isn't settled. Something about it remains up in the air. Perhaps it is what this thing about which one is wondering means. Perhaps it is what this thing implies. Perhaps it is what this thing relates to in a variety of ways. And perhaps it is whether this thing is right, true, adequate, beautiful, or some other evaluation. These are just some of the ways that wonder takes a somewhat determined given and treats it as relatively undetermined in some other way(s).

18. The consideration of relatively undetermined things certainly involves a subjective<sup>29</sup> element. The reflective subject is involved, and wonder is basic to its being reflective.<sup>30</sup> But this subjective element involves *practices*. We have to learn to be reflective people, including how to wonder effectively. Certainly, children have the potential to reflect, and this potential is largely the elemental stuff of wonder. If children aren't terrified by their environment, they do many of the things I associate with wonder. But it is an overstatement to call these things "reflection" or even "wonder" proper. They are the precondition of wonder and so of reflection: including a wild openness to the sense of being, without having any name for it or even any clear sense of sense itself. Historical work on the genealogy of practices that constituted the subject are relevant *mutatis*

---

<sup>29</sup> "Subjective" here means, *pertaining to the subject*. It does not indicate an arbitrary determination such as found within judgments of taste or highly biased opinions.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Kant, 1987

*mutandis* for reflection and, too, for wonder, albeit with much more specific foci on cognitive, affective, and imaginative development.<sup>31</sup>

19. The consideration of relatively undetermined things involves an objective<sup>32</sup> element, too. There must be features of the thing being considered that can be wondered over. I think of these as fine grain aspects of things that permit wondering over the sense of them.<sup>33</sup> These aspects might be something's *associability* with other specific things. They might be areas of *vagueness*. They might be areas of *implicitness*. Or they might raise questions of evaluation raising the *valuableness* of things. These are only some of the possible aspects of things permitting wondering over them.

20. Certainly, there is a subtle and complex interplay between subjective practices and objective features. The practice of paying attention to something, for instance, is bound to reveal features worth considering. It makes little sense to say that these features would be there as features without the subjective practice. Yet it also makes little sense to say that the practice has merely put them there as a projection. There is much to say

---

<sup>31</sup> This is a new area of work for me. But I am thinking of the kind of work that informs – in much different contexts – Michel Foucault's work on discipline, rationality, sanity, and the like; Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of practices, and even what remains implicit in studies on the self such as Charles Larmore's *Practices of the Self*, translated by Sharon Bowman, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010. Specifically *wondering* practices for young children as they become agents of learning and gradually accountable selves is obvious to those who study early childhood education, e.g., Daniel Scheinfeld, Karen Haigh, and Sandra Scheinfeld, *We Are All Explorers: Learning and Teaching with Reggio Principles in Urban Settings*, New York: Teachers College Press, 2008.

<sup>32</sup> "Objective" means here, *relating to the object*. It does not indicate the truth of something, which is a specific objective aspect of things as I will understand them.

<sup>33</sup> I use "aspect," not "quality," because an aspect is a specific way in which something can be *considered*, whereas a quality already implies evaluation, which is only part of wondering. I use "features" because I wish to connote the kind of wonderful details one can find in a face. Finally, the literature of "affordances," about which I am still largely ignorant, is relevant here. I have not yet determined how I want to rely on this literature, but plan to do so.

about the interplay between the subject and the object in wonder, but most of it must be discussed elsewhere due to the constraints of this paper's specific argument.

21. Finally, there is also an intersubjective element of wondering. As Kant pointed out in his understanding of the relationship between common sense (*sensus communis*) and reflection,<sup>34</sup> a good part of sound reflection is being able to imagine how others would understand, including judge, the thing being considered. I believe that much the same should be said for the operation of wonder. While it seems too strong for wondering *per se* to demand that one wondering understand the thing in question from the various perspectives of an entire community, it does seem advantageous to one wondering about something, first of all, and, secondly, it does seem important that someone who wonders can understand something as at least some others would.

Part of this importance follows from the social nature of sense. To consider the sense of things is, by implication, to consider how they are meant and how they make sense to others. We cannot grasp sense without this minimal social condition. At best, on our own, we can only intimate it. But even then, the way we orient ourselves in a world depends on a previous social environment, including its embedded sharing of sense.<sup>35</sup> Thus whether implicitly or explicitly, sense involves how others mean things and how they make sense of them. The importance of intersubjectivity for wonder seems necessary.

---

<sup>34</sup> Kant, 1987

<sup>35</sup> Heidegger, 2010

22. The operation of wonder has subjective, objective, and intersubjective elements and weaves them together into an effective practice. The operation constructs us to pay attention and to reflect in specific ways, finding specific features of the thing wonderful in specific ways that draw us to elaborate on them with others at least somewhat in mind as we do.

23. The point of this operation is to find the sense of being of the thing being considered. When this sense is found, it serves to determine our sense<sup>36</sup> of things. Thus, we can speak of the operation of wonder seeking a determination of our<sup>37</sup> being.

24. Since, then, wonder seeks a determination of our being, it can be said to be open to that determination, or, more simply, open to being determined. The ontological<sup>38</sup> openness of wonder is nothing more nor less than this.

25. Must openness to being seek some determination of being? It would seem that there are other ways of being open to being. One may try to remain open with no other point than maintaining a receptive awareness of being in some given way. I think of Rousseau's *sentiment d'existence* in this regard.<sup>39</sup> But even in such a state of pure

---

<sup>36</sup> This second use of "sense" appears to equivocate in relation to the first use of it. On such a reading, my sense of things is the subjective way in which I find them, whereas the sense of things is what they objectively mean or do, how they relate, etc. Fair enough. But in the context of wondering, the equivocal nature of "sense" is intriguing. It seems to display the back and forth nature of subjective and objective features in wondering. My sense of things finds sense, and the sense of things shapes my sense of them.

<sup>37</sup> It might be in some case of *my* – or *your* – being. But as a general rule, sense is implicitly intersubjective and so speaks for "us" in some sense that requires specification in the given context.

<sup>38</sup> "Ontological" meaning concerning the account of being (*ontos* in ancient Greek).

<sup>39</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Reveries of the Solitary Walker*, translated by Charles Butterworth, Indianapolis : Hackett Publishing, 1992

receptivity, as Rousseau notes, the mind seems to wander as if it were searching around, something found as well in many Zen master descriptions of “beginner’s mind.”<sup>40</sup> Thus it may be that wonder, in some attenuated form, is the basic form of openness to being. But that matter cannot be resolved here.

25. We can ask what is implicit in being open to being when seeking some determination of it. One of the things involved is being lost. If we can see how so, then we will be in a position to understand how lostness is the life of wonder.

26. Being lost is part of the process of being open to some determination of being. Here’s why. Searching for some determination of being involves not finding it yet, and not finding it yet involves at least to some degree being lost.

27. The main question to ask, however, is what specific kind of lostness is part of wonder. After all, one can be lost without wondering at all. When I am afraid and lost, I am usually not wondering. What can we say about the kind of lostness in wonder?

28. This question, in turn, bears on a larger one. What distinguishes wondering from other forms of thinking or even its searching from other kinds of searching? And can I think without wondering? Can I seek the truth without wondering? Can I try to find the keys I lost without wondering? And so on.

---

<sup>40</sup> Shunryu Suzuki, *Zen Mind, Beginner’s Mind: Informal Talks on Zen Meditation and Practice*, Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2011; thanks to Alex Shakar for this connection to “beginner’s mind.”



29. These are large questions. But what I can say here is that the lostness specific to wondering is one in which “the possibility of possibilities” structures and animates being lost. The lostness of wonder is a kind of being lost in thought, where the thought is formally structured by its ongoing awareness of the possibility of possibilities, that is, of mental anxiety.

30. When I have lost my keys, I think about the possible places that they might be. But when I wonder about my lost keys, I think not only about where they might be, but I consider the meaning and sense of them, including the world in which they are used, are lost, and so on.

31. The mental anxiety of being lost in wonder is not, then, a fear of anything or a crippling disorientation by which the meaning and structure of the world dissolves into dread. It is a positive opening up of the possibilities of the world *and* of this world’s contingency.

32. Similarly, the form of searching that is found in wonder is a searching within and structured by the possibility of possibilities. It is not just any searching around for something, even for the truth of a question.

33. The form of thinking that is wondering is a thinking of the possibility of possibilities. Anything and everything is potentially up in the air within reach of the thing about which one wonders in its relatively undetermined sense.

34. An intimation of wondering appears, however, in all thinking, searching, and being lost. To think about, search for, or being lost in relation to anything involves at least the possibility that the possibilities we take to be settled come unstuck. But to make this general argument requires a separate paper. The point is, some degree of wonder is implicit in thinking *simpliciter*. But wondering in its central cases brings to the fore a mental anxiety only humming in the background of thought at all times.<sup>41</sup>

35. Something needs to be said, at least as a placeholder, about the point of wondering. The point of some thinking is truth. This is to find being, as Aquinas held.<sup>42</sup> How is that determination different than the determination of being we seek when we wonder? As I've said, truth is one determination of being in wonder. So wonder is broader than truth-seeking, although it can include it. But what does wonder itself seek in its determination of being?

It seeks to place things in a world, to relate them to a world. This need not be a true one; it could be imaginary or impossible in the terms of our world, but it is a world in which something acquires a *filled-out* sense. The determination of being found through wonder is filled out with its relations to a world. Wonder is essentially world-making.<sup>43</sup>

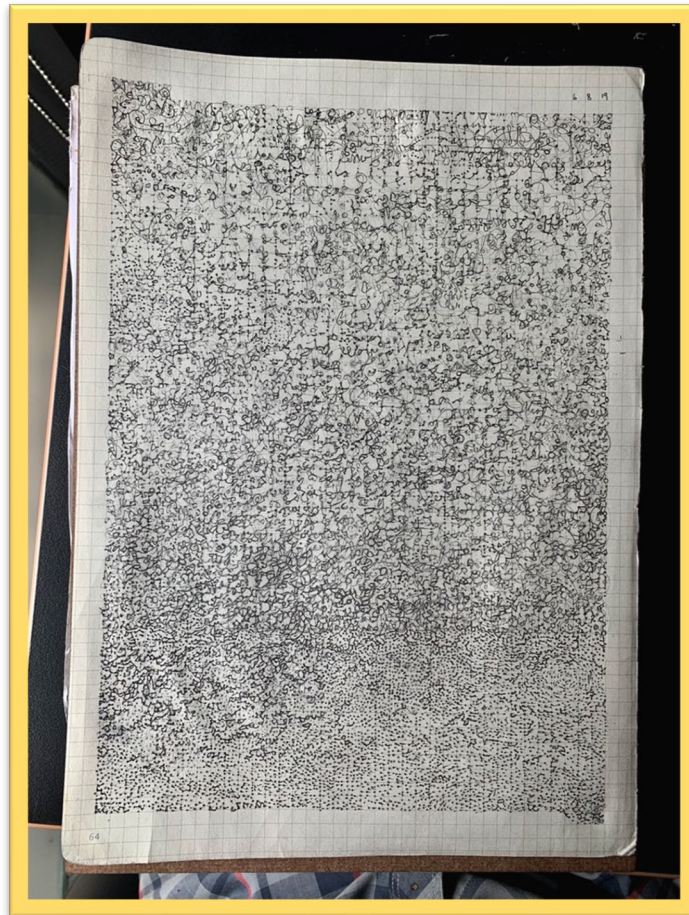
---

<sup>41</sup> Cf. F.W.J. Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, translated by Peter Heath, Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1993

<sup>42</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, translated by the Fathers of the Dominican Province, New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1948; first part, question 16, article 1

<sup>43</sup> More about this point must be saved for a different paper.

36. Why, then, is the lostness in wondering its life? Lostness is the life of wonder because in lostness we continue to consider the possibility of possibilities, driven by our awareness that we have not yet found the world-making sense which we are seeking. This makes us continue wondering – it makes us wonder more.



Tarek Darwish, *Page 64*, 2019

## Part II. Striving, being lost

37. Wonder is open to the determination of a world filling-in around the thing being considered, and it lives lost in the possibility of possibilities. The being wonder seeks is the being of a world, and the way it seeks it is by being lost in mental anxiety. The question I want to answer in this part of the paper is how this dynamic picture of

wonder's life relates to striving as understood specifically in the neo-Aristotelian tradition epitomized today by Martha Nussbaum's work on wonder.<sup>44</sup> To answer it, I will have to say something about what striving is in that tradition and then relate it to our particular form of it.<sup>45</sup>

38. All life strives. This is the basic assumption of the neo-Aristotelian tradition under discussion. To say this is to say that all life is teleological. It has a form qua living being by which its well-being can be assessed and according to which its life cycle can be understood. In the neo-Aristotelian tradition, this presumption of teleology is an *a priori* assumption that is part of seeing some chunk of matter as living.<sup>46</sup> Aristotle did not see things this way. He thought teleology was metaphysically real, not transcendently ideal.<sup>47</sup>

On my understanding of this tradition,<sup>48</sup> the teleological striving of all living beings is tantamount to their (positive) freedom, what it is for them to be dynamically realizing themselves.<sup>49</sup> The word "striving" captures the sense of this positive freedom.

---

<sup>44</sup> See Nussbaum 2006 and 2017.

<sup>45</sup> I will be drawing on Bendik-Keymer 2014 especially for textual support and conceptual reconstruction. I will also be referring to my "Freedom, Dignity, and Love: Mutuality with Other Species," Human Development and Capability Association annual meeting, University College London, 2019

<sup>46</sup> See Michael Thompson, *Life and Action*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008. This concern helps form some response to Jack Griffith's valid concerns in his "Difference or Deviation? The Ontology of Life and the Prospects for a Liberal 'Politics of Wonder,'" MS, University of Exeter, 2019

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Henry Allison, *Kant's Transcendental Idealism*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004

<sup>48</sup> See Bendik-Keymer, 2019

<sup>49</sup> On "positive" freedom – freedom for what realizes oneself – see Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty" in *Four Essays on Liberty*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1969, essay 1.

39. Now the way some life strives is its dynamism.<sup>50</sup> Oak trees grow deep and wide with roots and head for the light, casting off acorns every other year. Corgis, by contrast, grow with a mean meal. One of the things they do to strive is to herd, and their herding instincts are often on display.

Aristotle spent a lot of time thinking about human dynamism. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, he located our specific dynamism in thoughtfulness.<sup>51</sup> By this, he did not mean only conscious thought, but the way in which thoughtfulness is implicit in intentionality as such. Later, he locates it in emotional life as such, albeit in a way that often pulls against self-conscious thoughtfulness, creating a dynamic tension in the midst of human thoughtfulness.<sup>52</sup> Even inaccurate feelings, however, still cast the world in a certain light and suggest evaluations of it.<sup>53</sup> The human being strives through consciousness in the broadest sense, intentionality, and reflection, to name some obvious modes of our thought-saturated being.

40. The way we strive, then, clearly involves wonder, for wonder is important for reflectiveness and can plausibly be argued to be, in some degree, necessary for reflection in general.<sup>54</sup> When we realize that wonder, as a form of mental anxiety, is

---

<sup>50</sup> I discuss this term at some length in my 2019.

<sup>51</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, translated by Christopher Rowe, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002, 1.7-8.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.13

<sup>53</sup> See Rick Furtak, *Knowing Emotions: Truthfulness and Recognition in Affective Experience*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2018

<sup>54</sup> See section 34. But the argument cannot be developed in this paper.

plausibly found in mood and affect, the reach of it in our being is even wider and deeper.<sup>55</sup>

41. What is interesting, then, is to consider that, by implication, since lostness is the life of wonder, lostness is an important part of our dynamism, that is, of our striving. In being lost in wonder, we strive especially as human beings, living in the core of our thoughtfulness and hence of our being.

41. In so far as lostness is central to wonder's openness, we strive in wonder's openness by being lost, searching to fill in a world. This, then, is a central part of our teleology and so of our positive freedom.<sup>56</sup>

42. Moreover, since being lost in wonder is central to our human dynamism, following Aristotle,<sup>57</sup> we can say that human excellence – or virtue – is to be understood around being lost in wonder. The implications of this conclusion exceed this paper but are potentially far-reaching. How should being lost in wonder affect the more typical – or even “cardinal” – virtues?<sup>58</sup> Perhaps the virtues have not adequately considered the dynamic role of being lost in their formulation, historically.

---

<sup>55</sup> Wonder is not any mental anxiety – any sense of the possibility of possibilities. It is one in which we *consider* that our meta-possibility, if you will. Nonetheless, such consideration could plausibly be a mood or an affect, as found in such things as a wondering *attitude*.

<sup>56</sup> Again, see Thompson, 2008 and Bendik-Keymer, 2019.

<sup>57</sup> Aristotle, 2002, I.7-8

<sup>58</sup> See Candace Vogler, “The Place of Virtue in a Meaningful Life,” in Jennifer Frey and Candace Vogler, eds., *Self-Transcendence and Virtue: Perspectives from Philosophy, Psychology, and Theology*, New York: Routledge, 2018, chapter 4, on Aquinas's understanding of the cardinal virtues – practical wisdom, justice, temperance, and courage – especially.

43. Finally, in so far as Nussbaum's understanding of wonder is "biocentric,"<sup>59</sup> it is worth asking, in light of the account of wonder given in this paper, why life should be especially wonderful, as Nussbaum holds that it is. Secondly, how should lostness figure in wonder over other living forms?

44. The answer to the first question is that life should be especially wonderful because it both displays and challenges the sense of our striving as human beings. All life strives, just as we do. Our striving involves being lost in wonder over the sense of things, including seeking to understand the sense of ourselves. Other living beings display this homology: they strive just as we do, yet in a way that makes sense differently than we do. Thus they both bring up and challenge our sense of sense in striving. They are thus fitting objects of wonder, which concerns figuring out the sense of things, focusing especially on the world filled in around things. Each living form has its own world, from our perspective. But how can we fill it in? So we wonder.

45. The answer to the second question is straightforward. Lostness should figure in wonder over other living beings by helping us grapple with the otherness of their worlds and their sense of striving.<sup>60</sup>

---

<sup>59</sup> See Nussbaum, 2017 and Bendik-Keymer, 2019

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Cora Diamond, "The Importance of Being Human," in David Cockburn, ed., *Human Beings*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 34-62



Elaine Hullihen & co., *Held Together*, Cleveland, Ohio, June 2019

### Part III. Some implications

46. One of the claims structuring my wider inquiry into the politics of wonder in conditions of dissensus is that authenticity, (a relational sense of) autonomy, and isonomy are critical for resolving dissensus – either by finding agreement or by finding a way to continue disagreement without the world-shattering effects of dissensus undermining shared striving. How does the argument of this paper so far relate to authenticity, autonomy, and isonomy in conditions of dissensus?



47. The first thing to say is that dissensus involves a fracturing of common – or shared – sense so profound that those in dissensus do not share the same world. From the perspective of each in the dissensus, it will seem that those opposed in dissensus do not even have a filled in world. Between you and them in the dissensus is something that makes no sense to the other, and each of you holding into your world involves you holding onto what makes no sense to the other. That shatters your world to the other. Dissensus is thus characterized by a mutual perception of the other as lacking in a coherent world that makes sense, and the upshot of this is the lack of a shared world as well.

48. What is needed to work on or to work through dissensus is thus the capacity to fill in a world by trying to make sense of it. That capacity is provided by wonder, especially its life which is lostness.

49. If those in dissensus are to wonder together, however, they must put their own sense of things at stake. In filling in the worlds of each other, they must raise again the question of how their own world makes sense and of what really does make sense, especially when confronted by contradictions given by the dissensus.

50. To raise one's own world's sense as a question, however, demands both authenticity and a relational form of autonomy. It demands authenticity, because one must ask what one really believes makes sense, not just what one happens to believe in

a customary way.<sup>61</sup> It demands autonomy, because one must not settle for what is said to make sense, or what is pressured or imposed on one to make sense, but on what really does make sense to oneself. Authenticity concerns self-disclosure, and autonomy concerns one's relation to shared sense.

51. Additionally, autonomy, in seeking sense that shapes a world in common with others, must work through disagreement about the sense of the world. This is its relational nature.<sup>62</sup>

52. So the demands of sense already catch dissensus up in authenticity and autonomy – at least in so far as one strives to resolve the dissensus in the world's sense (and this is both human and excellent to do, whereas not doing it is a vice<sup>63</sup>). And wonder is called for to fill in the world of sense of each other. Wonder is especially appropriate for doing the human and excellent thing in conditions of dissensus.

53. Isonomy is important for resolving dissensus, because it names the structure by which each one in the dissensus does not have their world privileged *a priori* over another's. Rather, each one with each of their worlds is equal in coming to make sense of the world together.

---

<sup>61</sup> See Larmore, 2010, on authenticity.

<sup>62</sup> I discuss this understanding of autonomy (as well as the remarks in #50) at length in *Involving Anthroponomy in the Anthropocene: On Decoloniality*, New York: Routledge, 2020, chapter 2 especially.

<sup>63</sup> See #42.

54. Isonomy is necessary for resolving dissensus, because each one in the dissensus has a moral claim to autonomy and authenticity – one must be accountable to each (the first a second-personal duty, the second a duty to oneself).<sup>64</sup> On the basis of (1) the mutual senselessness of the other’s world, (2) the demand to fill in the world, and of (3) the demand to be accountable to each person’s authenticity and autonomy, sense cannot be imposed. Rather, it must be filled in together, and this means, due to the dissensus, isonomically.

55. Lostness affects these three structuring conditions of working on or through dissensus in the following way. It modulates authenticity to *vulnerability*, autonomy to *co-constructiveness*, and isonomy to *unconditionality*. Let me explain.

56. To know what one believes when one is lost in wonder involves difficult searching, even soul-searching. One does not know what one believes. One is without bearing. One is adrift. To then own this, as authenticity does, is to open up about being lost. The name for this virtue is “vulnerability.” It is a virtue, because it carries forward the human excellence of being lost in wonder in the conditions of dissensus. Putting one’s own lostness forward to seek a common world is a form of justness, or as I would rather say, forthrightness.<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>64</sup> See Stephen A. Darwall, *The Second Person Standpoint: Morality, Respect, and Accountability*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006.

<sup>65</sup> It seeks the common good. See Vogler, 2018.

57. To tarry with the sense of others and of one's own world while being critical of any sense that would be imposed on one is also hard work, especially in the often heated conditions of dissensus. It involves persistent accountability to others and to the norms of sense one takes to be justified, even while there justification is cast in doubt by others. Since one must be accountable to oneself as well, and this implies being authentic, autonomy also implies vulnerability, such that one must tarry with others and with the norms one takes to be sound while being vulnerable. And so there is also virtue involved here as well.

58. The name for remaining lost in wonder while seeking autonomy during conditions of dissensus is "co-constructiveness." The sense one thinks makes sense is not shared by others who disagree profoundly with it. For there to be a common world with sense that we each share and where the sense of the world isn't imposed on any of us, we must work to articulate a sense that we can share, working through the disagreement. This is incredibly hard, "incredibly," because our beliefs are strained in it. We have to strive to co-construct the world together.<sup>66</sup> Being lost as to the sense we could share together while striving to find that sense, one must commit to constructing it together.

59. Finally, to be accountable to the equality of others in co-constructing a world in which all involved will be vulnerable in doing so while being lost in wonder over the other's sense-making is relationally mature and demanding. It involves being open to

---

<sup>66</sup> On "co-construction," a term from post-Deweyan philosophy of education, see especially Scheinfeld et al., 2008.

the other as an “equal intelligence” in Joseph Jacotot’s sense,<sup>67</sup> despite the fact that their world – and possibly the way that the other makes sense of things – seems to lack sense. The name for this openness, I think, is “unconditionality.” One must be unconditionally open to the other’s striving for sense even as one finds it confusing and lacking sense. One must be open to the other while remaining lost.

~ Shaker Heights, Ohio, U.S.A., OLOMN,<sup>68</sup> late Summer 2019

*In writing this paper, I resided on the ancestral lands of the Lenape (Delaware), Shawnee, Wyandot Miami, Ottawa, Potawatomi, and other Great Lakes tribes (Chippewa, Kickapoo, Wea, Pinakashaw, and Kaskaskia). This land of the "Northwest Territory" was ceded under force from the U.S. military by 1100 chiefs and warriors signing the 1795 Treaty of Greenville. Subsequently, the treaty, like all 374 treaties with Native Americans ratified by the U.S. Senate, wasn't honored by the United States of America.*

---

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons on Intellectual Emancipation*, translated by Kristin Ross, Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1991

<sup>68</sup> “Once land of many nations”