

## Kaleidic Society: Entrepreneurial Plans, Societal Change, and Constillactical Politics

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**Abstract:** A kaleidic society is one exemplified by unexpected patterns of change. Associated with the works of George Shackle and Ludwig Lachmann, a kaleidic society describes market processes as driven extensively by entrepreneurial novelty. This paper seeks to elaborate upon the kaleidic society notion, specifically applying it to the study of social change. Actions undertaken by individuals and a range of collectives, such as nonprofit organizations, interest groups, social movements, and so on, within the social realm emergently bringing forth complex adjustments, if not transformations, to social practices and values. The extent to which these societal changes take place are influenced by how institutions and norms allow for diverse and open forms of expression, and, relatedly, the extent to which novelties are frustrated by social contestations as well as effects of time and uncertainty in influencing social plans. In this paper not only are the obvious kaleidical tensions between social tradition and change discussed, but the implications of policy in affecting rates and forms of social change. Institutions can provide some guidance in proceeding with entrepreneurial plans contributing toward social change, but institutions themselves are amenable to change in kaleidic society. The concept of “constillaxy” is introduced to illustrate how certain institutions enable voluntaristic collective organizing with the aim of delivering more satisfactory social outcomes for individuals, families, and communities, or at least allowing them to achieve aspirations. The constillactical vision of institutional variation within kaleidic society is contrasted with corrective public policies depriving individual liberties and generating additional social turbulence.

**Keywords:** entrepreneurship; institutions; kaleidic society; liberal values; social change

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### I. INTRODUCTION

A hallmark of modernity is its breadth and depth of social changes. Variations and modifications in respect of social behaviors, practices, and values manifested themselves over the twentieth century in fields as broad ranging as the arts, family and communal life, morality, politics, religion, science, technology, work and leisure, and so on. Social change has proceeded apace during these early decades of the twenty-first century, reinforced by the likes of technological and demographic changes as well as alterations of value systems regarding the environment, social equality, and attitudes to

politics and government. The determinants and implications of social change have unsurprisingly become a primary object of research inquiry, with interest in these matters spanning across the social sciences.

This paper engages with, and investigates, a particular description of society that identifies change as an elemental dimension—specifically, the metaphor of the “*kaleidic society*.” The kaleidic society term is invoked to generate images of incessant changes, whether they be of marginal or structural dimensions, in human activities. Furthermore, this kaleidic character of society is presented as a sharp contrast to all static or equilibrium conceptions of societal phenomena. This kaleidic notion is attributed to post-Keynesian heterodox economist, George Shackle, whose work proved influential with Austrian economists, especially those proffering radically subjectivist accounts of economic action. The kaleidic society metaphor has since maintained a presence within Austrian economics and the Smithian-Mengerian framework of “mainline political economy,” most notably in the works of Virginia School economist Richard Wagner (2012, 2020).

The kaleidic society has been primarily applied in an economic context, inviting further investigation concerning the character and significance of the kaleidic society *qua* social theory. How might the kaleidic society metaphor be used to describe processes of social change? The usage of the kaleidic society term by post-Keynesians and Austrians to discuss economic phenomena, such as entrepreneurship and investment behavior under uncertainty, leads one to reconsider broader questions about the impact of markets upon societal institutions, norms, and practices (and *vice versa*), a topic that has long been of interest to economic sociologists (e.g., Polanyi [1944] 2001; Granovetter 1985; Storr and Choi 2019). To be sure, the interconnecting and fluctuating webs of human interaction means that market relations cannot be ignored in a reckoning with the kaleidic society concept. But to consider the kaleidic society as a strand of theorizing about *social* change is intended to encompass sociological considerations that were arguably not directly (or primarily) of interest to economists such as Shackle and Ludwig Lachmann.

As will be discussed in this paper, the kaleidic society fundamentally embodies the proposition that human action by individuals and their collectives are exemplified by open-endedness and indeterminacy. The development of ideologies, institutions, practices, values, and other socially relevant phenomena that inform action exhibit qualities of increasing complexity over time, as individuals both discover and create new ways of being, doing, and knowing. A positive analysis of the kaleidic society requires a framework describing how individuals, and groups of individuals, may aspire to orchestrate, or be implicated in, change processes which, in turn, correspond with repatterning of human networks as well as revised meanings and understandings of the world. Entrepreneurial propositions, and the capacity of social peers to accept or refute such propositions, is but one critical element in the quest to operationalize the kaleidic society.

Kaleidics connotes change. It seems obvious, then, that multitudinous changes wrought throughout the kaleidic society will challenge traditions and similar incumbencies and threaten to displace them with something new. The antimonies of tradition and change represent a source of contestation and disagreement, if not tension, between peoples, and it is crucial to understand how these matters may be resolved if this is even possible. An appreciation of the role of institutions in a kaleidic society, admittedly a contentious matter given charges by the critics that kaleidics also conveys nihilism (e.g., Garrison 1987), will be seen as crucial to providing a sense of balance between tradition and change. A concept dubbed in this paper as “*constillaxy*” is used to recognize that institutions provide an element of navigation in the world but allowing for alterations, even substantial ones, to institutions insofar as such changes are voluntarily being organized and are mutually agreeable to those instigated, and affected, by them.

To what extent can politics be organized in the service of becalming the turbulence of a kaleidic society? This is an additional matter warranting consideration in this paper. Opposing the position of neoclassical economics (in their microeconomic and macroeconomic manifestations) that public policies are desired to exogenously stabilize societal kaleidics, it is argued here that discretionary policies are likely to further *destabilize* the kaleidic society. This argument seeks to reinforce the constillactical position for generic, non-discriminatory institutional configurations and polycentric diversities that both facilitate bottom-up forms of social change that are far more likely to be congruent with individuals’ changing preferences, and help safeguard diverse individuals from undesired forms of change.

The structure of this paper is as follows. Section II provides a summary of the use of the kaleidic society metaphor in its economic context, outlining the main characteristics of kaleidics and criticisms of the concept in the literature. Section III articulates the key principles of a sociologically operational concept of kaleidics with reference to contentious entrepreneurship, diverse expressions of socially preferred states of the world, and institutions that respect difference. Section IV critically appraises the role of government activity, and especially corrective public policies, in influencing the trajectories of the kaleidic society. Section V concludes.

## II. KALEIDIC SOCIETY IN HETERODOX ECONOMICS AND MAINLINE POLITICAL ECONOMY

A metaphor is a linguistic representation of an interaction or relation, or perhaps mapping, of one kind of concept, event, object, or other kind of phenomenon to another. As noted by McCloskey (1995) and others (e.g., Klammer and Leonard 1994), economists have demonstrated a partiality toward metaphorical devices. Among these is the economy as exhibiting “kaleidic” qualities of change not unlike those viewed through the prism of a kaleidoscope, “a toy ... in which three mirrors face inwards in a tall pyramid and repeat in symmetrical reflections the random mosaic of colour formed by loose pieces of stained glass on the floor of the instrument” (Shackle 1965, p. 47). Equilibrium remains a possibility, with

... the randomness of the disposition of the coloured pieces at any moment of repose suggests the *conventional* character of the economy ‘at rest’. The economy is in the particular posture which prevails, because particular expectations, or rather, particular agreed formulas about the future, are for the moment widely accepted (ibid., p. 48).

However, the metaphorical invocation of kaleidic processes indicates that conditions “can change as swiftly, as completely and on sight a provocation as the loose, ephemeral mosaic of the kaleidoscope. A twist of the hand, a piece of ‘news’, can shatter one picture and replace it with a different one” (ibid.). Having originally used the kaleidic metaphor to describe Keynesian investment dynamics, Shackle (1972, p. 76) would later come to refer to a “*kaleidic society*, interspersing its moments or intervals of order, assurance and beauty with sudden disintegration and a cascade into a new pattern.”

Ludwig Lachmann appropriated the Keynes-Shackle metaphor to align Austrian economics more rigorously with subjectivist foundations. In a survey article, Lachmann (1976b, p. 56) depicted “[t]he world of the market economy is thus a kaleidic world, a world of flux in which the ceaseless flow of news daily impinges on human choice and the making of decisions.” In his presentation to the intellectually formative 1974 South Royalton, Vermont, conference on Austrian economics, Lachmann (1976a, pp. 218, 221) asserted that “[a] kaleidic world can offer no congenial habitat to the neoclassical mind, to which all time sequences at once appear in the familiar form of difference equations. ... A mind for which the economic world is a complex system of given variables seems quite unable to grasp a kaleidic world.” Reinforcing these sentiments is Lachmann’s ([1986] 2020, p. 157) brief statement a decade later that “[t]he market is not a clock-work.”

With the generic characteristics of the kaleidic society having been elucidated, we now describe key interrelated elements of human action attributed to it. Intellectual historians note how Austrian economics progressively extended the boundaries of *subjectivism* from preferences to value and, with Lachmann, then to expectations (Langlois 1985). Expectational subjectivism indicates that acts of choice by individuals are guided by what future circumstances they believe will attain, with the heterogeneity of individuals implying that the kinds of expectations people harbor will vary interpersonally (and perhaps radically so). Given that the future is necessarily uncertain and, indeed, unknowable, there is every prospect that a given individual’s expectations about future economic conditions will prove, *ex post*, to be falsified in light of experience and events.

Under those conditions how is it even possible that human beings can aspire toward, let alone achieve, any modicum of progress? The kaleidic approach of Shackle and Lachmann insists that individuals can still imagine preferable future states of the world for themselves and, therefore, people have the capacity to instigate plans that marshal funds and resources, develop organizations, and instigate other activities to fulfil their objectives, all to be, idealistically, realized at a future date. Thus, *entrepreneurship* represents a key driver in a kaleidic society wherein individuals creatively promulgate plans to achieve their economic (and as will be described later, social) aspirations and, in so doing, generating gains, as however defined, for themselves and other people. In this regard, Buchanan and Vanberg (1991) and Vaughn ([1994] 2018) speak eloquently of the creative capabilities of humankind in not only dreaming of betterment scenarios but in exchanging and allocating real resources in their quest to make plans a reality.

The kaleidic society approach also emphasizes the significance of *time* in the construction and realization of plans. “*Ex ante* refers to anticipations on which plans are based. *Ex post* refers to some accounting of the results of those plans at some later date. Any plan spans time by creating a bridge from present when the plan is formed to some future point, or set of points, where the outcome of the plan is appraised” (Wagner 2012, p. 287). Whilst time can allow any entrepreneur to coalesce resources and knowledge to take advantage of their situation, it is noted that there exists an element of contingency in planning because of intertemporal fluctuations (of degree and in kind) of relevant variables (labelled by Shackle as “news”) that enlighten and inform decision-making. The invisible hand of human activity, and interactivity, is typically implicated in such changing conditions: “each individual in each moment of time may imagine different future economic situations and revise his or her plans as a consequence of his imaginative ability” (Gloria-Palermo 1999, p. 126).

The kaleidical bumping and scraping of humanity, as each and all strive to achieve their subjective plans in real time, raises questions about the realism of pristine equilibrium economics. As suggested earlier, the kaleidic perspective contends that the market economy is a process and therefore equilibrium is the exception rather than the norm. Indeed, interactions amongst heterogeneous individuals give rise to the upsetting of patterns, and through it disequilibria in industries, sectors, and markets—in short, metaphorical twists of the economic kaleidoscope. Wagner (2012, 2016) refers to the economic turbulence associated with tectonic clashes between radically divergent entrepreneurial plans as they emerge, with those plans subjected to conjectures and refutations by investors, consumers, and policymakers interacting in varying arrays of competition and cooperation. Similarly, Chiles et al. (2010, 2013) engages in wordplay when referring to a kaleidoscope as the imaging of a “collide-oscope” of conflicting plans. Shackle (1965) himself described the market process as prone to frequent “landslides” wherein some entrepreneurial plans are liquidated outright but, in any event, no given plan remains unaffected by change.

As evocative as the metaphorical device of the kaleidic society is, it has admittedly invited critical attention over recent decades. In his defence of the Misesian praxeological position, Selgin (1990) suggests that the Shacklean kaleidic metaphor when taken to the extreme implies scepticism toward purposeful action, in turn casting doubt upon the meaningfulness of economics as a science. For Selgin (*ibid.*, p. 32) the heart of the problem is that “Shackle ... cannot conceive of a “pure logic of choice,” i.e., of praxeology. He equates formal with “static,” unanticipated change with “irrationality.” His weak thesis entirely misses the mark insofar as praxeology is concerned.” Rather than opting for a “strong” kaleidic thesis that is taken to represent “a denial of mental or social causation or of activist determinism” (*ibid.*, p. 61), Selgin opts for a “weaker,” or tempered, form of “potential” kaleidic processes. Selgin’s suggestion identifies purposeful human action that could, under certain circumstances, bring about temporal economic stability. Yet another criticism of the kaleidic economic interpretation has been advanced: “[k]nowledge and understanding presuppose regularity and order, if there are no fixed points there is no basis for establishing a different view of the world. Learning is only possible within frameworks of ideas that are substantially stable” (Metcalf and Ramlogan 2005, p. 669). Others contend that not everybody necessarily engages continuously with originally creative choice, but with reactions also mattering (Buchanan and Vanberg 1991).

The nihilism charge directed is nontrivially based upon a perception that the likes of Shackle and Lachmann envision an institution-less economy and society. But is this so? As observers of Lachmann's scholarship have indicated (Gloria-Palermo 1999; Dekker and Kuchař 2019), Lachmann has presented a rich account about how institutions present an orientated guide for entrepreneurs (and other individuals) to act in the world. Of significance is that institutions both facilitate, and are facilitated by, the *intersubjective* capability of human beings to forge shared meanings and understandings about a gamut of worldly phenomena. Intersubjectivity helps reduce the cognitive and epistemic burdens of uncertainty, even as sharing comes about as a byproduct of interaction (Storr et al. 2004; Storr 2010). As part of this, the capacity to construct and communicate ideal-typical abstractions may also assist individuals in their efforts to negotiate complicated everyday economic (and other) scenarios (Koppl 2001). What is ultimately at stake for proponents of the kaleidic society is not that institutions are non-existent, for, after all, institutions help “render social life intelligible in terms of people pursuing plans within a societal setting” (Wagner 2007, p. 23). What is at stake is that *institutions, too, are amenable to change*, a matter we shall turn to shortly.

By this point we have outlined the fundamentals of the kaleidic society metaphor. Metaphors are intended to encapsulate a certain feature, or features, regarded as salient, therefore it is appropriate to ask: is the kaleidic metaphor an apt one? The glass shapes within the kaleidoscope will exhibit continuous change, only so long as the kaleidoscope *qua* machine is constantly turned by *someone*. It is not unreasonable for critics to attack the metaphorical value of kaleidics, given the extent to which heterodox economists have themselves sharply criticized machine-type metaphors as they exist in neoclassical economics (Mirowski 2002). As for the prospect of somebody turning the kaleidoscope of the economy (or society), this idea easily leads to ontological and normative mischievousness in the guises of the Walrasian market auctioneer or the Pigouvian-Lernerian political planner (although Earl and Littleboy (2014) contend there are multiple kaleidoscopes distributed throughout society).<sup>1</sup> In all of this we put forward the qualification set out by Chiles et al. (2010, p. 159) that Shackle, at the very least, “uses the adjective *kaleidic* far more often than the noun *kaleidoscope*.”

Putting aside the sheer variety of alternative, and perhaps superior, descriptions of societal dynamics by social scientists,<sup>2</sup> we shall persist with the exploration of the kaleidic society as a device for describing social change. In so doing, we aim to convey its value of the kaleidic society in highlighting open-ended human actions contributing toward a process of increasing social complexity over time.

### III. TAKING THE KALEIDIC SOCIETY SERIOUSLY: ENTREPRENEURSHIP, CONTESTABILITY, AND CONSTILLAXY

The treatment of the kaleidic society by Shackle and Lachmann was primarily situated in an economic dimension. But others pointed out which insights could help to assemble a kaleidic *society* framework. Alongside their own contributions as to how entrepreneurial creativity promotes investment, and other productive, plans in a world shrouded in radical uncertainty, the two leading figures of twentieth-century Austrian economics—Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich Hayek—expressly indicated that their methodological individualism acknowledges the existence of society, and of social influences upon individual decision-making (Hayek 1948; Mises [1949] 1998). The Misesian-Hayekian position not only serves as an effective counter to methodological criticisms of Austrian economics but has inspired modern research efforts integrating Austrian economics with economic sociology (e.g., Choi and Storr 2022). The present study seeks to build upon the intellectual sketching of earlier generations in articulating a *bona fide* social-theoretic orientation for kaleidics.

To further extend kaleidics to society, rather as merely a descriptor of economy, it is useful to definitionally enquire into just what society is. Society is a humanly ordered process consisting of interactions and relationships, of varying degrees of persistence, amongst individuals, including multiple individuals who collectively share similar a host of familial, associative, and identity groupings. Thus, in addition to the individual persons who comprise a given society, those individuals belong to (or affiliate with) families,



clubs and voluntary associations, religious orders, organizations, neighbourhoods, and communities.<sup>3</sup> The totality of society extends beyond the likes of families, or “the *kaleidoscope* of human action” (Cornuelle [1965] 2017, p. 38; emphasis added) exhibited by the independent sector (mainly charitable non-profits, benevolent foundations, and voluntary associations), to incorporate governmental entities that coercively entangle with commercial enterprises and other actors (individual and collective).

In his presentations of political economy, as especially clarified by his vision of “Viennese kaleidics” (Wagner 2012), Richard Wagner refutes suggestions that society is reducible to a singular, or even direct, object of choice. Social affairs entail an ecology of plans pursued by individuals, whether it be solely or in conjunction with certain others, in the pursuit of preferred states of the world. It is understood that society is not an unorganized mass, but an extraordinarily rich array of interactive episodes and relational configurations that may be theoretically and analytically presented as non-uniform and non-random social network connections manifested in time and space. These networks are both localized and multiplex in character, reflecting much more than the activation of economic exchanges of materials and resources. Networks are also an important mechanism through which social exchanges are performed, “both tangible and intangible, such as practical help, advice, information, or prestige” (Dijkstra 2015, p. 1), much of which is supported by interpersonal communications (e.g., Rogers and Kincaid 1981). These networked webs can facilitate a degree of (but not totalized) coherence through intersubjectively appreciated customary practices, institutional rules, normative frames, and values (Aligica and Wagner 2021), especially in the case of repeated interactions between the same individuals and similar groupings.

The activities of individuals and collectives are thus obviously implicated in the emergence of the kaleidic society. This is owing to contributions of such agents toward the flowing, variegated interactions and relations, all of which contribute (however marginally) toward social change. In this context, consider the following statement as an exemplar of the kaleidic approach:

... Experimentation arises at particular nodes within a societal nexus, and the speed with which the products of that experimentation spread depends on such things as qualitative features of those products and institutional arrangements within the society. ... Experimentation in the abstract is one of those eternal verities across time and place, but it is also a quality that is subject to historical validity (Wagner 2011, p. 215).

The preceding arguments require some clarification. Order is defined in the process of its emergence, famously said James Buchanan (1982). A logical implication of the non-objectified conception of kaleidic society is that any broad patterns of order, or observed regularities associated with (or attributed to) societal activities—and no matter how unending they may be—emerge from lower-level interactional processes involving individual and group (e.g., firms, clubs, associations, bureaucracies) participants. The ontological non-objectification of society further implies that order emerges spontaneously, or perhaps unintentionally, and cannot be attributed to the conscious plans of any given individual or group. Expressing this differently, the macro-level order ascribed to society is said in the kaleidic view to result from those interactions and relations orchestrated and maintained by micro- and meso-levels of human action (Dopfer et al. 2004). Similarly, degrees of increasing macro-complexity that have been identified as corresponding with societal evolution (Gaus and Thrasher 2013) cannot be reducible to the attributes, characteristics, interests, motivations, or values of individuals, or even any given collectives, either micro-nomically or meso-nomically (Foster 2005). Adding to the processual and dynamic picture being painted here, the forms and outcomes of societal processes cannot be known in advance; indeed, social change is non-teleological as given by the prospect of clusters of localized and diverse arrangements taking hold and tenuously coexisting with each other, but all potentially breaking down and being replaced by arrangements anew.

Much like its economic counterpart, a socially orientated kaleidic society framework considers entrepreneurial activity as an influential determinant of social change. Whilst various definitions of entrepreneurship abound, it generically refers to the creative formulation of plans to generate or procure some form

of value, gain, or form of betterment. Economic explanations of entrepreneurship tend to focus upon the individual as a soloistic, even charismatic, promulgator of change, although a range of contemporary accounts consider not only the possibility of groups of individuals acting entrepreneurially in various cooperative settings (e.g., Schneider et al. 1995; Montgomery et al. 2012; Meyer 2020). Consistent with this, successful entrepreneurial activity aims to apply not only their formal knowledge but tacit knowledge pertaining to opportunities in time and place, thereby needing to remain perceptive to the array of circumstances, contexts, and constraints that necessarily condition how they seek to promulgate their novel plans.

The kaleidic conception of entrepreneurial activity ramifying throughout the entirety of social affairs seems at first glance to be compatible with Schumpeterian insights. Schumpeter envisions an entrepreneurial framework emphasizing its “creatively destructive” capacities to generate structural change through the identification of new products, markets, managerial processes, and modes of economic organization. Others, most notably Israel Kirzner, have identified how entrepreneurial alertness to discoverable opportunities, and pursuing means of arbitrage through exchange, serve to equilibrate markets. Recent scholarship suggests that Schumpeterian and Kirznerian insights need not be orthogonal in respect to one another, thus describing different elements of the same entrepreneurial process (Shane and Venkataraman 2000; Kirzner 2009). The process-oriented view presented by the kaleidic metaphor at the very least implies that equilibration cannot entail sedimentation of arrangements or their habitation, given the ceaseless capacity of individuals (somewhere and someplace) to idiosyncratically propose and implement societal changes through new and revised plans.

The kaleidic society encompasses *ubiquitous* entrepreneurship as carried through an extensive range of domains of human activity. The entrepreneur is a key agent for change, implicated in everything from responding to market price spreads, solving social dilemmas and collective action traps, engaging in the pursuit of scientific extensions of knowledge, and the construction of organizational and institutional rules of governance. Novel, and oft-disruptive, economic entrepreneurship appears to have taken primacy in social science literature, but entrepreneurial impulses have been identified in the sphere of social organization (Novak 2021b) as well as in respect to the emergence of ideologies, morals, norms, and values (Vaughn [1994] 2018; Novak 2021a). As Koppl (2006, pp. 1-2) has indicated, “[e]ntrepreneurship is an aspect of all human action. Entrepreneurship is a human universal.” To obtain a glimpse into how these kinds of non-economic entrepreneurship may be implicated in kaleidic patterns of societal change, consider how norm entrepreneurs have struggled against stigmatized norms in society with respect to race, sexuality, disability, and so on, succeeding to some extent to change social attitudes toward minorities (Pinker 2011; Welzel 2013).

Given the porousness of specialized domains of human actions, it is unsurprising that economic entrepreneurship may bear social consequences. Generations of classical liberal scholarship has alluded to how entrepreneurship, and economic activity more generally, incentivizes ethical behavior among sellers and buyers seeking to uphold their reputation within the market (Storr and Choi 2019). Adding to these moralizing effects of markets is the proposition that actors use specific economic exchange opportunities, or even abstain from certain trades (say, through boycotts), to express sympathies and publicize a host of social values (Novak 2021a; Snow 2022). It is also known that individuals may reconceptualize finished products and other economic resources (e.g., money) as gifts to be dedicated to identified individuals, groups, or causes (Zelizer 2005; Gill and Thomas 2023). Researchers in the field of social movement studies have submitted that market-generated prosperity has provided financial and material bases to prosecute normative claims tied to political and social change (Dalton et al. 2010; Novak 2021a). In other words, the accumulation of consumer surpluses enjoyed in the market is posited to facilitate plans for emancipative rights claiming and, to the extent that such eventually articulated claims succeed in persuading others, social change of the kaleidic variety.

Entanglements between economic and social systems give rise to “opportunity exploitation ... in which entrepreneurs apply their creative imaginations to continually recombine resources” (Chiles et al. 2013, p. 144). As implied above, an implication of this is that the totality of entrepreneurial endeavor within kaleidic

society is anticipated to yield an abundance of economic as well as extra-economic goods, institutions, methods, and practices. And, to be clear, social processes differ from market processes in numerous ways. Social activities may be influenced by possession and exchange of material goods, as described above, but economically conditioning phenomena such as relative prices, several property, and profit-and-loss mechanisms do not permeate the entirety of social relations. As appreciated by Austrian economists with an interest in social phenomena, people can also obtain information about non-priced coordinative opportunities and feedback about preferences through communication and other mechanisms undergirding social exchange. Social life, especially in its contemporary guise with digital technologies such as social media coming to the fore, is similarly pervaded by dynamic effects by individuals and groups to harness focal points of attention, signal reputation, and to garner esteem from societal compatriots (Boettke and Coyne 2008; Chamlee-Wright and Myers 2008).

Certainly, the “commercial” or “market” society is widely perceived as disruptive. This perception arouses anti-market sentiments, including from communitarians who aspire to a strong separability between commercial and social life. Others have claimed that “Big Tech” digital affordances, which have commanded a growing imprint in contemporary economic life, promote affective manipulations. These critics appear to understate the extent to which economic considerations add to the extraordinary possibilities realizable in kaleidic society, and in normatively productive ways. From the liberal standpoint the market is seen to support important social goods and, relatedly, virtues, including (but not limited to) perceptions of greater autonomy and dignity, as well as improved capabilities in exploring strategies as part of the process at arriving at preferred living conditions.

The entrepreneurial emergence of divergent plans within kaleidic society gives rise to alternative, and, actually, abundant, social options for consideration. Central to the kaleidic society is a sense of participatory anticipation on the part of those propounding conjectures for social change, because of the likelihood that any member from the set of changing options will end up being emulated by others. Those proposals for social change that successfully diffuse throughout society, in the form of changing practices together with altered interactions and relationships, might deliver payoffs in the form of fame and a positive legacy for entrepreneurs who initially propose them (Cowen and Sutter 1997). However, some of the options emergent through kaleidic society will surely be refuted by certain others, given how they are subjectively perceived to be incongruent with existing (or imagined future) interests and values. To express this differently, social changes have every potential to “depreciate,” or perhaps obliterate, favorable social positions benefiting certain persons and collectives, and, as part of this, make obsolete the perceived benefits attached to their cultural, social, and symbolic capitals (Bourdieu 1986).

Change is always afoot within kaleidic society, but so is controversy including those arising from a certain resistance to change on the part of at least some. Wagner (2016) speaks about the potential not of blissful coordination, but of conflict in the form of “societal tectonics” as individuals and groups with divergent, if not incommensurable, priorities, and worldviews clash over the directionality in which the society in which they live evolve. It is also recognized that social plans conducted by those with variegated ideologies and interests proceed intertemporally, contributing toward the incompleteness of plans and incongruency between individual and group plans when *ex ante* aspirations become frustrated (Wagner 2010, 2012). Speaking in an economic context, but which could be transposed to the social, Podemska-Mikluch and Wagner (2010, p. 109) note how “[a]ny entrepreneurial effort entails making an investment now when the outcome won’t be known until some future moment. Not all such efforts will be successful, and failed efforts will inject tectonic shocks into society as subsequent economic adjustment becomes necessary.” Adjustments and readjustments, whether they be motivated by forces of competition or collaboration, generate the bottom-up impetus for constant changes which quintessentially characterize a kaleidic society, and this can readily frustrate.

Entrepreneurial conjectures in the quest to achieve subjectively preferred conditions in the social milieu in real time are the hallmarks of kaleidic society. We are now at a point to revisit a critical matter that has intellectually haunted this framework, and that is: is society kaleidic to the point of nihilism? Following



our earlier interpretation of the literature on kaleidics, we suggest that it is possible to present a social framework that recognizes the importance of creative agentic change without ignoring how structural matters may impinge upon the feasibility and possibility of fresh societal configurations. Aligica and Wagner (2021, p. 70) usefully invoke the figure of sociologist Vilfredo Pareto when stating that societies necessarily “operate through a tension between the creative forces he denoted as ‘combination’ and the conserving forces he denoted as ‘persistence’.”

The Paretian-Wagnerian position is one which we share. Societal configurations are to be understood, at any given moment in time, as an uneasy consilience between opposing, if not contradictory, forces of structure and agency, or of tradition and change, which in no small part reflect that creativity is informed by people’s intersubjective meanings and understandings of their situations. Besides, not all forms of human action are creative, or original, in character, with reactions to perceived conditions within the social environment also possible (Buchanan [1988] 2018). As has been already mentioned, Lachmann prominently articulated the contribution of institutions as orienting anchors for behavior, but this statement is not the end of the story. But if the kaleidic society metaphor is proposed as a meaningful, or at least credible, account of society, then there must be some processes or procedures in place which allow for amendments (or at least the possibility thereof) to those constraints which inform social interactions and relations.

It is at this point that the term, *constillaxy*, is coined to evoke the idea that kaleidics are *guided* by general institutional rules *without ruling out* emergent exchanges that bring about societal change. The term *constillaxy* is a combination of the term “*constitution*” with “*catallaxy*,” both of which are studied forensically by Friedrich Hayek ([1960] 2011; [1973-79] 2013).<sup>4</sup> As people are born into the world, and transition through childhood and adolescence into adulthood, they learn about—and their actions are informed by—the panoply of informal and formal rules that give structure and, through it, a sense of order, to social life. As orienting and as guiding as institutions may be, it cannot be presumed that everyone will find their terms and conditions to be necessarily agreeable. Indeed, reception to and engagement with institutions will, at least for some, engender feelings of duress, acquiescence, and even substantial degrees of coercion (Wagner 2016). Either individuals will resign and persist with living within the bounds imposed by given institutions, or, as suggested by the kaleidic society metaphor, they will engage in (albeit costly) efforts to invoke institutional change. Of course, propositions and practical engagements with change at an institutional level is likely to arouse countering disagreements, if not backlash, from those preferring the *status quo*.

Constillaxy is not only intended to convey the idea of institutional contingency, and within this the likelihood of institutional reform, in a kaleidic societal context. The constillaxy concept suggests something distinctively liberal in the content of the rules: heterogeneous persons are to be institutionally afforded sufficient freedom-space to introduce experiments with living, and realize their unique plans, without exhausting the capacity of others to do the same. This is consistent with the perspective that:

... certain kinds of societies are arranged better to allow individuals to better achieve their goals. Free and decentralized societies give individuals the kind of elbow room they need to be adaptable in the pursuit of their separate aims in a way that just isn’t possible within centralized and planned systems (Corcoran 2023).

The resulting societal circumstances that emerge because of constillactical adherence with institutions need not deliver cultural, economic, political, or social progression in a pre-determined or teleological sense (Tebble 2017). However, by enabling (and ennobling) people *to discover mutually agreeable social arrangements and generative relationships in a voluntary manner*, the kaleidic society is geared to enable individuals to fulfil their diverse and complex social preferences. The notion of constillaxy is intended to allow for sufficient redundancy within the structure of rules to avoid the costs, including the severe deprivations of liberty associated with the utilization of policing powers, likely to arise between disparities between (overly prescriptive) rules-in-form versus rules-in use (E. Ostrom 2005). It is regarded that the survivability of kaleidic society rests in institutionally compatible forms and activities—for example, polycentric diversifica-

tion in governance, combined with the right to exercise mobility across the different institutions at low cost, is seen as institutionally efficacious in enabling individuals to select for their preferred rate of (localized) social change.

Adding to the preceding points, constillaxy represents both content and disposition of rules that help ensure change to be a constructive, and beneficial, process for as many as possible. The nihilism critique of the kaleidic society runs the counter-risk that change is excessively problematized; in other words, change is so pervasive (or problematic) that individuals are incapable of managing their affairs.<sup>5</sup> As Vincent and Elinor Ostrom, the originators of the Bloomington school of political economy, have attested, the fact of the matter is that individuals can correct errors and iron out seemingly intractable problems if empowered to do so. A kaleidic society ordered by constillactical institutions provides a societal stage for learning regarding complex recombinant means of coordination and governance, and through those, betterment, over time. As part of this, it is conceivable that individuals would be amenable to engaging both privately and through non-state collective actions to resolve externalities and other dilemmas (Ostrom 2010; Novak 2021b; Mulligan 2023). As people intermingle with one another—and, resultantly, live better together under a constillaxy, which accommodates kaleidic societal changes more closely aligning with changing social preferences—they also achieve a crucial side-benefit of building up self-governance capacities (V. Ostrom 1997).

#### IV. NON-LIBERAL POLITICS AS A PERTURBING FORCE WITHIN KALEIDIC SOCIETY

The liberal position on social (and other) forms of change appears well represented by Hayek's epilogue to *The Constitution of Liberty*. In it, he says that "[l]iberalism is not adverse to evolution and change," and that "the liberal position is based on courage and confidence, on a preparedness to let change run its course even if we cannot predict where it will lead" (Hayek [1960] 2011, pp. 521, 522). The constillaxy perspective suggests that liberal politics can be facilitative of kaleidics in a constructive manner. The scale and scope of social change is more likely to be agreeable to people than not, and that is because the emergent changes under constillactical rules in large measure reflect voluntarily struck interactions, relationships, and social accommodations. To be sure, pure non-contentiousness will not arise amongst a diverse and curious public whose members instinctively pry into, and have an interest in, the affairs of others. Members of society would still need to manage the perceived costs and strains of living in a kaleidic society, uphold values of fairmindedness, self-reflection, and tolerance, and, importantly, develop the aptitudes and skills to negotiate through a maze of changes encountered throughout life.

Under a kaleidic society it is imaginable that a panoply of benefits would become apparent, at least to a sizeable cohort of a population. But this statement does not ignore the possibility that kaleidic society may well be discomforting for some, if not many, given that kaleidics by their nature will tend to be discordant and discontinuous. It is a reflection of socio-political reality that in the face of antagonisms associated with societal change, certain agents may try "to use the powers of government to prevent change or to limit its rate to whatever appeals to the more timid mind" (Hayek [1960] 2011, p. 522). Public policy is presumed to be a constillactical variable but there is the risk that policy action by governmental actors could undermine societal kaleidics. In particular, the authoritative and prescriptive insertion of policies into entrepreneurial plans is likely to introduce new dimensions of uncertainty for societal actors seeking to discover and create their own advantageous (or at least, satisfying) situations. In other words, public policy stands as "largely a euphemism for incoherent sequences of desperate expedients" that aggravate instability (Lachmann 1976b, p. 61).

Consider two strands of illiberal politics, being two *species* of ultimately the same *genus* of social control. One of these minimally retains the procedures of democratic politics, or at the least the appearance thereof, especially the occasional selection of candidates for political office by popular, general election. The illiberalism inherent within the mode of politics we have in mind does not lie with the electoral process *per se*, but with the extensive delegation of political powers to a small subset of the population—namely, legis-

lators, bureaucrats, and their allies amongst politically well-connected vested interest groups (Holcombe 2023). In this modernist Age of Policy, the observed tendency has been toward unconstrained (or, perhaps more accurately, loosely constrained) policy discretion regarding fiscal, legal, and regulatory settings by these elitist actors. Discretion appears to not only corrode the spirit (if not the letter) of institutional devices aimed at enforcing limitations upon the exercise of coercive public powers. An important modern feature of policy discretion is its assumption of a paternalistic character constraining the autonomy and liberty of individuals (Grattan 2006), undermining the very basis of kaleidic societal processes.

Richard Wagner objected that economic policy risks *adding, and not quelling*, kaleidic turbulence. Similarly, one may suggest that social policy discretion, and non-social policies bearing social implications, may have the effect of increasing kaleidic turbulence within society. This is because “the use of Power to impose Policy impedes the assembly of knowledge that is distributed throughout the catallaxy, thereby generally promoting rather than calming turbulence” (Wagner 2012, p. 284). The impediment to the assembly of distributed knowledge manifests here along two interrelated dimensions. First, situationally distanced political actors are unlikely to possess, let alone comprehend, the oft-tacitly-held knowledge about those social considerations or problematics that are the subject of policy interest. Second, the introduction of policy, and the utilization of police powers surrounding policy implementation, runs the risk of greatly increasing the coordination costs, thusly enervating the prospects for, kaleidic non-state resolutions along the lines discussed earlier.

There are related issues of aggravated turbulence surrounding this arbitrary, non-liberal politics of *dirigisme*. Qualitative differences in political *versus* economic decision-making implies that growing political influence would shroud efforts in response to, and correction of, social errors in ambiguity: “[p]oliticians and bureaucrats’ decision criteria are by their nature less comprehensible and communicable when compared to the intermediate entrepreneurial goal of staying in business” (Bilo 2018, p. 64). These problems are only likely to be compounded in the presence of “Big Player” governmental agencies with substantial discretionary powers (Koppl 2002), who may be biased to undertake action now—being incentivized to receive short-run political plaudits upon responding to public issues—but who invite reflection and critical scrutiny in the long run (if ever).

Policy discretion not only represents an additional variable informing change within a kaleidic society. The vagaries of discretionary policy conduct would appear to inhibit dynamic margins of experimentation, discoveries, and coordination amongst diverse members of the community. Then there are, of course, the standard arguments that policy discretion invites rent seeking opportunities. Part of the rent seeking appetite might be exhibited by those agents who strategically seek to censor or otherwise limit the expression of social kaleidics perceived to be prejudicial to their interests. It is not beyond question that redirecting social efforts toward political petitioning would, furthermore, give rise to rent extractive episodes wherein powerful political actors can cajole and threaten non-political actors into accomplishing political objectives (Novak 2023).

Under these scenarios kaleidic society degrades into a society already given by several names: the rent seeking society (Krueger 1974), the racket society (as propounded by Frankfurt school scholars such as Horkheimer), or the patrimonial society (Weber [1922] 1978). In these deformed, non-kaleidic societies, persistently exercised policy discretion “generates debris due to the collision among plans” (Wagner 2012, p. 286), as proxied by political privileges for those who are resistant to kaleidic social impulses (Potts 2005).

The second possibility of policy-induced departures from kaleidic societal conditions aims to resolve the challenges of living with kaleidics by repressing social diversity and change altogether. The model of society arising from a political intolerant disposition toward kaleidics have been described in political economy and sociological literatures as “militarized” or “regimented” societies, with their practical approximations given most closely by communist regimes—including the former Soviet regime and present-day Chinese communism with its “social credit” arrangements of control (Devereaux and Peng 2020)—and theocratic systems of public governance.

Under these totalitarian political regimes, policies and political values have been oriented toward the elimination of key elements of a civil society otherwise accepted in a modern liberal democracy. These elements include religious orders, an independent sector of non-profit organizations and associations, and anti-hegemonic collectives, such as social movements. Failing elimination of elements of civil society, the regime may attempt to coerce members and associates of these various social entities into ideologically adhering (or otherwise publicizing loyalty) to the priorities of the ruling cadre. Either way, the realization of a kaleidic society is thwarted by the heavy, punitive hand of state. The suppression of societal kaleidics attempted under such political regimes is consistent with a concern over the lack of self-limitation on the part of political authorities regarding the management of coercion against (real and imagined) dissidents, or against those identified as harboring ideological or perspectival differences (Madison 1998).

It is supposed that policy *dirigisme* and totalitarianism share profoundly dubious assumptions about human nature, not to mention repugnant moral premises. Inasmuch as the kaleidic society metaphor is accused of conveying a nihilistic vision of humanity, consider the alternatives presented here. The non-liberal dispositions toward policy assume that humans are either passive or outrightly incapable to remediate their problems or may be manipulated in a robotic fashion to achieve societal objectives and ends as determined by political administrators and other policy influencers. Speaking in respect of mainstream economics, but which could arguably be extended to social matters, Earl and Littleboy (2014, p. 11) state that “[p]eople are taken as matter in motion, governed by laws akin to those of classical physics. Life is viewed as acting out the solution to pre-existing equations, subject to already given constraints.” Political intervention, whether in form or in effect, may aspire to ease the burdens of negotiating life in the kaleidic society, but can add turbulence by substituting political for social knowledge, creating anomalies in policy design, implementation, and enforcement, and fuel resentments because people are prevented from living lives as freely chosen as possible (Shaffer 1975).

## V. CONCLUSION

This paper seeks to position the notion of kaleidic society as an explicit framework of social change. The kaleidic society metaphorically evokes continuous change as a societal property, and this change is fundamentally agential in character given the design and forwarding of entrepreneurial plans to bring about preferred adjustment or modification to observed social arrangements, practices, relations, and values. The change process itself is vital to understanding kaleidics, because the open-endedness of change illuminates the possibility of not only coordination and consensus but also of conflict and dissent amongst individuals and group representatives. Furthermore, change propels through time, and this provides opportunities for people to learn by doing, including reconfiguring their plans if necessary, or to forgoing them entirely considering refutations from societal peers. This paper also articulates the normative case for a certain orientation toward institutions. We call this orientation the *constillaxy*, providing an environment wherein individuals and groups are empowered to question, critique, and use resources and speech acts to amend the prevailing institutional structure when they happen to find it unsatisfactory.

If one is to summarize the defining characteristics of the kaleidic society, one is hard pressed to go beyond Devereaux and Wagner’s (2018) descriptions of emergence: “Constructedness as a virtue; stipulation as a vice” and “Indefiniteness as a virtue; definiteness as a vice.” To this we might add the rejection of linearity, closedness, and determinacy as prevailing conditions of society. By no means does kaleidic life generate social changes that go unchallenged, but it does allow for negotiations amenable to living better together that would not find its fullest expression under the subjections of a militarized, regimented, or totalitarian society. In this respect, the kaleidic society is designated as being compatible with the guiding principles of liberalism, in turn animated by respect for individuality and the human capacity for advancing voluntaristic activities ushering forth wide-ranging mutual, and collective, benefits.

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## NOTES

- 1 Steven Horwitz referred to an instance in which David Prychitko (or some other figure) once asked Ludwig Lachmann, “if we live in a kaleidic world, who turns the kaleidoscope?” to which Lachmann replied, “*that* is the question!” Source: <https://www.coordinationproblem.org/2011/11/viennese-kaleidics.html>
- 2 Classical liberals have spawned concepts such as the “great society” (Adam Smith, Hayek), “open society” (Popper), and “society of explorers” (Michael Polanyi), whereas Nozick (1974) referred to how liberty upsets (presumably societal) patterns. Virginia school economist Richard Wagner has embraced ecological metaphors to describe economic, political, and social processes.
- 3 In the modern context society is typically co-extensive with the political nation-state, as was suggested by Benedict Anderson (1983) with his paradigm of the nation-state as an “imagined community.”
- 4 The term “constillaxy” is an adaptation of the neologism “constellaxy,” introduced by Trent MacDonald (2015) to refer to the spontaneously ordered nature of social media.
- 5 Recent criticisms of the contractarian philosophical tradition, for example, suggest that constitutional-level rules are made operational (but in politically and socially sanitized ways) by ruling out crucial margins of diversity in both the underlying characteristics of bargainers and the issues about which they seek to bargain (Muldoon 2016; Haeffele and Storr 2018).

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