Abandon All Hope Ye Who Enter Here: Democracy and Climate Change

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Introduction

I offer a hyperbolic title to pay homage to Naomi Klein's hyperbolic text, *This Changes Everything*. Dante, of course, reads this warning as he enters the gates of hell. To enter her book is to read another apocalyptic warning: Ye who enter climate change abandon capitalism—the world as we know it cannot survive. We don't know what will unfold, but we may have entered a century of grand melodrama that will incessantly ask the following question: Are we at a historical juncture that demands new legal, political, and economic structures? I hesitate saying yes because the idea of pivotal moments in which something *changes everything* is a vast intoxicating trope, a Euro-American obsession that we have been encountering since at least the discovery of the "new world." Consider: John Meynard Keynes during the throes of the depression noted that the flow of stolen gold from the Americas into England during the sixteenth-century was an unprecedented, sudden injection of capital. That same capital benefitted England during its eras of colonialism, but in so doing it also flowed into the world system, eventually increasing global wealth and capacity.[1] That is, it, along with many other factors, set off not just an industrial revolution but over time ousted political privilege based on aristocrats and monarchs, and made room, eventually, for the rise of a global bourgeoisie and "masses." I call these moves the beginnings of an intoxicating "vanguardism" that moved across the next centuries, each one claiming that its given moment was the center stage of history. The American Revolution, the French Revolution, Paris in 1848, Russia in 1917, the World Wars, 1968, the many political identity revolutions, the technological and scientific revolutions could, in the melodrama of *this changes everything,* be called "switch plates in

modern history," Cornelius Castoriades' remarkable, revealing phrase.[2]

Climate change, then, may be the material driver—equivalent to new world gold in Keynes' account—fomenting theories about deep ecology, political ecology, and, generally speaking, a new set of relations between the human and non-human. Or ecological theory may be another incarnation of vanguardism. If the latter, then ecological theory is not writing what it thinks it is writing, but, rather, is being written by modernity's on-going intoxication with vanguardism. A presumption built into vanguardism is how the old order about to be replaced has become "exhausted," "tired," "broken," a kind of "zombie" (dead and undead at the same time). Thus, vanguardism institutes its new regime because the times demand change, and in so doing it gathers moral urgency. Of course, impassioned believers must name their revolution and believe utterly that their cause represents a substantive reality. Non-believers may think that it is all rhetorical noise and no substance. At any rate, consider: those who have named current capitalism as "late capitalism" have summoned the appropriate overtones of crisis.

None of the above detracts from my admiration of the journalistic detail in her book. I have learned a lot from Klein's text. Nor does it detract from the possibility that this historical moment and her account of it might be, indeed, when the real shit hits the fan—which, to be honest, I think is likely—making all other vanguardist moments mere anticipations.[3]

Still, I want to address what I think are genuine short-comings of her text. She has some fairly standard views, shared by both the left and right, that tend to fetishize democracy. Here are four related conceptions that expose the divide that separates her views from mine. (1) She splits democracy from capitalism. I argue instead that democracy and capitalism function through each other and cannot be pulled apart. This is as true for liberal democracies as socialist ones. We cannot make a clean cut between economics and politics. Each one organizes the other. As I will argue soon, I claim that capitalism shares the same ground with all of our political systems, including communism. The Ur term for all of them is *potentiality*.

(2) I believe that she fetishizes "people power." Here is the romanticism that underpins all democracies, whether liberal, socialist, or communist. She assumes that people power both *knows* itself and *knows* the world, and that this knowledge constitutes a moral posi-

tioning that *ought* to be followed. That is, if humanity is to move forward, social structures need to be changed and guided by this knowledge—or so goes the thinking. Historically, then, "people power" has been one of the primary rationales for launching the righteousness of vanguardist movements. However, "people power" is a code word for "populism," and these movements have, at times, been left-leaning and, at other times, right-leaning. That is, they *know* themselves in whatever ways they choose, and many of these ways would horrify Klein. There is nothing innately *righteous* about "people power."

(3) She believes that democracy will deepen the more it encounters climate change. Maybe. I suspect that we also run the risk of becoming more atomized and Hobbesian (the war of all against all)—if things get really bad. If the forecast is for world-altering climate change of the severe sort and if the forecast should materialize, then, indeed, *this changes everything:* Hobbes' fears reincarnate, nation-states cannot contain the uproar, and then "Abandon all Hope . . ."

(4) Finally, Klein favors the idea of the commons as a kind of expansion of public ownership that is in the hands of people rather than government or private interests. An example might be the installation of solar panels on Native American reservations. Not only would individuals produce their own electricity, but they would also sell the excess product to the electric grid. This "common ownership" of electricity as opposed to corporate ownership can be framed through the extensive literature on the commons produced by economists. It is not wholly clear to me that common ownership of electricity qualifies as a "resource commons," a term used in economics to understand such entities as ocean fisheries, grazing pasturage, and water districts that manage irrigation rights. Historically, many economists have argued that when a resource is commonly owned, it runs the risk of depletion—"over grazing" so to speak—which leads to the so-called "tragedy of the commons." An economist so inclined might ask Klein: if everyone can make some profit off of cheap solar panels, will there be over production of electricity thus lowering its selling price? No matter the answer, however, the deeper issue, I believe, is the need to think through the idea of the commons as something more than a "resource commons" susceptible to the "tragedy of the commons," and more than the left's rather amorphous notion of a "popular commons" shaped by "people power" opposing corporate interests. In this paper I will advocate, albeit in short-hand fashion, for a richer conception of the commons, what might be

called a "deep commons."[4] The "deep commons" rests on a different ontological foundation. Indeed, it seems to be a brute fact. The difficulty is finding a way to move its facticity into public view so that it can shape a social ethos that might lead to a different legal order and public policies.

This paper, then, will address the shortcomings of Klein's text. My main focus will be a critique of her fetishization of democracy. She fetishizes when she uses terms like "deep democracy," "people power," and so on. She also fetishizes democracy when she believes that she can temper capitalism and thereby make a better democracy. Central to my analysis is my understanding of "potentiality." I see potentiality as the bedrock supposition that provides legitimacy and purpose to the modernist project itself. Indeed, capitalism and the various political systems that have been invented from within modernity have as their goal the release of potentiality. Much of the paper, then, will be an analysis of the difference between her notion of the commons and my notion of the deep commons. In order to elaborate the idea of the deep commons, I will explore in truncated fashion notions borrowed from economics and, surprisingly, earth system science and evolutionary biology. But before moving into the heart of the paper I need to examine what is not in her text. Hence, I will conduct an excursion into geologists' notions of deep time in order to unsettle hers and others standard critique that capitalism is the central culprit.

Excursions into Deep Time and Geohistory

Researchers involved in geology, ecological sciences, and related disciplines (broadly, earth system science) have been wrestling with questions that might surprise Klein and others. The conversation here has the potential to reframe the role of capitalism as the only driver of climate change. For instance, through ice core samples and other pieces of data, scientists are building geochemical histories regarding the intricate fluctuations of oxygen, carbon-dioxide, nitrogen, and other gases. These events have occurred in "deep time," millions, if not billions of years ago. If we want to understand the current heating of the planet, we need to also understand how the atmosphere itself originated and is sustained through the relations of mineral matter and virtually all life forms. For instance, temperatures were hotter at the beginning of the Eocene (fifty-five million years ago)

by about 8° C in temperate regions and 5° C in the tropics. How did the planet cool down? "The removal of carbon dioxide from the air by its chemical reaction with calcium silicate in rocks is called by geologists 'chemical rock weathering,' and it is accelerated by *life* on the land surface and in the soil" (*my emphasis,* 59).[5] Rock weathering takes a long time, but it is not the only means for the removal of carbon dioxide. Forests, for instance, are efficient carbon sinks; farm lands less so. The larger point is that the atmosphere has been manufactured and remanufactured. It is never exactly in equilibrium but always in disequilibrium, supporting both life and extinctions at different times. The biggest problem has been the relentless heating of the sun, which is estimated to be approximately 25 percent hotter "than when life began" (Lovelock 64). This estimate is astonishing. It implies that the atmosphere has been constantly neutralizing the sun's increasing heat through complicated geochemical relations that includes minerals as well as life's production of oxygen, carbon dioxide, nitrogen, and so on.

Where then do we place capitalism's industrial revolution and its outsized production of carbon dioxide? Capitalism certainly is not let off the hook even if it is the newest player in the geochemistry of deep time. The problem of determining capitalism's role is very pronounced among geologists in their debates about the Anthropocene. The Anthropocene names that moment when the human alteration of the environment became significant enough to deposit a "golden spike" into the geographic record. The "golden spike" is a curious mix: it is, on the one hand, a metaphor that, on the other hand, names an a-priori fact, a stratigraphic deposit that must be *absolutely* visible (*self-evident as it were*) in layers of rock. It is stratigraphic evidence of this sort that allows geologists to divide geohistory into eons, eras, periods, epochs, and so on. For instance, the Eocene (an epoch mentioned earlier) is part of the Paleogene (a period), which is part of the Cenozoic (an era), which in turn is part of the Phanerozoic (an eon) that covers the last 541 million years. In other words a whole cluster of golden spikes placed in their appropriate rock zones allows geologists to conduct their debates and helps them to govern and legitimize their discipline as ontologically "real." So, the placement of any golden spike has serious consequences.[6]

"When exactly did humans [the Anthropos of the Anthropocene] attain dominance of the earth's environments?. . .[W]hich stratigraphic, atmospheric, and biotic variables. . .take precedence in

establishing the onset of the Anthropocene, how significant a change in value of these variables should be expected, and should the transition be tracked at a global or regional scale of analysis" (8)?[7] Where to place the end of the Holocene and the start of the Anthropocene has been the job of the Subcommission on Quaternary Stratigraphy. Here are some possible dates of notable human intervention: 13,800 B.P. (megafaunal predation and vegetation change, namely, changes in birch pollen)[8]; 8000–5000 B.P. (methane and carbon increase from wet rice agriculture and forest clearance respectively); AD 1750–1800 (methane and carbon increase from the industrial revolution); and AD 1950s (the appearance of artificial radionuclides from atomic testing). I should note that Smith and Zeder list four more possible starting dates for marking human dominance, resulting in eight candidates as of this writing. The search for the Anthropocene boundary, if it is finally established, is rigorous to say the least: "the Anthropocene epoch can be established by determining when unequivocal evidence of significant human ecosystem engineering or niche construction behaviors first appear in the archeological record on a global scale" (Smith and Zeder 12). Smith and Zeder seem to place their money on "the initial domestication of plants and animals worldwide 11,000–9000 years ago. . .[as] much more compelling. . .than the alternative starting dates that have been proposed, including the Industrial Revolution consensus." If their date should win the argument, it would mean that the interglacial period of the Holocene is, in effect, the Anthropocene that encompasses about "10,000 years of human modification of the earth's biosphere" (13).

It is not hard to see how these debates might affect the conclusions of Klein and many others: "The choice of beginning date—from very remote (since the appearance of *Homo faber)* to quite recent (since the industrial revolution) or very recent (since the Second World War)—correlates with profound political and moral differences. The more remote the date, the less the current forms of capitalism are at issue and thus the more responsibilities are diluted" (Latour 112).[9] I agree with Latour. The only sure route for understanding the climate crisis is to create a big picture that understands the present in its geohistory and geochemistry. Moreover, earth system science as an emerging field, including its understanding of the human and nonhuman in perpetual response, is beginning to shift the political ethos of individuation that lies at the center of self-interest capitalism (*homo economicus*). Earth system science then makes

new ontological claims regarding not only how the disciplinary sciences have constituted their individuated knowledges, but also how we have understood evolution.[10] Finally—although it may already be too late—there are implications here for rethinking individuation and its current dominance of our political, legal, and economic order. In other words, there are bodies of inquiry below Klein's more facile critiques of capitalism that point to the new politics that Klein herself wants to cultivate. But she seems to be unaware of those inquiries. I turn next to her understanding of democracy and what I think are its shortcomings.

Wrestling with and against Klein

Let me offer a specific passage that appears early in Klein's book where one can see her idealizations of democracy, her critiques of inequality, her fetishization of "people power," and her understanding of the commons:

> As part of the project of getting our emissions down to the levels many scientists recommend, we once again have the chance to advance policies that dramatically improve lives, close the gap between rich and poor, create huge numbers of good jobs, and reinvigorate democracy from the ground up. Rather than the ultimate expression of the shock doctrine—a frenzy of new resource grabs and repression—climate change can be a People's Shock, a blow from below. It can disperse power into the hands of the many rather than consolidating it in the hands of the few, and radically expand the commons, rather than auctioning it off in pieces. (10)

At numerous points in her text Klein talks of social movements in Germany and elsewhere that are forcefully gaining, for instance, control over electric grids by rejecting private energy monopolies beholding to shareholders (96–100). Indeed, she holds more hope in populist social movements than in the entrepreneurs who lead "green capitalism" (90). In sum she calls for a bottom-up deep-democracy consisting of citizen-owned utilities (130–133), agroecology instead of agribusiness' "Green Revolution" (134–135), and she suggests that indigenous ways of listening to the earth is a better ethic than our current ethics of extractivism (182).

For Klein, a decentralized economy under local democratic control would be a democracy running so deep that it would represent a revolutionary ideological transformation. I sometimes wonder if too

many of us want democracy to be more than whatever is at hand, and to deliver, like heaven perhaps, more than the life we know. In other words, we fetishize democracy, for democracy in my view is a kind of empty vessel that we fill with our unquenchable desires. It makes little difference if we belong to the left or right, if we are libertarian or communist, atheist or evangelical. We turn to the political order called democracy, for it gives us an opening to press our claim upon the world, a claim that emerges from whatever deficiency or insufficiency, we think, characterizes our present moment. For example, Ammon Bundy speaking from Oregon on behalf of small ranchers in 2016 asked for "more democracy" with as much conviction and passion as I do when, with my activist friends, we demand affordable housing initiatives on behalf of low wage earners in Chicago.[11] Both of these are "rights to land" claims, and both sets of activists use all the available democratic *topoi* to achieve their interests. Consider the trope of *rights* from Cliven Bundy in footnote #11. He and his followers fetishize negative and positive rights and their origins in the Constitution with as much fervency as an ACLU lawyer arguing on behalf of minority rights challenging discriminatory practices. Or juxtapose Klein's decentralization arguments alongside the Bundy's "worldview [that] aligns closely with the states' rights movement and efforts in the West to transfer federal lands to the states and local governments" (Quammenjan). Both are advocates of decentralization, but their respective ideologies, although grounded in the same premises and held with equal moral fervency, are at cross purposes and raise the other's animus. In sum, democracy, whatever it is, gives us shared *topoi* for rhetorical maneuvers, and the clarion call for "more democracy," which comes from the throats of every group, is meant to replace any specific deficiency with the hopefulness of future change.

It is in this light that we need to examine Klein's notion of "people shock," "a blow from below," and "people power." The commonplace or *topos* of the "people" is the primordial beginning of the democratic imaginary. To invoke the "people" is to invoke a godterm that legitimizes, even sacralizes, the release of human potentiality in the face of whatever is perceived as hierarchical authority. This release of potentiality, this sense of something within that must step forward, is as prevalent in liberal democracy as in socialism. Not only does potentiality structure both political orders, but it also structures economic aspiration. When we look closer at the democratic, socialist, and capitalist imaginaries, what we see is a kind of structuring ab-

sence. This absence, in effect, is that democracy, socialism, or capitalism is always in potential, waiting to arrive at some point in the future. The present, that is, is always incomplete and a little disappointing. In sum, liberal democracy, socialism, and capitalism are always eternally suspended in potentiality, always incomplete but moving toward a vague actuality. This condition of always becoming does not typically result in a critique of the "ism" itself. People continue to believe in the vast reservoir of its potentiality. Hence, the future is always the holder of the ism's truth, meaning that we must look to the future as possibly resolving, or even transcending, the incompleteness of the present. All three (liberal democracy, socialism, capitalism), then, share a futurist outlook, a narrative of futurism. All three are invested in reform; they are reformist, meaning that they are committed to the ceaseless movement of potentiality that never becomes an actuality but is always suspended as an infinite becoming. Advocates of democracy, whether of the left or right, talk about the necessity for "more democracy" and what it will bring; socialists talk about their commitment to expanding equality; free-marketers too look toward an infinitely expanding future. Free marketers are enamored with economic growth, that is, the acceleration of innovation that will generate ever more expanding growth as measured by world GDP. Investors incessantly look for good return by calculating the potential of specific economic sectors. If returns go up, the sectors have started to actualize their potential. In this sense, the GDP is nothing less than the measurement of the movement from potentiality to actuality played out in economic terms.

I want to suggest that the idea of capitalist self-interest (what we sometimes call *homo economicus)*, and the idea of democratic rights as well as socialist equality are versions of potentiality. Potentiality seems to anchor our different political and economic orders—indeed, potentiality is the distinctive marker of modernity. Furthermore, the instrumentalization of nature's potentiality—that is, the harnessing of its powers through innovation and machinery—means that the idea of potentiality unifies the human and the non-human, the animate and inanimate. When Klein talks about James Watt's steam engine representing "liberation from nature" or "freedom from the physical world" (173), this is precisely what she is talking about—the potentiality of nature at the service of the potentiality of the human. (Incidentally, the word "freedom" is another term for "potentiality," hence, its use by both libertarians and socialists.)

I want to link this argument about potentiality to the idea of the deep commons by referring to anthropologist Anna Tsing and her book *The Mushroom at the End of the World.*[12] She talks eloquently about "salvage accumulation," a concept that I find heuristically productive whether or not I fully agree with it. Salvage accumulation seems to be at the heart of all forms of wealth extraction. It represents the stuff that is largely outside markets—such as the primordial fertility of the earth and the eons it took to create fertility that could be powered by sunlight. All this is largely unpriced, and yet it must exist as part of the price that the agriculturalist receives for her vegetables. There are also the primordial changes in DNA, including non-human DNA. These changes have made humans very innovative but remain largely unpriced in the prices of every innovation. This primordial, deep commons, then, exists prior to any individual's wealth-making. Individuals are lying when they claim that the wealth they made is utterly theirs. That is, every ownership claim scissors the world into mine and thine, which, in effect, rationalizes away our social dependencies, the deep commons upon which our lives depend.

Consider a high rise at the edge of Lake Michigan. A condo of a certain square footage that faces the lake will be more expensive than another condo of the same footage and vintage a half mile inland. The reason why, of course, is that the lake condo is directly exposed to the spectacle of nature. An approaching storm, for instance, swirls around the building, but the owners are safely tucked away behind floor-to-ceiling glass. By paying extra money for their condo they are both protected from and immersed within the vicissitudes of nature. At one time, storms were outside insurance and real estate markets. They were a kind of externality, but then they became domesticated by these markets when, for instance, technological innovations appeared that allowed people to live safely high in the air, almost in the middle of storms so to speak. At that moment the externality called "storms" became an internality, for they were brought into the housing market and given a price. Indeed, one could technically calculate with some exactness the "added value" of storms and beach front by comparing condo prices at the lake front to equivalent condos a few blocks inland. Real estate agents and sellers pocket that added value not because of their individual effort. The added value is due to the beach front, which is publicly maintained, building materials that were invented rather recently, insurance institutions and their databases, and, ultimately, the storms themselves. Thus, when

the condos are sold, a percentage of the selling price will be due precisely to the spectacles of nature that they do not own and, further, to the "general intellect," a term that I will explore shortly. To repeat: do the owners of their condos own the history of engineering innovations, or the spectacle of nature outside the building, much less the storms that swirl around them? No. Have they mixed their labor with nature, as John Locke once described it,[13] and therefore acquired rightful ownership over the spectacle? No. Are they "over-grazing" a common resource? Possibly. One could imagine a building-boom of shoddy housing up and down the lake front—in this sense higher prices on the lake shore have prevented that boom. But the larger point has to do with the deep commons, how it functions as the source of a potentiality, which when tapped becomes a cornerstone of economic development that ultimately cannot be owned or possessed through the current paradigms of wealth-making.

Consider this second example: When a restaurant owner pays a waiter or waitress $5 an hour and the customers pay another $25.00 an hour in tips, the owner has salvaged or extracted considerable value from the waiter's smile, bearing, language skills, and liveliness of being. Does this liveliness of being belong to the owner or to the waitress? The waiter represents a potentiality waiting to be capitalized, that is, "salvaged" for the purposes of the owner's wealth accumulation. The owner may not own the waitress's liveliness of being, but through capitalist rationality protected by law, the owner appropriates it and calls it his or her profit. Meanwhile, at the moment of accepting the wage, the waitress, in effect, signs a "quit claim" regarding her right to claim a portion of the owner's profit due to her liveliness of being. We call this "salvage accumulation."

Both of these examples are about potentiality and who harnesses it. They are also about the commons, the stuff that precedes "mine" and "thine," and, if we name it the "deep commons," we begin to realize that it is the very source of potentiality itself. In the deepest senses possible, the deep commons is simply not ownable, even though salvage accumulation attempts exactly that. In sum, where Klein and I wholly agree is on the value of the commons. My complaint is that her analyses of the commons is thinly conceived because it takes what professional economists have called a "resource commons" to be the entirety of what we might theorize as the commons.[14] Although the resource commons is *not an unreasonable* position to take, it is possible that climate change is starting to reveal the idea

of the "deep commons" as a basis for expanding our notions of socio-economic order. I will elaborate on these matters further, but, in sum, the deep commons points to that which cannot be priced and owned. If we should take those principles seriously, would it represent an ontologically different economy, one that has always been there but hidden from view? I do not wish to idealize the deep commons, but rather to point to the foundational tension between an ontological "truth" and the obdurate forces, legal and otherwise, that prevent it from coming into being.

In sum, Klein's notions of the commons as well as of democracy are both thinly conceived. For instance, it is tempting to argue against current existing democracy by positing the fetish of some abstract democracy somehow free of the manipulations of the wealthy. But democracies are always territorialized by forces on the ground competing to make their interests dominant. Perhaps the source of this thinness is that Klein is a kind of literalist, or, better, a journalist who functions much like a social science literalist for whom the fact is a revelation of "the-world-as-is." This propensity is not her fault but more like a projection of a modernist sensibility moving through her and policy-making in general. Heidegger's "Science and Reflection" delivered as a lecture in August 1954 in Munich diagnosed this propensity[15] already diagnosed by many nineteenth-century "hermeneuts of suspicion," some of whom were political opposites such as Marx and Nietzsche. I offer nothing new here when I say that the figure of paradox might be a better way to regard the "fact." That is, the fact both reveals "the-world-as-is," but it is also an artifact of techniques and instruments that enable the fact to be "seen." When new techniques and instruments appear, new facts appear, and sometimes the old facts no longer reveal the-world-as-is. Thus the fact is also an artifact of a specific theory that makes a specific fact more sensible and meaningful than another fact, perhaps because it makes a given theory more coherent. The paradox then is that the fact is also an artifact, which means that it is not a pure stand-alone proof. So, the fact does indeed reveal "the-world-as-is," or at least the world that our current instruments, techniques, and theories allow us to see. Consider: we know that Klein, seemingly, is not aware of the theoretical lens called "deep time" described earlier and how that way of looking makes capitalism itself into a different kind of fact. That is, from a paradoxical point of view capitalism is both fact and artifact; from a literalist point of view, Klein's, capitalism is only a fact.

The Deep Commons—More Than We Can Handle

Consider what follows a thought experiment. I call it a thought experiment because the deep commons may be ontologically real, but it is utterly invisible to Klein, and more profoundly, to the rest of us "moderns." Thus we can point to it, but we cannot mobilize it; we cannot change its status from idea or thought experiment to a working reality that embodies a different kind of legal, political, and economic order. Given our current conditions, then, we cannot shape an ethos that might accept, make sense of, and embed itself inside such an order. Hence, the tragedy of this thought experiment but also the inducement to step beyond Klein and argue for it.

The deep commons includes all the implicit and explicit agreements that allow a people devoted to commerce to make "commonsensical" decisions within their private property regime. I start with the idea of private property because I want to broadly frame the "salvage accumulation" examples presented earlier. I also want to note that it is the private property regime and its ideas of ownership that Klein wishes to reform. Moreover, it is this same regime that rises up to protest her and others like her, for these protesting forces want to guarantee the continuation of ownership rights and private property as the cornerstones of liberal democracy. Increasingly, climate change is inserting itself into this divide. That is, the scientific work and the theorizations that are appearing under the umbrella of the Anthropocene[16] are causing a deep split between a legal/economic/political order that centralizes private ownership claims versus a legal/economic/political order that centralizes—*perhaps*—the deep commons.

Thus the condo example in particular represents how our private property regime functions. At the moment of sale, the owners and their real estate agents will legally claim their profits and commissions respectively. And yet the theorization of the deep commons that I have been pursuing suggests that much of the wealth claimed rests on matters that cannot be owned. This possibility suggests, further, that when individuals claim that their profits and their wealth in general are rightful remuneration of their effort or talent, doubts can be raised. Every private property transaction can only come into being when people already believe that individuated selves ought to be free to buy and sell individuated land and other entities, such as condos. Now these beliefs exist in a commons called the United States Con-

stitution, whose own potential has been actualized in specific laws passed, again, by common agreement. Every Supreme Court decision that has wrestled with possession and ownership, private property, eminent domain, public trust law, customary rights, and so on is an actualization of the Constitution's potential, but it also represents the commons that enables both private and public property to come into being.

Many elements represent the total volume of abundance held in the commons called the "private property regime." When individuals claim their profits at the moment of sale, is not part of the price due to the Constitution that provides both the commonsense behind the sale, the rights to conduct the sale, and finally the right to "own" the money from the sale? But how does one price the Constitution that is given to all freely? Its value is its abundance flowing through the capillaries of social life and providing the foundation for the invention of property, ownership, and price—and yet, and this is of the highest importance, it itself has no price! It is astonishing that that which enables the creation of price has no price—and yet it must exist somewhere inside every price. Can we render its value as a portion of the price? Would this hidden price be an extraordinary amount or a miniscule amount? One would think that its foundational and enabling power would be extraordinary—75¢ on the dollar or even 98¢ on the dollar—or maybe it is miniscule: only 2¢ on the dollar. The first set of calculations (and I do not know if this commons is indeed measureable) suggests that common ownership is the major player. It raises the ultimate question: on what basis does the individual own anything? The last calculation establishes the legitimacy of the private owner, for the bulk of the price would be a consequence of individual effort. Liberalism as an economic and political philosophy synonymous with *homo economicus* rests on ethical premises that rely on the last calculation being a kind of truth claim.[17] But the deep commons rests on another truth claim with its own ethical premises that state, in effect, that individual effort accomplishes little because it is wholly dependent on the commons to provide its ideology and rationalization and, finally, to provide the social institutions through which individual effort realizes itself.

We might call the deep commons by another name. Certainly the "general intellect" might be a candidate. Paolo Virno runs through some of its historical legacy and emphasizes Marx, but I find Virno's understanding of the term superior to anyone else's:

> Mass intellectuality is the prominent form in which the general intellect is manifest today. The scientific erudition of the individual labourer is not under question here. Rather, all the more generic attitudes of the mind gain primary status as productive resources; these are the faculty of language, the disposition to learn, memory, the power of abstraction and relation and the tendency towards self-reflexivity. General intellect needs to be understood literally as intellect in general: the faculty and power to think, rather than the words produced by thought—a book, an algebra formula, etc.[18]

The deep commons, then, as also including the general intellect, would point to education, language, weights and measures, indeed everything that might be understood as the store of knowledge that enables any innovation, small or large, a turn of phrase, any creative act, any technological solution. (Consider again the technological innovations that have allowed high rises to move safely into, so to speak, the middle of storms.) One might just as soon include rhetorical knowledge itself and pay particular attention to Aristotle's "available means of persuasion," as, for instance, a fund of shared *topoi,* for what would the English translation "available" mean if not something that precedes any rhetorical participant because it is what is summoned at any given moment by those who must show themselves to each other? The vast values of all this are never calculated into prices or costs. They represent the common wealth upon which all wealth-making depends. In sum, the wealth that both the wealthy and the poor call their "own" is, to a significant degree, a borrowing from the common wealth. But the loan is never paid back. Rather strangely, the individual (or individual corporation) claims it as their own. Certain versions of liberalism and *homo economicus* depend on these sorts of magical acts.

This analysis of the deep commons is something that Klein might want to take up, for it might serve as a foundation for the sort of transformative ethos that she hopes to establish. If she were to take it up, however, her project would start to stray into a kind of philosophical economics at odds with the sort of pragmatic reporting and moral muck-raking that gives her a public voice.

Conclusion

I want to accomplish two things in this conclusion. The first is to review my argument regarding potentiality and how it bears on her

book. The second is to ask the question: what is the "spirit of our times"? I will argue that her book belongs to a moment when we are seeing a confluence of a variety of forces. What we need are theories that articulate these confluences. Although her work represents shortcomings, it is a sincere attempt to popularize some elements of this confluence. But we need larger schemes. This essay may be woefully truncated, but behind it lies an ambition that others share and, indeed, are working on—namely, the ambition to articulate emerging forces that may indeed represent in rough fashion "the spirit of our times."

Broadly, I have argued that her arguments rely on bifurcating capitalism from democracy in which capitalism is the bad guy and democracy the good guy. I believe this to be a false binary—but a very common one. In my view, all modernist political and economic orders (and, for that matter, all the theoretical machinery that animates the academy) have the same underlying commitment, namely, the fetishization of potentiality and its release in the name of bettering life. I believe, further, that this release of potentiality—a virtue term to be sure because it serves betterment—ought to be reevaluated for its contributions to climate change. After all, for the last five hundred years potentiality and the duty to release it in the form of the self, of nature, of the collective body, and of wealth accumulation has been modernity's distinctive characteristic. It anchors modernity. But I have argued that potentiality is paradoxical. It is both uplifting and harmful. It uplifts in the senses just described as a betterment of everyday life. It is harmful in the sense that its release—as in Klein's example of James Watts' steam engine as the release of nature's potentiality—created, in time, climate change itself. So, from this view, Klein's argument that *this changes everything* is false. Hers does not lead to a paradigm shift. Consider: her socialist-like deepening of democracy is also wedded to potentiality, for socialism is a harnessing of collective potentiality, and it needs capitalist accumulation in order to have a potentiality to distribute. This is why Klein is focused on high rates of taxation as solution (114–115) because part of the potential for a "people power" lies in the taxation of capitalism.

Of course, my position also has shortcomings. I need to admit that there is a considerable amount of public opinion that does not see matters my way or Klein's either. For instance, there are many who feel that further technological innovations (the release of more potentiality) will overcome the crises of climate change. The Dutch,

for instance, with their historical expertise in the architecture of water management, are building a significant economic sector in selling their skills world-wide to those who feel threatened by rising waters.[19] This scenario would be an example of "green capitalism" and thus would challenge Klein's analysis as well—for capitalism here is not altered but deepens, and democracy does not necessarily become more "people powered" or socialist. At the same time, potentiality as modernist paradigm keeps chugging along as uplift or betterment—nothing paradoxical about it—and so it challenges my analysis. Admittedly, my critique is a bit stubborn, even outrageous, for I am inclined to say that we should critique all varieties of potentiality that go under other names such as rights discourses, equality discourses, and freedom discourses because they function, ultimately, as a set of moral possessions that one must have, that we must have, if we are to achieve the full potential that life promises. Looked at this way, rights, equality, freedom are birth-rights whose potentiality is to be fully exploited in the act of living. If our economic discourses obscure the deep commons, then these are the political terms that obscure it as well. That is, they try to name us as common, but, when they are wielded in legal and even everyday discourses, they help to establish the individuated self or individuated group—"I have a right"/"we have a right"—in a face-off with other individuated selves. This sort of atomized self, swollen with self-interest and importance, uses rights and freedoms to cultivate a vast permission to legally extract and accumulate at the expense of others. So, my notion of the deep commons tries to alter these sorts of self-understandings. Admittedly, I am inclined to think in rather impossible ways of an emptied self, the nothingness of self, that cannot appear except through the deep commons. I am inclined to reevaluate potentiality through this sort of frame. But what is still unclear for me and Klein too, I suppose, is whether this sort of reorientation of our economic, political, and legal structures is genuinely necessary. The Dutch example may suggest that both Klein and I are writing unnecessarily hyperbolic texts. And yet there are many who are intuiting that something may be taking shape that, indeed, calls for a paradigm shift.

What are the bases of these intuitions? Here I want to invoke a term—"the spirit of our times"—that echoes outmoded ways of thinking, outmoded because the term claims that a constellation of things and forces are taking shape below the noise of the everyday, and, dangerously, that some see it and some do not. Who is having

these intuitions? Who is not? Indeed, what are intuitions? What capability do they claim for reaching-into? Does a concept like the spirit-of-our-times deny the safeties and virtues of an egalitarian world that is foundationally disputatious and non-authoritarian? To inquire into "the spirit-of-our-times" entails these difficulties and possible deceptions.

We are seeing an emerging confluence. Much of it is based in scientific work that is vast and far from what I can summarize, but some of it relates to what I mentioned earlier regarding climate change research. Climate change has created the impetus to inquire into the possibilities of new ontologies regarding the relationship of the human and nonhuman. As these questions get asked and answered, one emerging possibility is that we are currently seeing the overturning of sovereigns. That is, the biosphere—the geological area where life is found and includes earth's minerality, atmosphere, and hydrosphere—is becoming sovereign and thus nudging the sovereignty of nation-states as well as the sovereignty of economics. Or, for those who prefer less sweeping claims, we are seeing an increasing number of conflicts in which the rights of nation-states or markets to become the determining force are being questioned. If the biosphere as sovereign should increase its sway, it is hard to see how the principle of individuation that underpins both the rights of self-interested parties to negotiate in the marketplace and the rights of nation-states, each state sovereign over its bordered territory, can persist. For the biosphere implies something different, something that cannot be managed according to the principle of individuation. Not even a "world government. . .could, by a miracle of coordination and good governance, attribute to each party [nation] its share of CO_2 or financial compensation, under the threat of sanctions. While we have the right to dream of such a thing, the absence of a planetary government is all too obvious" (Latour 259).

So, the institutional structures that used individuation as core principle and allowed the older sovereigns (nation-states and the laws of the marketplace) to rule find themselves no longer equipped to handle the emerging sovereign. In fact, we are at a loss to find a principle that might replace individuation. The deep commons belongs to an opposing semantic field, seemingly, but whether it deserves to be the core principle of new institutional structures—and, if so, how—is far from settled. However, it is worth noting that both terms, "individuation" and the "deep commons," seem heuristical. They are

generative of ways of being and ways of seeing oneself. Perhaps this is how we ought to understand their force. That is, they are productive of simultaneous ways that have always constituted us, for hasn't the biosphere always been that silent entity out of which individuated life forms and the whole of life itself emerges? To repeat some of my earlier language: the biosphere holds the past and the future of all economies, and thus has always been silent but at the center of every economic transaction.

But there is another strand of scientific work that is shaping this confluence and places the concept of a deep commons as a kind of umbrella term for talking about it. At least a few scientists are self-consciously pursuing lines of inquiry that overlap with the notions of individuation and the deep commons. One such inquiry occurs at the level of the body and its internal ecosystems. Scott Gilbert, a developmental geneticist and embryologist, frames it this way:

> What the cow does is chew the grass and maintain a symbiotic community of microorganisms in her gut. It is this population of gut symbionts that digests the grass and makes the cow possible. The cow is an obvious example of what is called a *holobiont,* an organism plus its persistent communities of symbionts. The notion of the holobiont is important both within and beyond biology because it shows a radically new way of conceptualizing "individuals" (M73).

> [T]he holobiont [as] concept disrupts the tenets of individualism that have structured dominant lines of thought not only within biology but also in fields as diverse as economics, politics, and philosophy. The holobiont is powerful, in part, because it is not limited to nonhuman organisms. It also changes what it means to be a person.

> Only about half the cells in our bodies contain a 'human genome.' The other cells include about 160 different bacterial genomes. We have about 160 major species of bacteria in our bodies, and they all form complex ecosystems (M75).[20]

If earth system scientists are reading the fluctuations of the biosphere across "deep time," we have, simultaneously, evolutionary biologists reading the genetic integration of microorganisms and holobionts. Both camps seem to be pointing to the forcefulness of things in composing the human. The proportion of oxygen and car-

bon dioxide is fairly narrow if humans are to survive; similarly humans are not human without the bacteria that prior plant and animal forms evolutionarily incorporated during their own moments in "deep time." The human moment branches from theirs—even if, indeed, we need to abandon these tropes of "linearity," for their moments continue to persist inside our own. But these notions drawn from current scientific work amplify further what I have been calling the "deep commons." So, the emergence of a confluence whose strands knot together earth system science, evolutionary biology, and other related disciplines to the deep commons—this, I think, is the-spirit-of-our-times.

Again, what is the human? It does not seem to be an individuated, stand-alone entity. But do these eco-systems functioning inside the micro-worlds of cells and the macro-world of the biosphere represent some sort of harmonious integration, a whole or unity that transcends individuation? We ought not model the idea of the deep commons as something that overcomes the competitiveness of individuation, for the many parts that compose, for example, the holobiont act less on behalf of the holobiont and more on their own behalf. On that sobering note—that the deep commons may not neutralize but, rather, include the forces of individuation that also underpin the capitalist narrative—is how I wish to end this essay. If the ancients reading the spirit-of-their-times found unified conclusions that pointed a way forward, we read the spirit of our times as pointing to the internal contradictions of our ways of understanding. Klein is the former type of seer. I am not.

Notes

[1] "For I trace the beginnings of British foreign investment to the treasure which Drake stole from Spain in 1580. In that year he returned to England bringing with him the prodigious spoils of the Golden Hind. Queen Elizabeth was a considerable shareholder in the syndicate which had financed the expedition. Out of her share she paid off the whole of England's foreign debt, balanced her Budget, and found herself with about £40,000 in hand. This she invested in the Levant Company —which prospered. Out of the profits of the Levant Company, the East India Company was founded; and the profits of this great enterprise were the foundation of England's subsequent foreign investment. Now it happens that £40,000 accumulating at 3f

per cent compound interest approximately corresponds to the actual volume of England's foreign investments at various dates, and would actually amount to-day to the total of £4,000,000,000 which I have already quoted as being what our foreign investments now are. Thus, every £1 which Drake brought home in 1580 has now become £100,000. Such is the power of compound interest!" John Maynard Keynes, "Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren," *Essays in Persuasion,* New York: Norton, 1963, pp. 358–373.

Castoriadis, Cornelius. 1993. *Political and Social Writings, Vol. 3, 1961-1979: Recommencing the Revolution: From Socialism to the Autonomous Society,* translated by David Ames Curtis. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, (149).

"What is unusual about the coming crisis is that we are the cause of it, and nothing so severe has happened since the long hot period at the start of the Eocene, fifty-five million years ago, when the change was larger than that between the ice age and the nineteenth century and lasted for 200,000 years" (7). James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia: Earth's Climate in Crisis and the Fate of Humanity,* New York: Basic Books, 2007.

Here is a partial list of authors that have helped me understand a theory of the commons: Harold Demsetz, "Toward a Theory of Property Rights," *American Economic Review,* 57:2, 347–359, 1967; Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science,* 162: 1243–1248, 1968; Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action,* Cambridge University Press, 1990; Carol M. Rose, "The Comedy of the Commons: Custom, Commerce, and Inherently Public Property," *Property and Persuasion: Essays on the History, Theory, and Rhetoric of Ownership,* Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1994; Stephen Gudeman, "The Persuasions of Economics," *Economic Persuasions,* Stephen Gudeman, Ed., New York: Berghahn Books, 2012 (62-80); Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time,* Boston: Beacon Press, 2001.

James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia: Earth's Climate Crisis and the Fate of Humanity,* New York: Basic Books, 2007. For a much more technical analysis of the carbon cycle as it plays out during weather events such as El Niño see Junjie Liu et al., "Contrasting Carbon Cycle Responses of the Tropical Continents to the 2015-2016 El Niño," *Science,* 358, eaam5690 (2017), 13 October, 2017.

For a much fuller account of what is at stake see Jeremy Davies, *The Birth of the Anthropocene,* Oakland, CA: U of California P, 2016.

Bruce D. Smith, Melinda A. Zeder, "The Onset of the Anthropocene," *Anthropocene* 4:8-13, 2013.

For further understanding of the human impact on megafaunas see the biologist Jens-Christian Svenning, "Future Megafaunas: A Historical Perspective on the Potential for a Wilder Anthropocene," *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet,* Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, Nils Bubant (eds.), Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 2017, G67-G86.

Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climatic Regime,* Catherine Porter (trs.), Oxford: Polity Press, 2017.

See Tsing, et.al.

[11] Betsy Gaines Quammenjan, "The War for the West Rages On," *The New York Times,* January 29, 2016; Kirk Johnson and Jack Healy, "Protestors in Oregon Seek to End Policy That Shaped West," January 5, 2016; Quoctrung Bui and Margot Sanger-Katz, "Why the Government Owns So Much Land in the West," *The New York Times,* January 5, 2016; Alan Feuer, "The Ideological Roots of the Oregon Standoff," *The New York Times,* January 9, 2016. Here are the words of Cliven Bundy, the patriarch of the stand-off:

"From the moment their ancestors' horses took a sip of water or ate the grass, 'a beneficial use of a renewable resource' was created, Cliven Bundy told me.

""That's how our rights are created,' he explained. 'So now we have created them and we use them, make beneficial use of them, and then we protect them. And that's sort of a natural law, and that's what the rancher has done. That's how he has his rights. And that's what the range war, the Bundy war, is all about right now, it's really protecting those three things: our life, liberty and our property"' (Quammenjan).

[12] Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins,* Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2015.

[13] "Whatsoever. . .he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. It being by him removed from the common state nature hath placed it in, it hath by this labour something annexed to it that excludes the common right of other men." John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration,* Ian Shapiro (Ed.), New Haven: Yale UP, 2003, (111-112).

[14] See footnote #3, particularly the citations for Demsetz, Hardin, and Ostrom.

[15] Martin Heidegger, "Science and Reflection," *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays,* New York: Harper Perennial, 1977.

[16] "To live in the epoch of the Anthropocene is to force oneself to redefine the political task par excellence: what people are you forming, with what cosmology. . . ? . . .We have to get used to it: we have entered irreversibly into an epoch that is at once post-natural, post-human, and post-epistemological. . . .We are no longer exactly modern humans in the old style; we are no longer living in the Holocene!" Bruno Latour, *Facing Gaia* (143-144).

[17] An important lesson that I have learned from my dear friend and renowned economist, Deirdre McCloskey, is that there are different types of liberalism, or libertarianism. Her variety does not subscribe to *homo economicus* but, rather, to a "New American Liberalism" (unpublished essay)

that is as concerned with the problems of poverty as democratic socialism, but, of course, approaches these matters differently.

[18] Paolo Virno, "General Intellect," *Lessico Postfordista,* Zanini and Fadini (eds.), Arianna Bove (trs.), Milan: Feltrinelli, 2001.

[19] Michael Kimmelman, "The Dutch Have Solutions to Rising Seas. The World Is Watching," *The New York Times,* June 15, 2017.

[20] Scott F. Gilbert, "Holobiont by Birth: Multilineage Individuals as the Concretion of Cooperative Processes," *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet,* Anna Tsing, Heather Swanson, Elaine Gan, Nils Bubant (eds.), Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 2017, M73-M89.