

SMPLECTY

Ecological Civilisation and the Will to Art



SAMUEL ALEXANDER

Essays on the Aesthetics of Existence

Creative Evolution and the Will to Art

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CONTENTS*

Preface: The Apocalyptic Sublime

BOOK ONE – THE WILL TO ART

Introduction: The Aesthetic Dimension

The Cosmos as a ‘Readymade’: Dignifying the Aesthetic Universe

Creative Evolution and the Will to Art

Pessimism without Despair: Suffering, Desire, and the Affirmation of Life

An Aesthetic Justification of Existence: The Redemptive Function of Art

Camus on Art and Revolt: Overcoming Nihilism in an Absurd Universe

Rescuing Aestheticism from the Dandies: Critical Distinctions

Homo Aestheticus, the Artful Species: An Evolutionary Perspective

Giving Birth to Oneself: Ethics as an ‘Aesthetics of Existence’

The Politics of Beauty: Schiller on Freedom and Aesthetic Education

BOOK TWO – THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF ART

Bad Faith and the Fear of Freedom: Can Art Shake Us Awake?

Banish the Poets! The Power and Politics of Aesthetic Education

Making Art While the World Weeps: Political Reflections on Aesthetics

Art Against Empire: Marcuse on the Aesthetics of Revolt

Answering Estragon: Art, Godot, and Utopia

Industrial Aesthetics: A Critique of Taste

Artful Descent: A Cosmodicy of SMPLCTY

Poet-Farmer: A Thoreauvian Aesthetics

Democratising the Poet: William Morris and the Art of Everyday Life

The Aesthetic State

Conclusion: Revisiting *The Glass Bead Game*

* This is a provisional Table of Contents. The essays are being published individually as they are completed, meaning that this project is a work-in-progress which may evolve.

‘The teleology of the Universe is directed toward the production of Beauty.’

– *Alfred North Whitehead*

Creative Evolution and the Will to Art

Samuel Alexander

The conventional picture of the universe begins by positing an incredibly small, dense, and fiery lump of primordial energy which exploded into existence around 13.8 billion years ago. Thereafter the universe is said to have unfolded mechanically in accordance with the immutable laws of physics. Science is unable to provide any insight into what ‘caused’ the Big Bang and attributes to the cosmos no purpose or goal. Nevertheless, physicists still hold out hope of one day developing a ‘Theory of Everything’, which will be able to explain all phenomena, from the cosmological all the way down to the sub-atomic particles of quantum reality. How consciousness arose from and interacts with matter remains one of the ‘hard problems’ of science, but in time it is assumed that even the inner workings of our brains will be explainable according to determinate physical laws. According to this description of reality – based on the metaphor of a machine – the end of the universe is built into its original state, such that all events that occur along the space-time continuum are simply a result of the machine operating strictly according to its preestablished laws. Many people treat this view as the true, scientific picture of reality, rendering alternative descriptions either false or ‘merely poetic’.

Friedrich Nietzsche wrote that ‘truth is a mobile army of metaphors.’¹ His point was that our pictures of the world and everything in it, including ourselves, are ultimately metaphorical in nature rather than objective. We can lose sight of this fact when our metaphors have been in place for so long that they are mistaken for ‘just the way the world is’ rather than one of a variety of potential descriptions. For example, it is easy to forget that the mouth of a river, the eye of a needle, and the face of the clock are descriptions grounded in metaphor. They are so entrenched in our use of language that they have become ‘dead metaphors’, in the sense that we interpret them literally without needing to think about their meanings. Metaphors come into use not because they reflect reality *in itself* but because they prove useful when communicating or pursuing goals. However, they can also become hindrances if they outlive their usefulness, locking us into a particular way of viewing the world and concealing alternative perspectives and possibilities.

We are living in the Age of the Machine, a product of Enlightenment rationalism. But suppose this mechanical view of the universe is itself a dead metaphor? What if, to borrow a phrase from philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, a picture holds us captive, and we cannot get outside it, for it lies in our language and language seems to repeat it to us inexorably?² To ask this question is not to call for the metaphor’s rejection, for viewing the universe as a machine that operates according to laws surely serves the useful purpose of helping humanity control and predict nature. But if we were to raise this metaphor from the dead, we might better appreciate its rhetorical and thus contingent nature. We would see that it is only one of a variety of potential ‘pictures’ of the universe, useful so far as it serves a particular purpose, but also potentially concealing of different ways of knowing and being in the world. To think that the machinic perspective is the one and only right way to view the world is to fall prey to its entrenched, rhetorical value, imbuing it with an objectivity that in reality it lacks.³

Metaphors, however, are inherently unstable – even dead ones. Sometimes the mobile army can shift ground in unexpected ways, at which point we can come to see the world and our place in it with fresh eyes. This movement of metaphors would not be a shift toward a clearer or truer picture of a pre-existing reality, rather it would signify a paradigm shift in perspective that helps us see things in new ways. With a new perspective, important problems might be resolved or dissolved, or new possibilities of living might present themselves that were previously unthinkable. A metaphorical shift can never be written off because the universe is infinitely complex, denying humanity the possibility of ever providing a complete or final description of all phenomena. It will always be possible to redescribe our complex world in metaphorically imaginative ways that unveil new insights into the universe, human society, or even our own subjectivities, inviting us to look at life through a different lens. American philosopher Richard Rorty argued that scientists invent descriptions which are designed to help us achieve the goals of prediction and control, just as poets and political thinkers invent other descriptions for other purposes.⁴ But there is no chance of ever seeing the world without *any* interpretive ‘lens’ – no chance, that is, of shedding our conceptual schemes entirely in order to perceive reality as it *really is*.⁵

It follows that there is also no sense in which the vocabularies we create to understand or represent the world can be said to exist ‘out there’, waiting to be discovered. Instead, poets, philosophers, and scientists must *create* them. Even the notion of ‘foundations’ of knowledge draws on the spatial metaphors of architecture and therefore is only one way to think about knowledge – a perspective which may be epistemologically revealing of certain insights and concealing of others. As analytic philosopher Donald Davidson wrote, a metaphoric shift can lead us to ‘notice what might not otherwise be noticed.’⁶ When a new vocabulary catches alight in the social imagination, we call these creative people geniuses, and sometimes bestow upon their perspectives the honorific ‘truth’. When new vocabularies are invented that do not catch on, they can be dismissed as uninteresting, false, irrational, or even mad. Of course, a metaphoric shift that at first appears strange can come to be seen, in the fullness of time, as truth, and in the process, the metaphor dies, or at least lies dormant. Thus, the madman can become a poet-philosopher, and old truth-tellers can fall out of fashion as their traditional verities get overturned and replaced by a new generation.

Science teaches no moral lesson, offers no spiritual comfort, and provides no explanation for why there is something rather than nothing. Neither does it confer on the universe any meaning or purpose. And yet, many of us seek insight into these matters out of existential need, even if we discover that answers lie simply in the questioning itself. The great French philosopher Rene Descartes sought to uncover ‘first principles’ that would lead him to the truth, but his philosophical method of radical doubt was defined by the fear of error – which betrays a value judgement that itself could be false. After all, could a person not be entitled to risk being wrong about the nature of some mystery for the chance of being right? Suppose, for example, that we only allowed ourselves to fall in love or trust people who we knew *for certain* would never hurt us. That strategy might well avoid the pain of heartbreak or betrayal, but mightn’t it also result in losing, through lost opportunities, more than we gained? Could there be times when believing *as if* something were true might be a necessary precondition for it becoming true?

The following words from novelist and poet Herman Hesse give me the courage to take such a risk – the risk of falling into error in exchange for the chance to live in some uncertain truth: ‘Nothing is harder,’ he wrote, ‘yet nothing is more necessary, than to speak of certain things whose existence is neither demonstrable nor probable. The very fact that serious and conscientious people treat them as existing things brings them a step closer to existence and to the possibility of being born.’⁷ And so, in that spirit, I will now offer readers an alternative cosmology to consider – a grand narrative whose author is perfectly aware of its narrativity.



Causation is a temporal concept – an effect always comes after its cause, never before. One never feels the physical vibrations of the note before plucking the string. On that basis, the idea of an uncaused cause – music without a musician – defies our deepest intuitions about physical reality. Yet, to ask what happened ‘before’ the Big Bang doesn’t seem to make literal sense either, given that space-time itself is said to have been created at the moment of that originating explosion. Science negotiates this paradox by refusing to speculate on what cannot be empirically tested or verified, and it is true that there is no direct evidence on what caused the Big Bang. We hear the music of creation but see no musician. This renders the nature of that first cause unknowable and therefore, on this subject, science must forever remain silent.

That is a perfectly coherent position. It assumes, however, that an understanding of the cause of something can only be known directly, whereas I suggest that we can infer an understanding about the nature of something from its effects. This is necessarily a speculative exercise, open to interpretation and contestation, but it is not unscientific, given that all inferences are drawn from experience and must be coherent in light of that experience. Nevertheless, the ambiguity of the evidence in question – regarding the *fundamental* nature of reality – means that there is no way to offer a neutral or objective reading of it; that is, no way to avoid interpretation grounded in a particular perspective. I acknowledge therefore that what follows is an interpretation, not simply the description of a self-evident truth. My opening point, however, is to insist that *not* offering any creation story is itself an interpretation of our place in the cosmos, and to deny this requires making assumptions which are themselves in question.

When the dominant assumptions that hold us captive are suspended, if only for a moment, we are freed to consider the possibility of alternative pictures of the world. What if, for example, in a moment of cosmic madness, the spectacular explosion that originated the universe were interpreted not as a *physical event governed by laws* but rather as the commencement of an *aesthetic unfolding of creative evolution*? My invitation here is to shift the foundational metaphor from universe-as-machine to universe-as-artist, and then see what follows. Again, I am not calling for a rejection of machinic thinking. Rather, I suggest that such thinking conceals as it reveals, and my interest is in exploring what lies behind and beyond the dominant metaphor. As I began to look behind that metaphor and take up residence in its blind field, I found myself writing this essay.

I invite readers to consider the existence of what could be described as a ‘aesthetic impulse’ or ‘creative drive’ at the base of reality – a primordial art-force from which everything else follows. I am calling this the Will to Art. This can be understood as the cause of the

cosmological instability which led to a mighty explosion at the beginning of time, resulting in the universe itself and the perpetual creative drives working in and through the universe. It is the internal spark of life and the cause of literally unpredictable moments in what French philosopher Henri Bergson called ‘creative evolution’.⁸ And it is the cause of that mysterious feeling or mood which inspires, even compels, the artist to sit down to compose *something out of nothing*. Therein – by creating something out of nothing – humanity is able to commune with the mysterious aesthetic impulse from which existence itself has emerged.

Although I make the analogy tentatively, the Will to Art, like gravity, is operating everywhere in the universe. Theoretical physicists have no direct observational evidence of ‘dark energy’ and ‘dark matter’ but posit the hypothetical existence of such in order to help predict and understand cosmological happenings. So too am I positing an original aesthetic force – a creative impulse that brings the art of life into being – to see if it can help make sense of the world. I believe it can, and I ask readers to indulge me in presenting this creation story before deciding whether to reject it.

To be clear, I am not suggesting there is a conscious, metaphysical ‘being’ that created the world or governs it. I am not positing a deity – some ‘Artist-Creator’. Nietzsche made such a metaphysical claim in his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy* – based on what he called his *Artisten-Metaphysik* or ‘artists’ metaphysics.’⁹ While it will become clear I have a somewhat Nietzschean story to tell, mine is metaphoric not metaphysical, and I have de-personified the cosmos in due regard to the mysteriousness of the entity I am discussing. Nature is more than an ‘It’ (object) but less than a ‘Thou’ (subject). Even if there were some ‘being’ capable of creating a universe out of nothing, it would be crudely anthropomorphic to assume this entity would resemble an old man, with a long white beard, living in the clouds. Any Creator-Being – any god – would surely be so strange to our finite minds as to be utterly incomprehensible. Even without positing a deity, the universe is quite mysterious enough.

As primordial art, the cosmos seems to be unfolding in order to *experience itself*; to experience its underlying creative spirit through the genesis and evolution of conscious life. While I subscribe in most regards to the Darwinian theory of evolution, I realise that one must leave room for the reality that evolution is unpredictably creative not merely mechanistic, and when complex systems emerge and become alive, they become increasingly creative. Creativity begets creativity; art begets art – and here we all are, as living proof. The interpretation I am offering is that there is an originating aesthetic force in the world – the Will to Art – and we are its products.

Admittedly, we cannot observe this ‘first cause’ directly – this aesthetic impulse that drives creative activity with unpredictable (non-mechanistic) effects. But we can infer something about the nature of such an impulse or drive from its effects, just as we can know something about the nature of dark matter from its effects, even though this hypothetical substance has no luminosity (i.e., cannot be seen). As Nietzsche maintained: ‘it is enough to create new names and valuations... in order to create new “things”’¹⁰ and ‘a “thing” is the sum of its effects, synthetically united by a concept.’¹¹ On that basis, the Will to Art is the sum of its effects – the aesthetic universe itself. Given that its effects can be coherently understood through an aesthetic lens – the fractal lens of art, creativity, beauty, imagination, and sensuality – it

requires no interpretative gymnastics to *infer an aesthetic cause from the multiplicity of observable aesthetic effects*. Indeed, one can plausibly claim that a multiplicity of aesthetic effects – the creative universe as we know it – must, in some sense, have a cause that is itself aesthetic. ‘The world is a work of art that gives birth to itself,’¹² Nietzsche declared, and through the Dionysian impulse at the heart of reality ‘the artistic power of all nature reveals itself.’¹³

Let me present this view another way. The material universe proceeds in accordance with physical laws; matter mysteriously gives rise to life; life becomes conscious; consciousness becomes self-aware; and in the human species – *homo aestheticus* – the cosmos has produced indeterminate nodes of boundless imaginative potential and sensuous capacity. These nodes of sensuous creativity exist within the physical universe – finite souls with infinite poetic potential. There is, however, a creative impulse within each of us that is not itself governed or governable mechanically by physical laws. Indeed, every human being can affirm the lines from American poet Walt Whitman: ‘I am large; I contain multitudes.’¹⁴ The Will to Art is what drives us to explore those multitudes in search of beauty and meaning.

In this way our essentially artistic being is simply a reflection of the restless dynamism of the aesthetic universe itself, a product of the same mysterious, creative drive that knows no inherent closure. As Terry Eagleton writes when discussing the German Idealist Friedrich Schelling: ‘The human subject is a form of self-conscious production; but this self-fashioning is also its way of participating in the world’s perpetual conjuring of itself into existence... It is the function of the work of art to cast Nature’s self-productivity in palpable form, and in doing so permit us a rare insight into the intelligibility of that process.’¹⁵ If we interpret art broadly to include all creative or aesthetic activity through which humans give order, form, and meaning to existence, we can begin to understand what Nietzsche meant when he wrote: ‘art is the highest human task’¹⁶ of life.

Moreover, as William Morris wrote: ‘that which most breeds art is art.’¹⁷ Beauty and other forms of aesthetic value are often the intended result of creativity and art, and one observes that the contemplation of such aesthetic value propels the expansion and propagation of further aesthetic experience and creativity in new forms. Philosopher Elaine Scarry makes this point by asserting that: ‘Beauty brings copies of itself into being... The generation is unceasing.’¹⁸ The poet inspires poetry, just as music gives birth to musicians. In the same vein, Wittgenstein once remarked that when the eye sees something beautiful, the hand wants to draw it.¹⁹ When we are in the presence of beauty, we are naturally inclined to share the experience, to invite others to see the sun setting or to listen to a piece of music we found particularly moving. It is as if there were some aesthetic tendency for beauty to reproduce itself, even as that tendency must fight against ugliness and violence.

On these premises, the aesthetic experiences of beauty and meaning (arising from creative activity or aesthetic contemplation) can be understood as the *telos* of the universe. This universe proceeds toward its *telos* due to the cosmological impulse I am calling the Will to Art. Just as the acorn has the oak built into its nature, so too does our aesthetic universe have art built into its nature. This mythopoetic account of the world pre-determines nothing, however, since art is inherently unpredictable and the evolution of artistic being is unforeseeable. Obviously, the human world is grossly unjust and may remain so. But in an aesthetic universe,

hope resides in the possibility of moving towards a more beautiful and humane world, through the exuberant fertility of creative (and destructive) struggle.

What results from imaginative engagement with the world and ourselves is unknowable in advance. Unlike a machine, therefore, the end of creative evolution is not built into its original state. No longer bound exclusively to the physical laws of evolution, *homo aestheticus* is now a co-producer of creative evolution, the results of which are limited only by our imaginations. In line with its nature, the underlying aesthetic impulse of reality has created an artistic species. Through us, the universal aesthetic field in which we exist – the cosmos – is able to experience itself over time as a boundless and evolving work of art. Because the outcome is unknowable, the art-force driving creative evolution seems to be amoral and reckless, existing beyond good and evil. This impulse is defined not so much by what it is but by what it has the capacity to become, through us, for better or for worse.

Within this mythopoetic framework, the Will to Art can be said to lie at the heart of existence and is infused into the fabric of reality. I am inviting readers to consider what would follow if this premise were embraced – even as one must accept that *all premises*, by virtue of their nature, rest on nothing more than their own ground. Consistent with observable data, this aesthetic reading of the universe, as I have said, is not a metaphysical thesis but a metaphorical one – it is, unapologetically, a narrative or interpretation in search of new insight. The universe-as-machine cannot account for the indeterminate phenomena of art – of creativity that cannot be explained merely by what preceded it – and scientists operating within the machinic metaphor dare not speculate about a creation story if the cause cannot be directly observed. But I contend that contemplating the cause of creative elements in the universe and in ourselves might offer insight into the nature of our very existence – of all existence – and so we should hesitate to stay silent on this mystery simply out of fear of being wrong, when doing so ensures that we have no chance of living in some positive but uncertain truth.

The art of nature: reenchanted the machine

The poet-scientist looks to creation itself to know the nature of our cosmos – from which it becomes clear that its *nature is creativity*. When thinking of the origins of the universe, do not imagine you are viewing the Big Bang as a spectator. An external ‘view from nowhere’ – a position outside of space-time – is incoherent if not contradictory. Rather, imagine the cosmic dawn as a participant, from the internal perspective from where you are being creatively blown out into aesthetic reality. In a sublime moment of poetic frenzy, emerging out of the Will to Art, an unfathomably vast and beautiful expanse of space-time bursts into existence, a canvas painting itself with swirling gases and around two hundred billion trillion stars. Conscious beings emerge sometime later, and occasionally we find ourselves looking up at a night sky, in a universe of breathtaking dimensions, to see the sparkling light from the long dead stars from which we were made. Where did all this come from and where is it going? As one stares into the abyss, this question can induce a shudder between the shoulder blades, ushering in a mystical mood from which one never fully recovers.

Equally, we might think of the creation story of the Big Bang not as an originating physical explosion but rather as an *interior explosion* of the creative spirit in humankind – and then

work backwards to see if we can understand how our minds that seek to impose order and meaning on the world came into existence. Some might be tempted to suggest that this aesthetic universe is a very 'inefficient' means of creating merely one (known) planet with the conditions necessary for artistic being, but that is to assume the miracle of life can be weighed against the overwhelming predominance of non-life. Couldn't one just as easily be astounded at how *few* stars were needed to create something as astonishing as life?

As well as imagining what the origin of the universe *looked* like, we might also consider what it *sounded* like. Scientists advise that it would have sounded more like a deep humming bass instrument than a 'bang', the frequency of which would have fallen over time on account of sound waves being stretched as the universe expanded. These ancient soundwaves have left their imprint as temperature variations on the afterglow of the Big Bang – the so-called cosmic microwave background. At the beginning, was not the Word, but the Tone. Mystics of sound have long argued that music and vibration originated the universe and comprise the fabric of reality itself.²⁰ If the universe can be explained at all, asserts Hazrat Inayat Khan, 'it is by the phases of sound or vibration, which have manifested in different grades in all their various forms of life. Objects and names and forms are but the expression of vibrations in different aspects,'²¹ and these vibrations influence 'the tone and rhythm of our being.'²²

If some readers are concerned that this mystical account has drifted dangerously far from the standards of scientific rigour and is getting frustratingly poetic, let it not be forgotten that contemporary 'string theory' physicists – the controversial but still leading 'Theory of Everything' – employ guiding musical metaphors in precisely the same way. In fact, it is not clear that these physicists are using music as a metaphor at all, for they seem to be trying, just like the mystics, *to be as literal as possible* – even if the tool of language is not fully up to the task. Without attempting any detailed statement, string theorists advance the claim that subnuclear particles – the most fundamental building blocks of reality – are extremely small 'strings' that take on different modes of existence depending on how they vibrate.

One leading proponent of string theory, Brian Greene, describes the universe as a 'cosmic symphony'.²³ In the same spirit, esteemed theoretical physicist Michio Kaku says 'the universe is a symphony of vibrating strings,'²⁴ so that even human beings are 'nothing but melodies, nothing but cosmic music played on vibrating strings and membranes,'²⁵ implying that we are ourselves part of the orchestra. In Kaku's view, 'physics is nothing but the laws of harmony that you can write on vibrating strings.'²⁶

For now this framing need not be taken any further, but it does serve to counter the perceived objectivity of the disenchanting view of the universe and points to its superficiality. Beneath the mechanistic view of the universe lie alternative possibilities, simmering metaphors of art and music, waiting to be born, to live, and to die. Should these aesthetic metaphors become dead metaphors, we would find ourselves, quite literally, living in a new universe, shaped according to the new but ever-evolving poetic ontology. This would not merely change how we think about everything; it would change everything, forcing us to think differently about it.

As implied above, the process of creative evolution could be understood in stages. First, matter is governed by physical laws that are driven by a 'Will to Life'. For billions of years this process

crept onwards, like a cosmological glacier, toward the emergence of life. Eventually, forms of conscious life emerged that were infused with an insecure and confused ‘Will to Power’ – a harsh struggle for existence driven by a blind striving for something that life did not yet understand.²⁷ But in the fullness of time, the developed aesthetic consciousness comes to realise the futility or meaninglessness of power in and for itself. With power, one is still left asking: what is power *for*? From which it follows: what are humans *for*? All at once it becomes clear that it is not power but meaning that we seek, and in the absence of external or objective sources of meaning, we are left to explore the poetics of our existence through creative activity and aesthetic experience. Situated delicately on the edge of insanity, the inspired mood, given by grace, is the point of origin for creative expression and experimentation. As always, the cause, however mysterious, precedes the effect. The artist, broadly conceived, is but a medium through which our aesthetic universe can experience itself.

By exercising our imaginative capacities and thereby giving lived expression to the Will to Art, we become who we are, which is a creative force, an aesthetic and affective becoming. We are the art-created art creators, forever tasked with making ourselves and our worlds anew; forever seeking to grant and expand aesthetic opportunities as we explore aesthetic experience. Therein lies the source of human dignity and solidarity – which has social and political implications that will be addressed in due course. In accordance with the telos of the universe, we can honour nature, ourselves, and each other by creating as an aesthetic project the meaning of our own lives; to create and immerse ourselves in beauty so as to propagate it. For it is only as an aesthetic phenomenon, as Nietzsche declared, that existence and the world can be justified.²⁸ To describe this aesthetic universe merely as a dead, cold empty space in which matter operates according to mechanistic laws, is to do interpretive violence to alternative and equally valid perspectives that see the universe as alive, creative, artistic, mysterious, and full of the affective capacity to enchant. Fortunately, if the mechanistic conception of the universe is *disenchanted*, that implies that it also has the potential to be *reenchanted*.

This collection of essays emerged from my belief that interpreting the world through an aesthetic lens can help us understand the human situation – existentially, socially, and politically. My offering, of course, is merely *one perspective* on an infinitely complex universe. But perspectives and stories are all we have, so it would be imprudent to deny the potential value of a particular story merely because it does not provide a complete, singular, and objective description of all phenomena. The narrative I have offered will resonate more with some people than others. I certainly cannot demonstrate its singular validity. But I am prepared to risk going astray for the chance of uncovering new insights, and this essay has been an invitation for readers to join me on this philosophical journey and dare, if only for a moment, to ‘think of things this way’. To invoke the environmental philosopher Henry Thoreau: ‘I trust that none will stretch the seams in putting on the coat, for it may do good service to [they] whom it fits.’²⁹

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- ¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense' in Walter Kaufmann (ed), *The Portable Nietzsche* (London: Penguin, 1988) p. 46.
- ² See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963) p. 48.
- ³ In an age threatening ecosystemic collapse, we might well ask whether the conventional goal of science as 'control over nature' needs to be rethought – on the grounds of its apparent failure. After all, if climate change burns civilisation to the ground this century, what then could be said of the scientific enterprise? Perhaps only that we rigorously documented civilisation's collapse and understood the causes.
- ⁴ Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989) p. 4.
- ⁵ See Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 185.
- ⁶ Donald Davidson 'What Metaphors Mean' in Sheldon Sacks (ed.), *On Metaphor* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979), p. 39.
- ⁷ Herman Hesse, *The Glass Bead Game* (London: Penguin, 1972), p. 14.
- ⁸ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution* (New York: Dover, 1998).
- ⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* and *The Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Anchor Books, 1956), p. 10.
- ¹⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage, 1974) p. 122.
- ¹¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (New York: Vintage, 1968), p. 296.
- ¹² *Ibid*, p. 419
- ¹³ See John Fredrick Humphrey, 'Friedrich Nietzsche's *Artisten-Metaphysik* (Doctoral thesis, Graduate Faculty of Political and Social Science, New School for Social Research, 1992), p. 22.
- ¹⁴ Walt Whitman, 'Song of Myself' in Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Toronto: Colonial Press, 1965), p. 79.
- ¹⁵ Terry Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015), pp. 53-4.
- ¹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* and *The Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Anchor Books, 1956), p. 17.
- ¹⁷ William Morris, 'The Beauty of Life' in William Morris, *Hopes and Fears for Art: Five Lectures by William Morris*. Available at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1882/hopes/chapters/index.htm> (accessed 10 May 2023), para. 102.
- ¹⁸ Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p. 3-4.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid*, p 3.
- ²⁰ Hazrat Inayat Khan, *The Mysticism of Sound and Music* (Boulder: Shambhala, 1996), p. 9.
- ²¹ *Ibid*, p. 18.
- ²² *Ibid*, p. 29.
- ²³ Brian Greene, *The Elegant Universe: Superstrings, Hidden Dimensions, and the Search for the Ultimate Theory* (London: Vintage, 2000), Part III.
- ²⁴ Michio Kaku, 'The Universe is a Symphony of Vibrating Strings' *YouTube* (1 June 2011).
- ²⁵ *Ibid*.
- ²⁶ *Ibid*.
- ²⁷ Here I am using the phrase 'will to power' in the conventional or literal sense of power over others, dominance, accumulation of wealth, etc. Nietzsche's very different and more subtle conception (i.e., power over oneself) will be addressed elsewhere in this collection, especially in 'Pessimism without Despair: Suffering, Desire, and the Affirmation of Life'. The full set of essays will be posted here: <http://samuelalexander.info/s-m-p-l-c-t-y-ecological-civilisation-and-the-will-to-art/> (accessed 10 May 2023).
- ²⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), p. 22, p. 143.
- ²⁹ Henry Thoreau, *Walden*, in Carl Bode (ed.) *The Portable Thoreau* (New York: Penguin, 1982), p. 259.