

## **Who's to Blame for Injustice? Joseph Rouse's Poststructuralist Critique of Enactivist Ethics**

This paper compares Joseph Rouse's perspective on the relation between naturalism, social normativity and ethics with the enactivist approaches of Shaun Gallagher and Hanne De Jaegher. Rouse and these enactivists draw from many of the same conceptual resources, including the philosophical insights of phenomenology, hermeneutics, the later Wittgenstein and feminist scholarship, in order to rethink naturalism in the direction of strong interdependence between the individual and their material and social environment. Rouse(2023) has expressed support for embodied, embedded, extended, and enactive (4EA) approaches to cognition, saying his project "primarily intersects theirs in relations between organismic bodies and their developmental and selective environments." Unlike Gallagher and De Jaegher, however, Rouse also incorporates the poststructuralist thinking of Nietzsche and Foucault. His proximity to the ideas of Foucault on power and subjectivity gives him a vantage on the radically socially situated nature of individual sense-making that is missing from enactivist writers' accounts. Despite their emphasis on the primary role of intersubjectivity in the genesis and functioning of individual perceptual, affective and cognitive processes, the lingering vestiges of subjectivist voluntarism and consequent reliance on individual moral blame inhabit their formulations of the ethics of social embodiment.

Rouse has in the main applied his analyses to debates within philosophy of science and the post-analytic community (McDowell, Brandon, Haugeland, Rorty, Davidson, Sellars, Quine). In this paper I will instead direct Rouse's poststructuralist articulation of naturalism toward a critical reading the recent forays into the terrain of ethics and justice by Gallagher and De Jaegher. There are a number of dimensions to the grounding of ethics and justice that emerge in the work of Gallagher and De Jaegher. Gallagher's thinking incorporates a variety of ideas, including Buddhist writings on mindfulness, biological accounts of justice among non-human animals, enactivist neuro-cognitive work on empathy, critical theoretic sociopolitical analyses and Levinas's philosophical account of the ethical. De Jaegher taps into many of the same sources, as well as the feminist writings of Donna Haraway, Kym MacLaren, Carol Gilligan and others.

Let me begin my discussion with Gallagher's Buddhist-inspired conception of the Good. Taking inspiration from the work of Francisco Varela, he links the modern empirical discovery of the absence of a substantive 'I' or ego with the Buddhist concept of non-self, and imports from Buddhism the ethical implications of the awareness of this non-self, which he formulates as the transcendence of a grasping selfishness in favor of a compassionate responsivity to the other. Gallagher(2024) summarizes Varela:

"Putting the self in question is a kind of deconstructive phase of Buddhist mindfulness practice, out of which comes something more positive, and here he quotes a Buddhist scholar who says when the

reasoning mind no longer clings and grasps one awakens into the wisdom with which one was born and compassion arises without pretense....The good is what compassion means, the good is to eliminate suffering. For Varela and for Buddhist theories this is closely tied to the conception of or the elimination of the self as a source of suffering...

Gallagher sees in Varela's account a strong normative conception of the Good.

"One can conceive of this selflessness in terms of skilled effortful coping which associates with the Taoist idea of what is called not doing. When one is the action, no residue of self-consciousness remains to observe the action externally. In the Buddhist practice of self deconstruction, to forget oneself is to realize one's emptiness, to realize that one's every characteristic is conditioned and conditional. So it's this appeal to this notion of a selfless type of phenomenon that for Varela really constitutes the sort of core of the notion of goodness, since in fact by eliminating the self one eliminates suffering, and one acts compassionately."

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Footnote: Evan Thompson(2005) was also strongly influenced by Varela's synthesis of neuroscience, phenomenology and Buddhist ethical teaching. He writes:

"One mentally imposes an intrinsic "I-ness" and an intrinsic "otherness" onto phenomena, but "I" and "other" are simply relative designations imputed onto elements in which there is no inherently existing "I" and "other." Each "I" is an "other," and each "other" is an "I." All beings are in exactly the same situation of imputing "mineness" and "otherness," and all are in exactly the same predicament of wanting to be happy and not wanting to suffer. On the basis of this realization of the equality of self and other, one then visualizes the sufferings of other beings as one's own. In the words of the Tibetan commentary from which I quoted earlier: "the teachings affirm that by applying the name I to the whole collection of suffering beings, and by entertaining and habituating oneself to the thought 'They are myself,' the thought of 'I' will in fact arise with regard to them, and one will come to care for them as much as one now cares for oneself.... [F]rom the standpoint of suffering as such, the distinction between 'others' suffering' and 'my suffering' is quite unreal. It follows that, even if the pain of another does not actually afflict me, nevertheless, if that other is identified as 'I' or 'mine,' the suffering of that other becomes unbearable to me also."

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Gallagher finds empirical support for his conception of the good as selfless compassionate openness to the other in biological accounts of justice among non-human animals, and philosophical support in Levinas's ethical prioritization of the recognition of the autonomy of the other. Gallagher(2020) writes:

"... if Bekoff and Peirce are right that a sense of justice "seems to be an innate and universal tendency in humans" , and continuous with certain tendencies in some non-human animals, a more basic sense than the sense of fairness may be at stake—a sense, perhaps, of just being able to respond, or being able to join in the back-and-forth arrangement of responses."

Gallagher links justice with the enactivist concepts of relational autonomy and affordance.

"Play involves action and interaction and the ability or possibility of the participants to continue in play. It's defined by a set of interactive affordances. When one animal starts to dominate in playful interaction, closing off the other's affordance space (or eliminating the autonomy of the other), the

interaction and the play stops. Self-handicapping (e.g., not biting as hard as the dog can) is a response to the other's vulnerability as the action develops, based on an immediate sense of, or an attunement to what would or would not cause pain rather than on a rule. Role-reversal (where the dominant animal makes itself more vulnerable) creates an immediate affordance for the continuance of play. If in a friendly playful interaction one player gets hurt, becomes uncomfortable, or is pushed beyond her affective limits, this can generate an immediate feeling of distrust for the other. That would constitute a disruption of the friendship, a break in this very basic sense that is prior to measures of fairness, exchange, or retribution. Robert Solomon captures this idea at the right scale: "Justice presumes a personal concern for others. It is first of all a sense, not a rational or social construction, and I want to argue that this sense is, in an important sense, natural.

Justice, like autonomy, is relational. I cannot be just or unjust on my own. So an action is just or unjust only in the way it fits into the arrangements of intersubjective and social interactions." "Justice consists in those arrangements that maximize compound, relational autonomy in our practices." The autonomy of the interaction itself depends on maintaining the autonomy of both individuals. Justice (like friendship) involves fostering this plurality of autonomies (this compound autonomy); it is a positive arrangement that instantiates or maintains some degree of compound relational autonomy." "Accordingly, although one can still talk of individuals who engage in the interaction, a full account of such interaction is not reducible to mechanisms at work in the individuals qua individuals." (Ibid)

Gallagher sketches out the sociopolitical implications of this conception of justice, identifying distorting situational factors that may prevent one party from recognizing the autonomy of the other. For instance, he points to a reification in the treatment of the other as central feature of the breakdown of just interaction.

"As reflected in the definition of interaction, in interactional dynamics recognition depends on autonomy and is undermined by reification; that is, treating the other as an object observed from a third-person perspective. At the same time, individual autonomy diminishes without social interaction; and interaction doesn't exist if the autonomy of any of the participants is denied. Interaction, autonomy, and recognition dissipate in cases of slavery, torture, or terrorism." (Ibid)

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Footnote:

Slaby, Schütze, Jörg and von Maur(2020) provide further illumination concerning the processes of reification in the context of affective social formations. Slaby et al write:

"...what we call the conservative power of affect is grounded in the tendency that affective relations tend to reproduce their prevailing patterns and clusters into stable constellations at the discursive level, while habituating individuals into characteristic modes of relatedness and attachment. In fact, 'the lure of the familiar' might be the single most effective force when it comes to affect's conservative thrust. It ensures that affect relations often reinforce and sustain specific historical trajectories." "In many of its prevailing social forms, affect operates as a sluggish glue or even an iron grip that holds practices and social routines in place. From this perspective, it is not surprising at all that the concreted social structures persevered." (Affect as Disruption: Affective Experimentation, Automobility, and the Ecological Crisis)

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In sum, for Gallagher a key manner that social dynamics become unjust is by reifying and

perpetuating themselves, thereby excluding and rejecting individuals or groups not conforming to those values. This assumption licenses a violent, pathologizing vocabulary. We must disturb, intervene in, oppose, fracture, challenge, shake up, obstruct and break ossified, unjust, unfair social formations, forces preserving the past, inertia, the mesmerizing magnetism and toxicity of the status quo. Gallagher(2020) also incorporates Levinasian tropes into his model of justice as relational autonomy:

“As the enactivist approach makes clear, a participant in interaction with another person is called to respond if the interaction is to continue. My response to the other, in the primary instance, just is my engaging in interaction with her—by responding positively or negatively with action to her action. Although research on primary intersubjectivity provides a detailed model of elementary responsivity, it may also be useful to consider Levinas’s analysis of the face-to-face relation in order to explicate what this research tells us.” “...according to Levinas, the face-to-face relation primarily registers in an ethical order: the other, in her alterity, is such that she makes an ethical demand on me, to which I am obligated to respond... Levinas describes a direct embodied encounter with the other....the failure to enact that transcendence [recognizing the alterity of the other], as when we simply objectify or reify the other person, is also a possibility of relational contingency.”

“In the circumstance of gazing at the other’s face the other’s vulnerability shines through, independent of context, and elicits a response from me...The most basic and elementary response to the other is in this face-to-face, which sets into play the trajectory of subsequent interactions, and the possibility of transcendence (moving beyond just myself). Elementary responsivity, as it gets shaped in intersubjective interaction, leads to a transcendence that carries participating agents beyond the meaning of their individual actions.”

In Gallagher’s understanding of the relation between individual and the social, normative social patterns accommodate themselves to and are shaped by pre-normative biological processes with which they must negotiate. His concept of ‘no-self’ eliminates the substantial persisting self in favor of a bodily society of inter-affecting ‘selves’ whose collective activity produces an emergent intentional agency. In Gallagher’s naturalistic account of empathy, one body’s agency is linked to the agency of other bodies through the activity of mirror neurons in the brain. Gallagher calls this linkage ‘endogenous intersubjectivity’. He quotes Mackenzie and Stoljar:

“ [P]ersons are socially embedded and . . . agents’ identities are formed within the context of social relationships and shaped by a complex of intersecting social determinants, such as race, class, gender, and ethnicity . . . . [A]n analysis of the characteristics and capacities of the self cannot be adequately undertaken without attention to the rich and complex social and historical contexts in which agents are embedded. The notion that the self is endogenously intersubjective means that it is not just constrained or conditioned from the outside by its social environment, but is social from the inside out. And only by being intersubjective from the inside out, in a primary way, is it possible for it to be significantly social from the outside in, and subject to the constraints and conditions of social life.” Gallagher 2007)

In attributing the basis of intersubjective normativity in part to a biological mechanism antecedent to social interaction, Gallagher grounds cultural normativity in a sovereign account of nature. Within this sovereign account, empathic interaction depends on relational processes occurring within individual bodies. De Jaegher(2009) critiques Gallagher for attempting to

ground his notion of direct perception, the biological basis for the capacity of primary intersubjectivity, in mechanisms not themselves based in intersubjective dynamics. She argues that this distinction begs the question of how social norms can be generated non-normatively via neural mechanisms.

“In Gallagher’s work there seems to be an assumption that “direct perception...delivers what [we] need to interact with others most of the time” (Gallagher, 2008a, p. 540). What I argue is exactly the opposite: we may experience an other’s feelings and intentions directly, but direct perception builds on something, namely on skillful interaction with others. In other words, social interaction is not derivative, but constitutive of the process of social understanding and also of direct social perception.”

De Jaegher sees Gallagher’s concept of direct perception as a splitting apart of body and mind.

“...first we carve nature up at artificial joints – we split mind and body apart – and then we need to fasten the two together again, a task for which the notion of embodiment is, according to Sheets-Johnstone’s assessment, used as a kind of glue . But glueing the two back together does not bring back the original “integrity and nature of the whole”” (De Jaegher 2009).

De Jaegher and DiPaolo (2021) don’t share Gallagher’s enthusiasm for a selfless, mindfulness approach to ethics. This may be because they connect Gallagher’s belief that a strong prescriptive notion of the good is an essential component of a thoroughgoing enactivist account with his placement of endogenous intersubjectivity outside of the reach of normative social practices.

“The perspective we are defending is suspicious of those who promote all-embracing forms of emotional regulation, mindful awareness, empathy, abstract togetherness, calls to civility, and all the rest of it. However well-intentioned, these discourses attempt to obliterate differences and negate irreducible conflicts (Ortega 2006).

De Jaegher’s suspicions concerning the coherence of mindful compassion may stem from her conviction that Gallagher’s account requires the strong prescriptive glue of mindfulness to motivate action only because his biologicistic grounding of intersubjectivity unnecessarily splits apart mind and body. In other words, it is not just that invoking pre-social mechanisms like direct perception to explain how individuals come to know each other is not up to the task of addressing robust forms of empathy such as compassion and friendship. It is that such a starting point compromises the integrity of intersubjective processes, producing a large empathic gap between persons which must then be filled by voluntaristic acts of selfless caring. For his part, Gallagher raises the question of whether enactivist accounts like De Jaegher’s have within themselves the resources to ground an ethics. He argues that

“enactivism, and specifically its account of sense making, is an attempt to explain or give a descriptive account of how cognitive agents operate, but it doesn’t say anything about how they ought to operate. A descriptive account of course is different from a prescriptive one and the question is how one gets anything like strong normative conceptions into a description of how action happens. To say they ought to operate in a certain way or to offer ethical guidance, one needs to appeal to resources outside of enactivism... even if the ought cannot be derived from the is, the ‘is’ may be able to constrain the ought in some way.” (2024)

In spite of Gallagher's claim that De Jaegher's enactivist account lacks a prescriptive dimension, her notion of ethical attunement as the engaged knowing of letting-be offers an alternative ethical 'ought' to that which Gallagher articulates as the compassionate responsiveness to the affordances of the other. DiPaolo and De Jaegher understand this ethical 'ought' in terms of an intimate dialectical intertwining between subjective and intersubjective processes, and from this vantage they critique Levinas's notion of the radical Other as ignoring the reciprocal dependency of self and other. They recognize that Levinas's notion of the ethical Other shares with Gallagher a grounding in a reified conception of subjectivity. De Jaegher and DiPaolo(2021) write:

Radicalising the other without due attention to concrete context and reciprocity and without giving central role to co-constitutive participation risks absolutising alterity, whereas both intercorporeally and in the constitution of linguistic bodies, self and others interpenetrate (Di Paolo et al. 2018).

While I agree with De Jaegher's critique of Gallagher's lingering cognitivism, I don't think her account entirely escapes the subjectivist tendencies she finds in Gallagher and Levinas. I suggest that De Jaegher's distinction between norms and values implies a split between individual and social processes in their relation to the dynamics of normativity. This leads to residual reliance on voluntarism and individual blame in De Jaegher's thinking, on the one hand, and a reification of normative knowing on the other. The differences between self and other that De Jaegher relativizes imply a splitting of individual and social autonomy into partially independent differential systems, what De Jaegher(2021) calls "an existential dialectic between individual and social orders."

"Humanity is shorthand for humanity-partly-produced-by-nature and Nature shorthand for nature-humans-participate-in. Networks of biological processes interlace with regional practices in what Haraway (2016) calls sympoietic ("making-with") webs."

Sense-making is "the active adaptive engagement of an autonomous system with its environment in terms of the differential virtual implications for its ongoing form of life. [It is t]he basic, most general form of all cognitive and affective activity manifested experientially as a structure of caring" (Di Paolo et al. 2018, 332)...Whether we act or we perceive, whether we emote or we cognize, a structure of caring is at play in all forms of sense-making."

While care is synonymous with sense-making for De Jaegher, she argues that the question of who we care about, of who matters to us in our sense-making, can only be answered by recognizing a distinction between the descriptive region of normative comportment and the prescriptive ethics of valuative becoming. Gallagher's distinction between cleverness and ethical wisdom, mindless instrumentality and mindful compassion reappears in De Jaegher's work in a more robustly interactive guise as the distinction between normative knowing and valuative becoming. De Jaegher defines ethical values as "the relation between forms of knowing and changing configurations of becoming." Drawing on the work of Simondon, they write:

"Individuating systems in relation open the possibility of new metastable states to which they can transit. These transitions are not in themselves normative because they are open; they follow no

“algorithm”. But they have or express values, the relation between current and potential states...to act ethically must involve forms of knowing (incorporated in practices of behaviour, emotion, and reflection) about values in configurations of becoming, i.e., about the good expressed not in the maintenance of a current configuration but in its future (and inevitable) transformation.”(2021)

On the one hand, De Jaegher asserts that the “enactive conception of value and moral attunement is inherently non-individualistic. Ethical reality always involves communities of bodies” At the same time, her distinction between normative configurations and valuative becoming makes the former pre-social in a certain sense. More precisely, the maintenance of configurations of knowing is not social in the same way as what she calls moral attunement. It is only when we engage in valuative becoming that our schemes of knowing open themselves properly to the affective influence of another. This suggests an element of volunteerism in that the individual adopts an attitude deciding their level of engagement with others, whether to care or not to care about them, to what extent to contribute and participate to a social becoming.

“At its fundamental, engaged knowing requires a particular attitude to flourish, the attitude of letting-be; otherwise, it degrades. Limited knowing can either take the form of overdetermination, i.e., a knower who attempts to force the known into an obstinate epistemic frame, or it can take the form of underdetermination, i.e., disengagement, a “respect” for the known that forgoes any serious relation with it, letting-be degrading into letting-go. Both are fundamentally attitudes of not-caring, situations in which participation is thwarted, leading to epistemic injustices (Fricker 2007). Both can also be resisted or contested, making knowing an open arena for struggle. Engaged/engaging epistemology is both descriptive and prescriptive; it tells us what lies at the basis of a knowing relation, and it tells us also that there are better and worse ways of knowing. If a knowing relation is to flourish it should not be dominated by either end of the relation, which means inevitably that to engage in knowing is to engage in a mutual transformation, a co-becoming of knower and known.”

“To care ethically is to be morally attuned to differences in becoming and to act in ways that cultivate, nurture, protect, and/ or repair configurations of becoming according to values. Caring for the sick and vulnerable is to help them revert a narrowing in their world. Caring for growth is to promote the value of openness and expansion in possibilities of becoming. Caring for the oppressed is to act so as to destroy patterns of blocking and neglect towards actors whose becoming is systematically thwarted.”(2021)

“While there is not one truth to how or what something is, the example shows that there are also not infinite ways in which we can know things. As Maclaren says, “[w]e can do injustices in the way we take things up”. In our knowing of things, we never fully know them. But the real problem is that we can “know” them quite wrongly.”(2019)

De Jaegher’s authoritative stance concerning the identification of the unethical resonates with Gallagher’s (2020) confident assertion: “...let’s not pretend that we don’t know injustice when we see it”. But can one distinguish in this way between norm and value? Are valuative changes non-normative? Or is it the case, as Rouse argues, that values amount to what is differentially at stake for each participant in partially shared normed practices? In other words, that there is no critical distance between normative forms of knowing and changing configurations of becoming, since to participate in a partially shared normative practice is already to contribute to changes in its configurative becoming. For Rouse(2002), the choice to care or not to care about an other,

to contribute and participate, is outside of our individual control in the sense that it is only intelligible from within a partially shared practice, as a move within it which at the same time reconfigures one's relation to it. As he states:

"The selective environment of an organism includes other organisms and the ways in which they configure their surroundings, whenever those organisms have selective significance. That is true both of different kinds of organisms, and of conspecifics. The selective environment of an organism thus incorporates other organisms as actively configuring their more or less shared surroundings. The same, however, is true in reverse. The intra-action of various organisms thus constitutes a common world, even though it is manifest in significantly different ways for each of the active bodies that help configure it. Discursively articulate bodies, of course, have richer resources for responsive intra-action to their surroundings and to one another's activities. Yet discursive and other practical performances are not perspectives on the world from outside, but practical configurations of the world, which can only figure meaningfully as such in the world as also partially configured by the sayings and doings of others.

The problem with any form of voluntarism is now clear. Normativity requires something at stake in my activity whose significance for me must nevertheless not be entirely up to me (not merely a matter of desire or chosen commitment). Such stakes can arise, however, in the intra-active shaping of a partially shared practical configuration of the world. If my activity must be responsive not only to my surroundings as significantly configured by my doings, but also to those same surroundings as configured by and configuring the activities of others, then what is at stake in my doings is both significant for me and beyond my control."

De Jaegher claims that unlike the maintenance of configurations of knowing, the valuative becoming of new configurative possibilities is not itself normative. But Rouse argues that what De Jaegher calls the moral attunement of valuative becoming (the determination of better and worse ways of knowing) cannot be treated as external to normative forms of knowing. Rouse doesn't split the 'is' and the 'ought'. The temporally extended, perspectively re-situating dynamics of unfolding practices make the ethical imminent to the 'is'. What would constitute balanced caring about the other (neither underdetermined nor overdetermined, as De Jaegher puts it) is itself at issue in our partially shared practices. Participatory sense-making does not, as De Jaegher claims, simply take on a life of its own, as though the dance can be understood apart from or added onto the perspectives of the differently situated participants in it. De Jaegher(2019) asserts

"We often tend to know things (and people) in an overly deterministic manner, that is: where a big part of the knowing is determined by the knower, and a smaller part by the known. This is an over-determining, and thereby limiting knowing."

But from Rouse's vantage, the knower doesn't exist apart from the known as a subject the known object appears before, and who can choose not to fully engage with their world. Rather, the knower is nothing but their world of interactions, understood as a situated web of relevant engagements. The knower can no more disengage from or underdetermine the known than the world can disengage from itself. What the knower can do is reassess and redetermine what is at stake for them in the continually shifting alignments of relevance in the world they find



themselves thrown into along with others. If this results in what appears to De Jaegher as a failure to engage with and care about the known, this speaks to a disparity between how a partially shared configuration of practices is manifested for De Jaegher and for the knower who she judges to be over or underdetermining the known. What looks like non-engagement, under or over-determination from De Jaegher's vantage is a fully invested, fully caring participatory move within interdependent worldly configurations of practices as manifested by the one she accuses of injustice. Rouse(2024b) explains:

“The standing and authority of ethical and political criticisms is itself part of the contested normative dynamics of a practice-differentiated way of life. We cannot understand the normative authority of ethical and political challenges to the practices of slavery or white supremacy or of gendered and sexual hierarchies without considering how they come to bear within and on particular social practices and their dynamic interdependence...

While some practices, roles, and norms are relatively stable, ...a practice-based account emphasizes that such stability is a dynamic achievement that is in need of non-inertial explanation. The interdependence of practice-participants' performances, and of practices with other practices, provides continuing sources of contestation and instability. Even a current local configuration of social norms is not simply the presence of an authoritative standard, but a field of normative tensions and pressures to which patterns of conformity and non-conformity are both responsive and transformative.”

De Jaegher(2019) says that when agents

“participate in each other's sense-making, the precarious processes of not just their individual sense-making, but also of the interaction process, which is also autonomous and thus precarious, interact with each other (De Jaegher et al. 2016). This makes it possible to deeply affect one another (De Jaegher 2015; Di Paolo 2015) and requires us to navigate tensions between embodied and interactive normative domains that are not guaranteed to be in alignment.”

By contrast, Rouse doesn't distinguish between the individually embodied and the socially interactive as partially independent processes. Alignments and misalignments occur among interdependent social practices, not between individual and social autonomies. Before I enter into a 'dance' of participatory sense-making with another, my own autonomous sense-making is already intimately structured as my situated, perspectival participation within multiple interactive practices. The fact of my participation with another, and the nature of my participation, is not a question of a choice that I make to engage or not to engage with them. Rather, it is outside my control as an ongoing interdependence that binds me to others within partially shared configurations. In dancing with myself I am executing a performance that both expresses and reconfigures what is at stake for me in this ongoing dynamic vantage within the structural confines of a communal dance. In my involvement with a new partner, in opening myself up to being affected by them I am not breaking free from these structural ties in an act of voluntaristic valuing. Rather, it is only by virtue of my tension-laden partial ensconement within ongoing normative practices that my openness to another is at all possible, and it is only the particular pattern of my involvement in these social practices that defines the terms of my openness to the other.

Thus, rather than treating the free play of becoming as a back and forth alignment between individually embodied and socially interactive “autonomies, vulnerabilities, and sense-makings”, Rouse sees free play as intrinsic to the founding, persistence and transformation of what De Jaegher considers as autonomous configurations. Once normativity is understood from within its own resources in these dynamic, self-differentiating terms, it no longer needs to be thought as reifying itself into stagnant autonomies (De Jaegher(2021) says “ We must resist any reification of the subject, whether individual or collective”, insisting that “A non-moral act is lost in itself, closed to becoming in relation; a loss of becoming.”), and there is no longer a norm-driven basis to distinguish individual embodiment and social interaction. Furthermore, the ethical impetus to personal blame, to fault the individual for failing to strike the ‘right’ balance between individual and social autonomy, is removed.

What Gallagher and De Jaegher consider a breach of justice, the failure to participate fully in the mutual coordination and transformation of individual autonomies, is for Rouse a question of a struggle among incompatible intelligibilities. I want to call attention here to the different role that the concept of power plays in Gallagher’s and De Jaegher’s views of justice in contrast to Rouse. Two forms of power can be extracted thus far from my account of these enactivists: a self-maintaining power of individual capability and a critical power of intersubjective engagement and ethical contestation. In addition to these two varieties, a third type may be identified, consisting of forces of domination feeding back upon individuals from the institutional practices that they co-construct. Gallagher understands this ‘structural’ power as acting in such a way as to make possible situations in which “collective (institutional, corporate) narratives take on a life (an autonomy) of their own and may come to oppose or undermine the intentions of the individual members.” Gallagher(2020) presumes the existence of macro-social institutions transcendent to actual interpersonal relational dynamics, which act to constrain, oppose and distort communication from beyond them.

“Standard accounts of action and interaction abstract away from the specifics of everyday life; they ignore the circumstances that are framed by social and instituted practices that often lead to structural distortions and injustices.” “Structural features of the specific practices or institutions within which individuals interact can distort human relations in ways that subtract from total autonomy and reduce the overall interactive affordance space.” “When structural features of cognitive institutional practices are exclusionary, closing off possibilities, or when such practices are designed so that whoever uses them comes to be dominated by them, with the result that their thinking is narrowed and determined, then again autonomy, not just of the individual, but of social interaction is compromised.”

“To the extent that the instituted narrative, even if formed over time by many individuals, transcends those individuals and may persist beyond them, it may loop around to constrain or dominate the group members or the group as a whole...Collective (institutional, corporate) narratives often take on a life (an autonomy) of their own and may come to oppose or undermine the intentions of the individual members. Narrative practices in both extended institutional and collective structures and practices can be positive in allowing us to see certain possibilities, but at the same time, they can carry our cognitive processes and social interactions in specific directions and blind us to other possibilities.” (Gallagher 2017)

The implication of Gallagher’s understanding of the socio-ethical dynamics of power is that the

normative content of a social structure is in some sense self-reinforcing, and that its recalcitrant pull is to blame for the failure of a normed practice to open itself up to difference. But we must inquire beyond the issue of whether a certain social organization closes down alternatives, and focus on the question of why it does so. We must ask ourselves what we are assuming concerning the motivational processes behind the emergence of conventions that exclude.

All three forms of power described by Gallagher and De Jaegher (self-maintaining capacity to act, critical power of intersubjective engagement and structural power) conform to what Rouse(2024), consistent with his reading of Foucault, critiques as “a conception of power as an ability or capacity that agents, groups, or institutions possess and exercise to exert power over others [or themselves].” Rouse(2023) counters that

“.. ‘power’ is neither something possessed by agents nor imposed upon them from without. It instead expresses that what agents do materially transforms the world in ways that normatively reconfigure what can be at stake in one another’s actions and whether those stakes can be realized.”

“Structural” power “suggests too static a conception and seems to separate social structure from individual agents’ doings altogether. Constraints on people’s actions and abilities can be dispersed throughout their environments yet still dynamically produced by agents’ ongoing, situated interactions...”

Rouse invites us to explain dogmatic, ossified social practices not as the manifestation of dominating self-reinforcing configurations of knowing but as representing the most intelligible avenues of practical movement available to us within the given patterns of coordination that open up to us as we find ourselves in tension-filled relations with others in given material circumstances. When people appear to stop actively questioning and evaluating their ethical practices, and seem to fall back on old conventions, this should not be seen as a sign that the persons or groups have found themselves at the mercy of a vicious cycle of self-reinforcing, reifying configurative autonomies. Instead, it is likely to signal challenges to the negotiating of relational bonds between competing intelligibilities. These constraints on intelligible becoming are located neither as autonomous processes within the individual nor as a social outside, but in an interdependency which precedes both. Rouse offers:

“...the bodies that engage in discursive practices are not clearly bounded objects, but emergent, shifting boundaries between coordinated activity and its surroundings. The perspectives expressed in their discursive performances are not features of bodies or subjects by themselves, but practical configurations of the surrounding world as fields of significant possible activity.”(2002)

When a person isn’t changing in the direction that the ethical critic would prefer them to change, it is deemed a failure to recognize and engage with the other. But how can this judgement be made when the person who is relating to other persons has their personhood constituted by such relations with an outside? The question of why and to what extent the social ensemble of personhood puts up barriers around their value system should be seen as a matter of how much uncertainty that system is capable of tolerating without crumbling, rather than as a self-reinforcing impetus for ossified thinking. An important implication of understanding ethical formations in terms of intelligible discursive process rather than self reinforcing contentful schemes is that we need no longer attribute ethical breakdown to a failure or unwillingness

(reification) on the part of one party or parties to engage with and recognize another's autonomy, as Gallagher and De Jaegher argue. I cannot by an act of will adjust my role in a practice in a direction that is unintelligible to me, and what is intelligible to me is oriented in relation to that normative practice. I cannot transcend the normative context of affective sense-making to discover and thus respond to the other's vulnerability. This doesn't mean I don't anticipate into new possibilities of perceiving others, but such possibilities are guided, enabled and constrained by extant practices. If, as Rouse argues, we as individuals are always re-assessing what is at stake and at issue even in the midst of a partially shared value system, then every moment involves a new determination, by each participant, of what ought and ought not to be.

“...concepts such as justice or epistemic objectivity acquire genuinely transcendent normative significance, but they do not do so through a regulative ideal of a just society or objective knowledge. They instead respond to issues arising from discursive articulation and critical reflection within ongoing practices amid contested conceptions of what is at stake in resolving those issues...”

Normative accountability is not about adjudicating different ways of life from a sovereign standpoint, but involves a situated transcendence that asks how to move beyond current ways of life and their issues or impasses to discern and build more adequate ways to live together. These considerations arise within current ways of life and incorporate discursive articulation of their futurally oriented normative concerns...”(2023)

The failure to coordinate harmoniously among competing relational intelligibilities results in the appearance of injustice, as though there were an intention on the part of one of the parties not to recognize an aspect of the other. For Gallagher justice is maintaining the autonomy of the other, as if one first glimpses this autonomy and then decides not to honor it, or in De Jaegher's case, one at least has the capacity to recognize and thus choose to engage with the other's autonomy. Rouse argues that recognition implies the construction of the relationality within which an 'other' appears in a particular way. This happens not simply by turning to it, since that 'other' with its affordances has no existence outside of the way we construct it with those affordances, and the self which turns to and is affected by an outside, doesn't pre-exist that outside. The self is already changed by the outside via the way that the other contributes to, by further differentiating, one's perspectival vantage within interdependent social configurations. When there is disagreement between the victim and the alleged perpetrator about whether an injustice has indeed been committed, who determines, and how is it determined, that someone is closing off another's affordance space, ignoring their autonomy or failing to participate with them in reciprocal knowing? If it is intelligible ways of going on that are being protected, then from the vantage of the 'perpetrator', what is being excluded, closed off and withdrawn from is not a particular content (the other's affordances), in the service of reifying one's own autonomy. On the contrary, the aim is to exclude from a system of practices that which would render it nonsensical and deprive it of coherent meaning. In other words, from the vantage of the so-called perpetrator, the practices of exclusion and elimination are in the service of rendering justice by preventing the degradation of meaningful autonomy in general.

The question of how to be alive to each being's suffering assumes a need to resist the unjust desire or intention not to be alive to the suffering of others, that is, the unethical impetus to

intra-affect with others by excluding their experience. But the suffering other can only be acknowledged if they can first be made sense of as a suffering other. What matters to us, what we care about, whose suffering we empathize with, is dependent in the first place on what is intelligible to us from our situated vantage of participation within multiple practices. We can only intend to recognize and welcome the Other who saves us from sense-making chaos; we intend to reject the Other who offers the oppression of incommensurability. Freedom from incoherence strengthens ties of relevant social relationality, freedom from the order of intelligibility fragments the integrity of social bonds. What is repressive to us is what we cannot establish harmonious relation with. To choose to embrace the other is to discover and construct that aspect of the other which is knowable and relatable, which offers us the hope of avoidance of the abyss of senselessness and incoherence. We cannot get beyond this link between the lovable and the recognizable without losing the basis of any ethics, which is the ability to distinguish between, even if without yet defining, what is preferred and what is not.

To follow this trajectory of thinking is to understand not just that disputes over what constitutes an injustice in any specific circumstance are not amenable to resolution within the terms of justice determined by extant subjective or intersubjective affordances, but that the reason for this is that Gallagher's and De Jaegher's intertwined concepts of justice, autonomy and affordance intend to locate a real entity transcendent and thereby indifferent to the multiple traditions of meaning that jostle with each other within social situations. Just responsiveness relies on the obscuring of multiple intelligibilities in favor of constructing a particular content. It picks out one relative form of intelligibility, that which is recognized by the accuser as coherent, and formulates this familiarity as a just structure of relation. However, if the valuative dynamic of a relational tradition forms a center of equilibrium around which its participants' interactive practices revolve, this is not the effect of the distorting power of a dominating autonomous content. Rather, it is testament to the fact that the relational process of reciprocal coordination tends toward heterogeneous meanings that exist in some relation of coherence with respect to each other. There is no state of being, whether in the guise of Gallagher's endogenously intersubjective subject or De Jaegher's normative forms of knowing, existing prior to our ensconement within multiple moral communities. There is no such original state, in relation to which a decision to act justly (for the sake of the autonomy of relationship, as Gallagher or De Jaegher formulate it) would imply an additional step.

The question is not whether or how we achieve just relations but how we can manage to think beyond justice understood as singular traditions of the good, how we can become aware that any sovereign definition of the just, the ethical and the good (openness to the other, knowing rightly) expresses only one perspectival form of sense-making embedded within multiple intelligibilities. Gallagher's assertion that other animals species have a sense of justice is an admission that animals produce adaptive systems of harmonious interaction but cannot adapt to alternative or deviant practices. Their justice is at the same time an injustice from the vantage of members of their species, or other species, who participate in patterns of coordination unintelligible to them, and toward whom they exhibit hostility. Rather than viewing intelligibility through the lens of Gallagher and De Jaegher's dialectical relations between personal and social autonomy, we are invited instead to discover multiple, heterogeneous processes of perspectively situated relationality concealed by the authoritative intent of concepts like affordance, autonomy and the

ethical good. Beneath and beyond Gallagher's singular interpersonal system of affordance space and accompanying conditions of justice are multiple but interdependent worlds producing multiple competing intelligibilities. Gallagher and De Jaegher mean to capture the moving dynamics of a social system as a whole with their concepts of autonomy, affordance and justice. They might better be seen as peering out at the wider social web from the limited vantage of one among many perspectival intelligibilities and reading their situated vantage as the totality.

The ethical dilemma we face is not that of recognition vs reification, self-transcendence vs self-interest, the conservative thrust of the lure of the familiar vs the caring, participatory engagement with other selves. When we seem to fail to recognize and maintain the other's autonomy this is not a retreat into solipsism but, on the contrary, a robust participation in a structure of social interdependency whose dimensions at the same time exceed my control and preclude the kind of relational intimacy that, from a certain partisan vantage, would be deemed as just and compassionate. What is at stake ethically, then, is the repercussions of personal blame. When we assume non-recognition and non-participation as a possible outcome of relational communication, we are licensed and impelled to intervene, potentially violently, to 'disrupt' and correct the terms of the interaction. When instead we no longer find useful the notion of personal or social schemes acting as fulcrum of resistance to social engagement, we are prepared to substitute for the 'just' practices of blameful disruption and correction, the affirmative values of reassessment and transformation of what is at stake for us with the aim of enhancing trust and cooperation between ourselves and others within mutually dependent practices.

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