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Tony Fry

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Redirective Practice

An Elaboration

Tony Fry

“For design ‘redirective practice’ has three areas of focus: adaptation in face of what has to change to counter the unsustainable; the elimination of what threatens sustainment by designing ‘things’ away; and prefiguration, which is designing in order to redirectively deal with what is coming.” [*Design Philosophy Politics* 1:07 forthcoming]

Human beings have turned the very ground of being into design, the designed, decision and direction – this not least by how ‘we’ live and act upon our world and the worlds of others. What this means is that everything actually, or metaphorically, touched by human hands has, by degree, a determinant consequence on the form of the future. The *designed/habitus/ethos* – difference here is in many ways a matter of adopted discourse rather than substance – in reality, this structures the situated materiality and culturally prefigured horizons out of which we (as we are genetically packaged) arrive to act, within our proscribed freedom, in our world. Such structuring in its enormity is unspeakable. It is beyond our ken.

In the company of the agency of the already designed, the discourse of design is pitiful.

This essay focuses on how redirective practice seeks to displace the defuturing character inherent in so many productivist practices like design. But this is not the sum of how redirective practice can be understood, for it can equally apply to forms of inscribed use that render users passive. Once a user seeks to counter this, and actively engages an object to increase its ability to sustain (whether the object is a product, service, technology or process) they also become redirective practitioners, though they are unlikely to name themselves as such, or be named as such by others.

Clearly redirective practice has an ambitious transformative agenda directed at and beyond design – an agenda centring on forms of ‘appropriative, generative and re-appropriative’ actions implicit in the perpetual condition of exchange experienced as taking, making and being (re)made. Such thinking is unambiguously aimed at exposing the teleological inadequacy of ‘production,’ (because it depends on the consumed), and of ‘consumption’ (which, by nature, is always the productive). Framed by this setting, the aim of redirective practice is to become a significant means to help move ontologically designed unsustainability – the condition in which we now mostly exist – toward a future of ontologically designing sustainment.¹

The essay is divided into two parts. Part 1 presents a general outline of exactly what redirective practice is. Part 2 is directed at those readers who wish for more detail on its theoretical underpinning.

PART 1 – the Argument

Design as dominantly known, economically configured and professionally practiced had its day long ago. This is even being recognised in design’s heartlands, as would-be trendsetters compete to outdo each other in their disparagement of designers and designer culture.

One face of this situation is illustrated by the furore caused by ‘Are Designers the Enemy of Design?’ – a paper that *Business Week* writer Bruce Nussbaum gave at Parsons School of Design in New York and then subsequently published on his blog in March 2007. Nussbaum jumped on a bandwagon celebrating ‘the democratisation of design’ and declaring that ‘everyone is now a designer’ – thanks to design software tools now available, including AI based generators of almost infinite variations of visual forms of the same object – letterheads, wine labels, fabric patterns, toothbrushes, motor cycle crash helmets: anything is fair game! He derides designers and architects who are critical of the notion that design is something anyone can do, lambasting them as ‘arrogant.’ Although Nussbaum’s arguments are weak and poorly presented, they have provoked considerable debate, including a special issue of the New York on-line design publication NextD, which published 50 short commissioned papers from design thinkers around the world.²

The second face of design's terminal condition is contradictorily exemplified by the clamour of students in Australia (and no doubt elsewhere) trying to get into design schools. To deal with this demand some Australian design schools now require academic qualifications from school leavers higher than the entry requirements for law and medicine – traditionally the hardest school to enter. Why this popularity? Because the omnipotence of design as 'in your face' style has made a career in design look cool, and the perception now of many 'switched on' kids is that design is both entertainment and entertaining and maybe a path to fame. In the demand-driven education system, the mantra has become 'lets keep the cash flowing', as the 'customers is always right'.

What goes by the board in the blossoming garden of design democracy is what is actually needed to be designed for humanity to be sustained and have a viable a future.

Will design just go away quietly and die? Of course not. In its proliferating plurality and trivialisation, it will either lose any directional agency and coherence or be subordinated to other discourses that emasculate it. This is already well advanced in architecture as it split into numerous divisions of knowledge that became independent of it. Structural engineering, civil engineering, landscape architecture, construction management, project management, interior design, are all disciplines that once were encompassed by the architect.

Are there other practices waiting to displace design? Certainly there are those who want to claim that design is a mode of thinking or a meta-practice that should be taken into new domains – politics, policy, management, etc. – but such ambitions don't go beyond improving the functioning of the status quo. This is hardly an appropriate direction at this historical moment, as it becomes clearer, almost by the day, that propping up things as they are is likely to get us in an even bigger mess.

This paper makes a claim for a different destiny for design – that of 'redirective practice' which, it will be argued, requires being constituted and established as the hegemonic practice to which designing becomes subordinate.

The designer exercises choice, excluding all possibilities other than what is decided, and whatsoever is brought into being by design, by degree, always has directional consequences (material and immaterial impacts). By default, we now live in a world that has been made unsustainable by design (although blame here obviously goes well beyond designers). Rather, than continuing to design without directional consequences being taken rigorously into account (which is exactly the situation that unrestrained pluralism will proliferate) it is vital to have a practice that is both corrective and redirective.

There has to be another way. There has to be a practice that can ethically confront and answer two crucial, but currently unasked questions 'what should and should not be imposed?' And, 'what should be created, redirected or eliminated?'

'Redirective practice' is the other way – it is design redesigned. To make sense of it, two major clarifications are needed. The first goes to how 'practice' is understood, the second, is to spell out 'what is there to be redirected?'

Practices of Redirective Practice

Our starting point is to make clear that redirective practice is finite; as such it is imbued with a process of auto-negation. What this means is that the realisation of its underpinning ambition effectively erases its *raison d'être*. It is thus a means not an end – a means to take us from where we are to where we need to be.

The ambition of redirective practice is to bring about the ontological designing of an other *habitus* (cum *ethos*) that can advance, rather than undermine, sustainment. Thus its intent, as a meta-practice, is to gather a multiplicity of practices (including, but beyond) design to start to redesign/redirect the structural and cultural condition that designs our mode of being-in-the-world (including how and what we design) – hence the ambition of 'designing another habitus'. More prosaically, redirective practice serves the cause of retrofitting, by design, our mode of being-of-the-world so as to reduce a crisis of, and beyond, our current way of being-in-the-world.

What is being advocated here is in direct contrast to the environmentalist cry of 'save the world' or the techno-economistic response to the 'environmental crisis' via 'sustainable technology'.

The point here is not that redirective practice is being posited with subjective transformation as the primary change agent, but rather with a *transitory* transformation of practitioners and their practices. In other words, 'ontological design (the redirected *habitus* and all that flows from it)' cannot come into existence without that agent (redirective practice) that then becomes redundant.

Now quite clearly one cannot put '*habitus*' before oneself as if it were an immediately available object of engagement. Neither can a new practice be created out of thin air. So where to start?

Counter to a culture of the commodified 'quick and easy', one starts by acknowledging that the task will be slow, hard and dependent upon being sustained by a political commitment to sustainment as a general condition. No matter that this view lacks 'sales appeal', accepting it is unavoidable for any serious redirective practitioner. Thereafter, three moves are to be made.

The first move is reflective and requires gaining an historical understanding of what has structured one's practice and oneself as (in the case of design) a designing subject. This move thus turns on answering two tough questions that bring into discomfiting proximity, one the one hand, one's 'education in error,' institutionalised direction and codified behaviour, and on the other,

one's 'material desires'. The two questions are: 'What constitutes my practice, where did its dynamic come from and where is it going?' And, 'what has structured my disposition towards acquiring my practice – how did I see its potential in relation to myself and my world?' To answer these questions in detail is a significant labour in itself, but crucial in bringing the underpinning of one's directional choices before oneself.

The second move, informed by knowledge gained from the first, is to start to redirect one's existing practice towards a continuous engagement with the immediacy of one's omnipresent *habitus* – this as it structures the unsustainable, materiality and immateriality, as it is directly encountered.

The third move is to bring one's redirected practice more generally into engagement with the world in which one practices with specifically directed transformative intent. This strategic move means drawing distinctions between design actions aimed at bringing into being 'things' that sustain, versus deploying design to negate 'things' that are structurally and irredeemably identified as unsustainable.

Clearly, the nature of the practice of redirective practice itself is nothing more or less than the orientation of one's practice toward sustainment in ways that act back on the practice itself as well as what the practice acts upon – which is to say that one's practice is placed under perpetual political direction. At the same time, political practice is itself a practice to be redirected. Effectively this means making ethics (as a material practice and as the efficacy of 'things') the guiding force towards designing for sustainment (as 'the common good' of and beyond the human).

Redirection is not, of course, dislocation. It does not mean total rupture from the status quo; rather it means disclosing how a practice is being determined and then uncoupling, modifying, remaking or reframing it. In the case of design, it is a question of bringing it to acts of futuring via the actions that have been indicated.

Redirection and the Political

Design remade as a redirective practice, in its restructuring of *habitus*, is profoundly political.

The adoption of a redirective practice, becoming a redirective practitioner, is, as indicated, an act of self redirection producing a particular political ontology that 'sees' an end in common – an end pursued that itself has the potential to become the basis for a new political community and politics.

Notwithstanding a minority that recognises the reality of the many market and institutional directive forces of artifice that render 'the world of our dwelling' political (and thus contestable), design, the designed and designers are not generally seen to be inherently political. Certainly, institutional politics does not grasp this actuality,

just as it lacks cognisance of the enormous ontological shifts taking place on the very ground of 'human being'. This results in an increasing schism between the political and politics.

To assert that redirective practice is political, doesn't automatically open the door to readymade forms of action. For the political is just as much in need of redirection as is design.

The political in the service of the common good (as the sustainment of what is good and common to being-in-being) is not able to be accommodated in democratic politics. Sustainment cannot be taken to be a matter of choice, an option. Rather it is that which is most fundamental to relational being (including societal being) in general including the ground upon which politics rests. Effectively we, and our others, cannot be without a dictatorship of sustainment in its differences of form. Let us be absolutely clear, this *is not* a version of ecological fascism, rather, it is to posit sustainment as sovereign. This is not the rule of 'nature' but the rule of the 'naturalised artificial,' in general and localised forms, as the material ground of culture and exchange.

Taking politics beyond democracy can be regarded as integral to the proto-culture of redirective practice and its ontological designing end point (*de facto*, design implies a total abandonment of politics as idealistic projection). Least the dismissal of democracy is thought to be shocking, there are two things to remember.

First, is that what travels under the name of democracy is not democratic. As long ago as 1921 Max Weber in 'Politics is a Vocation' (included in his seminal book *Economy and Society*) powerfully argued that modern parliamentary democracy and its system of government, is inherently undemocratic. Two years later his former student, Carl Schmitt, published *The Crisis of Parliamentary Democracy*, a radical critique, which he returned back to the moment of democracy's political birth. The criticism of democracy has been unbroken, and in large part, based on showing the sham that is masked by the name. Jacques Ranciere's *Hatred of Democracy* (2006), a polemic against the export of 'democracy' by violence, is a recent case in point.

Second, the unavoidable question of our not too distant future is 'can democracy as we know it deliver sustainment'? Eventually we will all be confronted with the need to attempt to answer this question. Clearly one could develop a proposition that argued that freedom and sustainment are indivisible. The argument presented here however says that democracy as we know it cannot deliver what we most need – the future with a future. For all the rhetoric of sustainability in institutional politics and the public sphere, any real engagement with the question of the limits of democracy feels like light years away. Meanwhile, the task of redirection calls, and it waits for nothing. It's possible to act now.

Such political action does not depend on an institutional politics; it is not a matter of confrontation, revolution or lobbying

for radical policies. Rather it's a matter of adopting, growing and spreading redirection from modest to major acts of practice. It's a matter of smothering that politics that serves the unsustainable with a blanket of change woven by all who are politically committed practitioners.

Redirection, Ethics and Politics

Redirective practice can be understood in relation to Aristotle's ethics and the philosophical tradition it instigated, in which ethics is seen as embodied in a 'practical philosophy'. This does not mean adopting the rationalism that can deflect such a philosophy toward pragmatic and instrumental ends that so easily can deflect it from 'the good'. Within this philosophical tradition, the subject is not posited as the sole the agency of ethics. The subject can be viewed as an agent able to direct, but also be directed by, ethics materialised ('the good' as things in action) towards the performative qualities of objects (non-human others that become designing agents of humans and their environments). Equally, the subject can be viewed as an agent able to direct, but also be directed by ethics materialised as things – those socio-political entities which animate human and non-human collectivities.

The highest level of expression of the socio-politically animated collective is registered in the power of 'the constitution'. The faith Aristotle posited with the constitution, as it unifies sovereignty, rulers and the political order of administration, has travelled to the present (via political theory) to contemporary, new ideas of what a constitution is and can do.³ A clear example is Bruno Latour's notion of the constitution as a gathering of reality-defining objects that can, via the mediation of 'the few', inform the theory, practice and speech of political actors.⁴

In summary, ethics enacted by redirective practice becomes a consequence of the ontological designing of all those objects and things that populate the *habitus (ethos)* out of which the subject is constituted. The subject thus acts by dint of ethics rather than being the agent of its delivery.

PART 2 – Theoretical Elaborations

The idea of practice to be worked over here is not reducible to a general notion of activity (as in, say, the labour of craft or professional practice). Rather, what will be explored is what practice is foundationally, and what, exactly, its inscriptive qualities are.

Pierre Bourdieu, in his *Outline Theory of Practice*, established a set of strong connections between *habitus*, structures and practices. He argued that practices cannot be causally reduced to the material conditions out of which they appear to arrive. Rather, they come into being as a result of the structuring of the structure of *habitus* – that is: all that structures our disposition towards being materially situated, in relation to our perception of the potentiality

of these material conditions, is already structured. We 'arrive' in our specific worldly circumstances biologically, culturally and socio-economically prefigured and disposed. This does not mean we are totally over-determined, but it does mean that our freedoms (given or acquired) are extremely limited.

From its structuring, *habitus* emerges as the way a social being acquires their culture, and how they appropriate their own cultural specificity from it. *Habitus* thus functions in, and replicates, the collective socio-cultural structures of exchange – language, material goods and symbolic forms. Effectively, worldly occupation and action, so understood, are not predicated upon a distinction between mind and matter, but result from inter-relational regulatory determinations as they structure, and are structured by, particular social conditions quite independent of overt rules.⁵

All this is to say that initially, practices do not originate from conscious decisions, but come from the structuring situation out of which the active subject comes into being.

While human beings are ordered by their world, they, by degree, equally order a world of their own. This is viewable in the smallest of places we constitute as well as on the grandest of scales. Practices, as they are adopted, inhabited and mobilised are intrinsic to our being and its continuity, which means that they create much of what we are, at the same time they elementally and actively fold into the *habitus*, in its perpetual transformation. The *habitus*, while partly formed by them, equally has to be understood, in its spiralling, as the context of their encounter and structuring (including of our practices) – it continually turns but never returns to the same point.

The foundationally ontologically designing practices from *habitus* then get overlaid with the overtly demonstrable, discursive, inscriptive practices consciously acquired by the designer-subject – and these equally design ontologies.

Re-emphasising: the designed has clearly become integral to the character of structuring, *habitus* and practice. The designed infuses and articulates social conditions and relations. It is enmeshed in specific appropriated cultural forms and conduct at the most basic level (for instance, how we sit, eat or walk are not purely natural but have been modified by design, artifice and made objects). Design thus has become the primary discursive practice in directing the form, operation and visual representation of the material world of beings (human and, in many instances, non-human). As such, it demarcates action between the intuitive, reactive and that which is consequentially considered and directional. In this respect, design professionalised is a profoundly secular practice that has displaced the 'invisible hand of God' with an agent that is unequivocally a human initiated determinism. Yet for all the directionalism of design, designers have so far failed to recognise or take responsibility for the ontologically designed direction that it establishes. By

implication, this means that designers (in particular professional designers) have failed to grasp the ethical implication of designing and the designed in action. This failure is structural rather than individual (which is to say it is grounded in that *habitus* which is 'design education').

On the one hand (design) action itself has become diminished to instrumental behaviour – this in contrast to ancient understandings. For the Greeks the verb *archein* defined acting as commencement, leading and completing.

On the other hand, the political space, *ethos* (the temporal condition of our dwelling echoed in the concept *habitus*) has become eroded by rampant individualism. This condition hasn't happened just over the last few decades. In general terms, it has come through the arrival of hegemonic capitalism in the company of neo-liberalism; going back further, individualism could be said to have been formed through the Enlightenment and its active afterlife. But this explanation barely touches the complexity of how the culture of the individual has been existentially formed and embedded in *habitus*. Likewise, one can generally observe that, at the behest of neo-liberalism, freedom of the individual has been reduced to the exercise of myopic self interest. Yet it also has to be recognised that the actual processes by which this has occurred are fine grained and very nuanced.

Design action (directional praxis) knows how to bring objectified things into being, but without recognising that what is being enacted is world-making or negating. Design's political amnesia conforms to what Hannah Arendt characterised as a 'substitution of making for acting'.⁶ The slide she identifies occurs in the company of politics degenerating into a means which has lost sight of its ends and the vision that should prefigure its agenda.

Optimistically, Arendt asserts that instrumentalisation and the degeneration of politics never fully eliminate the possibility of action.⁷ Unless one fatalistically abandons one's self and society, one has no choice but to subscribe to this view. Certainly, there can be no possibility of talking about redirective practice without it. Yet the very ontological designing possibility of this practice aims to relieve this state of dependence.⁸

As has become increasingly apparent, human artifice does not take place independently in localised worldly environments, rather to a lesser or greater extent it is generally environmentally constitutive and transformative (as climate change induced by global warming is now making clear to large numbers of the human population). But more than this, as we have been arguing, human artifice not only creates the human habitat but is equally formative of *habitus*.

As action becomes an instrumental mode of making, it creates habitats and artefacts while at the same moment negating – the future is undercut in the very act of the design and fabrication

of things of the future. The continuity beyond single lifetimes that both *habitat* and *habitus* essentially constitute is not only seriously undermined, but this human-induced process of negation creates a regime of unsustainability that extends to organic life in general.

These remarks return us to considering the relations between making, action and praxis, and as we shall see, the Greeks bonded the idea of praxis to action as its expression – not simply in the kinetic sense, but more fundamentally in its realised end.

Action, as praxis, is that which forms humanity as collective, as community, as society, as polis, as particular identities and as difference. It is futural in-so-far that it secures being. Making, fabrication (*poiesis*), in contrast, can never make what is absolutely vital for humanity's continuity (which is why, in the end, sustainability can never be created as a product of technology). However, *poiesis* should not be thought of as completely partitioned from *praxis*⁹ in that once 'made things' enter the world of human affairs, a relation is established in which *they may* be completed as praxis. Aristotle's view (as elaborated in *The Nicomachean Ethics*) was that *poiesis* became praxis. Now, however, with the breakdown of any absolutely clear distinction between technology (especially in its metaphysical and biological forms) and the human, the division between 'human things' and 'the artefactual' becomes less distinct. The world of human affairs and made objects no longer exist in a binary division – we now live in a world where objects become 'things' that interact with us within our *habitus* with an agency in common with practice.

What becomes clear from the way Greek thought has been mobilised by modern philosophers (the case above being predicated upon the relation between Aristotle and Heidegger) is that there can be no interpretative closure. This is well illustrated in Jacques Taminiaux's reading of Heidegger on *praxis*¹⁰ One of the main reasons why this open situation pertains is that many seemingly abstract and philosophically specific concepts are recast by the circumstances in which they are interrogated. The present always transforms the past, and we encounter nothing (including concepts) unmediated.

Thus we can observe that it could well be the case that as the breakdown between 'the human' and 'human designed fabrication' continues apace, there will be a corresponding breakdown between 'the meanings we give to our being' and 'the meaning posited with material symbolic forms' (as these forms acquire increasing designing power upon the character of 'the human'). In this context, redirective practice (through an engagement with *habitus*) could possibly act to turn the human back toward itself and away from its reification – this as much as redirective practice, in the end, aims to redirect 'our' mode of acting in and on the world in which we find ourselves.

In acknowledging a form of designing (or for that matter the efficacy of *habitus*) beyond the reach of everyday observation and thought, we wonder if it is possible to see and grasp what seems to be an activity that increasingly, and simultaneously, gains agency and invisibility. Hermeneutical phenomenology may assist in bringing what is experienced and objectified to light, but what is required is the exposure of that which has not been made present to, or for, experience.

Gaining a fleeting glance of the operative dimension of some ‘thing’ designing, when what is being observed is equally a self-observation, demands a clear understanding of *theoria* and *aisthesis* (the perception of what the senses reveal) as bonded to a *praxis*. What is actually being evoked then is an action that takes what is deduced by prefigurative knowledge (the sight of the mind) to disclose the appearance of what is seen (by the eye) so it may become constituted as an object of interpretative inquiry from a momentary insight.¹¹

There is no consolation in the fact that we see as a result of our knowledge and not merely via the optics of sight. This has been known since Plato and reiterated in numerous ways, not least through Foucault’s notions of everything being aesthetically refracted. That we see and know by virtue of processes of mediation and interpretation means that revelation and concealment co-exist. That I know my dog is a dog, and have developed some knowledge on the nature of dogs, in no way reveals what it is in itself to me. No matter what knowledge I project onto my dog, what it is, in itself, ever remains concealed from me.

Empirical observation, an interpretation of what is seen, theoretical deduction – it is not as if we have the option of selecting an epistemologically certain method, but we can structure relational modes of knowing in our inescapable condition of limitation (a truth of ‘good’ science).

Amid our structuring, we are simultaneously the product and the exercisers of practices – just as we are equally unmakers as we make. Such is the power of our anthropocentricity that we conceal our unmaking, our destruction, as omnipresent in the being of our being, from ourselves. While our destructiveness is unavoidable, what we destroy is a matter of ethical placement: that is, our conduct in relation to the ethical qualities, or not, of the environment in which we place ourselves, or are placed, and the ethical choices we then make. At the opening of his essay on ‘The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte’ Marx famously observed that “Men make their own history, but not of their own free will; not under circumstances they themselves have chosen but under the given and inherited circumstances with which they are directly confronted.” Irrespective of one’s view of Marx, this statement remains almost true. The modification to be added from our observations on design, making and unmaking is that ‘men are

equally made by their historical circumstances' the manner of their 'enframing' is however concealed by their seeming difference.

Action informed by what is deduced by prefigurative knowledge to disclose the appearance of what is fleetingly seen to constitute an object of interpretative inquiry is a bringing forth from knowledge (*techne*), and action (expressed *praxis*). Such action is indivisible from everything that gives the future a form in which we are sustained and sustain others.

Revisiting Ethics

As indicated here and elsewhere, design as an inscriptive practice, as process, objects and things, has had, and is increasingly having, profound directional consequences. Unavoidably, design always excludes 'what might have been' and imposes 'what is'. Design thus eternally rides a line between the ethical and unethical. It did this prior to its naming and will do so after a futural renaming. One of the key objectives of redirective practice is to re-position design as a primary ethical agent, which by implication is also to mobilise it toward the unethical. In so saying, and notwithstanding what has already been said, we are still left with a critical task of further elaborating how ethics is to be understood.

Aristotle provides a starting point, and can contribute to considering the end point, of the question of ethics.

In both his *Eudemian* and *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle's premise is that ethics is a domain of practical philosophy.¹² Rather than simply being an object of study, ethics is something directed at the realisation of a particular end in the world: the good. Likewise, Aristotle's concluding remarks in these two works also converge when he asserts that the study of ethics results in a need to apply oneself to politics. Both of these propositions beg consideration in the frame of redirection, but first, we need to clarify what was, and is, meant by 'the good'.

Aristotle understood the good to be "that for which sake everything else is done", as such it is "achievable by action".¹³ The good then is put forward as the final end of human endeavour and named as 'happiness' (*eudemonia*). In so saying, Aristotle recognised the danger of this being taken as a platitude. He argued against this possibility by defining and elaborating happiness as 'living and faring well' as constituted by wisdom (both practical and philosophic), virtue as the end of an activity, pleasure as 'the state of the soul' and prosperity for "it is not easy to do noble act without equipment".¹⁴ Notwithstanding the distance between Aristotle's view of happiness and a contemporary popular understanding of it as hedonism, one cannot simply, in a 'world made unsustainable' adopt and employ 'the good' as he envisaged it.

In contrast to Plato's cosmology, wherein 'the good' was projected as a transcendental value posited in beauty, truth and intelligence, Aristotle grounds it materially and, inescapably,

anthropocentrically. Although his proposition is not purely idealistic, and can be applied to a collective condition, it inevitably fails to grasp the 'common good' as that which now needs to unite the interdependency of all human and non-human beings. Not only cannot one 'live and fare well' as a singularity but this condition cannot be attained just as an accomplishment of the human community. Simply, the state of our being is in a continuum with the beings of the world of our existence. 'The good' thus folds into an expanded view of how sustainment should be understood, which is also to say that happiness, as living and faring well, should equally be seen as elemental to sustainment.

Although Aristotle viewed ethics as a practical endeavour, it remained predicated upon being an activity directed by human conduct (in contrast to being extended to the agency of whatever this endeavour brought into being). This meant that moral philosophy became the means by which such conduct was discussed. As a consequence, and unfortunately, much of the discussion then folded back into philosophy itself, delimiting its ability to permeate the practicalities of social, economic and political life. This is not to say that ethics has had no influence in shaping forms of conduct of private and public life, rather it is to say that the influence has been weak, especially in terms of delineating clear means to its realisation (here we have the disjuncture between ethics and its projected delivery via ethnocentric morality and moral codes). Moreover, expediency and pragmatism deeply infiltrated moral philosophy, especially with the emergence of merchant capitalism, the bourgeois subject and the national state.

Effectively, the material conditions that in large part interpolated the modern subject undermined the possibility of the agency of that subject acting as the primary means by which ethics, as lived, was made present and extended in everyday practical life. Problematically, the counter current to the negation of the ethical life was religion. However, at least in the West, religion became implicated in the very same directional forces that constituted the modern subject, and as a result it was neutralised before the onward march of secularisation. Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, which first appeared in 1904, was one of the most explicit and widely read registrations of this history and its diverse literature. Within this literature one finds, at one extreme, the attempt to reinvigorate religion by bonding it to 'the common man' loyal to 'King, State, Nation and Church' and to the cause of liberalism.¹⁵

At the other extreme, is the attempt to defend the very basis of religion – faith – against the complicity of the church in the rise of the nation state – a position that is perhaps epitomised by Søren Kierkegaard's lyrical polemic (*Fear and Trembling*, 1843) against Hegel's positing of faith in the moral agency of the absolute state.

Conclusion

As was said at the start of this essay, redirective practice, with its ambitious transformative agenda, is not ‘a stand alone activity’. Its focus is clearly on action to create that which sustains and destroys that which does not. So said, this does not mean that redirective practice can have definitive determinant qualities. It follows, that ‘the user’ of the designed of sustainment requires as much creative and critical attention as the practitioner. Certainly *habitus* bridges both, but with different structural qualities and consequences. Working against the notion of the user as passive (a consumer) it is clear that specific socio-cultural relations of use, and active transformations in use, both beg and are receiving serious consideration.¹⁶ The question one then asks: is this merely an extension of redirective practice or is it another activity altogether?

Notes

1. Sustainment is used here as the name of the condition to aspire to bring into being. In common with, for example, ‘freedom’ one can only provide qualified and relative, rather than absolute definitions. As the essay goes on to say later – “Sustainment cannot be taken to be a matter of choice, an option. Rather it is that which is most fundamental to relational being (including societal being) in general.” ‘The Sustainment,’ however, names a project and moment (as did the Enlightenment). In contrast, sustainability is a far looser term that embraces process but so often is bonded to technological ‘solutions’ (as in sustainable technologies, architecture, farming etc.).
2. ‘Beautiful Diversion: Response to Nussbaum’s ‘Are Designers the Enemy of Design?’”, *NextD Journal*, Special Issue, 4 April 2007, available as pdf at <http://www.nextd.org>.
3. Aristotle’s turn to politics as the means by which the ethical could be advanced, while influenced by Plato’s understanding of the political as the realm of all human conduct (rather than just that between the individual and the state), undercut the proposition of the ethical state (this critique, of course, prefigured Hegel’s conception of the ethical nature of the ‘end state’). Specifically, what Aristotle did was to suggest that the discussion of how to advance ethics should focus on legislation and the study of the constitution in order to discover what laws and customs best serve it. This focus, he believed, was the means by which to complete a ‘philosophy of human nature’ (*The Nicomachean Ethics*: 1181b20). Aristotle’s conclusion to his writing on ethics was the opening into the project which became *The Politics*.
4. Bruno Latour, *Politics of Nature* (trans Catherine Porter) Cambridge (Mass): Harvard University Press, 2004: 10–18.

5. Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline Theory of Practice* (trans Richard Nice) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977: 85.
6. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958/1989: 229.
7. Arendt: 1958/1989: 230.
8. Ontological design can be basically understood as – ‘the things of the world (including things that designers design), as they themselves contribute to the designing of modes of beings in that world, and thus to the changing character of worlds themselves’. These are relations in flux; they are dynamic, circular and excessive. See Anne-Marie Willis, ‘Ontological Design—laying the ground’ *Design Philosophy Papers Collection Three* Team D/E/S Publications: Ravensbourne, 2007, 80–98.
9. William McNeill, *The Glance of the Eye: Heidegger, Aristotle and the Ends of Theory*, New York SUNY Press, 1999:65.
10. Jacques Taminiaux, ‘Heidegger and Praxis’ in Tom Rockmore and Joseph Margolis (eds) *The Heidegger Case on Philosophy and Politics* Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992.
11. *Augenblick* – a concept explored at length by McNeill in *The Glance of the Eye*.
12. The general view is that the *Nicomachean Ethics* is the later text and is a reworking of the earlier work.
13. Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (trans David Ross) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1925/1991:1097a15.
14. *Nicomachean Ethics*:1099a22.
15. Here is the history of, for example, British Methodism, within which the language of ethics was mobilised in unethical causes (not least in its links to liberalism as the ideology of British imperial expansion).
16. See Cameron Tonkinwise’s review of Albert Borgmann’s *Real American Ethics* in this issue. More generally see these papers in previous issues of *Design Philosophy Papers*: Cameron Tonkinwise *Ethics by Design, or the Ethos of Things*, 2/2004 and *Is Design Finished? dematerialisation & changing things*, 3/2004; Carleton B. Christensen, *The Material Basis of Everyday Rationality: transformation by design or education?* 4/2005; Susan Stewart & Jacqueline Lorber-Kasunic, *Akrasia, Ethics & Design Education*, 4/2006. (Editors note: available in back issues to subscribers; also the two Tonkinwise essays are reprinted in *Design Philosophy Papers Collection Two* and Christensen’s is in *Collection Three* – more information here).

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